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No 73

Mr B. Pogrand
P.O. Box 1128
Johannesburg
2000
R.S.A.

8th August 1981

Dear Mr Pogrand

We are very fortunate in having been very close friends of such a sterling character as Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe.

I first met Mangaliso in 1946 when he was a student in Matric at the Herald town Institution near Fort Beaureport. I was then spending ^{mid-term} holidays with a friend of mine Mr Jema Matsheuni who was a secondary school teacher at the same school. Mangaliso was a prefect. After his prefectural duties at night he would come to Mr Matsheuni's study to put in an hour or two's study. At the time I was at Fort Hare. I finished my studies in 1947. I went back to the school at which I was before I went to college.

As I had the necessary qualifications the school could now become a ^{school} secondary. When we started and even when Sobukwe joined our staff in 1950 the Janzamb Secondary School had had four primary school classes.

Stds III to Std VI — and Forms I, II and III. Because Standard was a small town our school at our time never became a very big secondary school.

When Robert Lebunju joined our school in 1950 things were slightly better but nothing to write home about. When ^{he} came he was responsible for History in ~~Std III~~ Std VI and in Forms I & II, English in Std V and in Form II and Scripture in the secondary department.

Mangaliso (or Mangie as his colleagues, friends and scholars called him) was loved by all ~~the~~ who came into contact with him. He was loved by all; by the young and by the old. He ~~was~~ became a leading member of the staff and they all accepted him as such. His pupils worshipped him and they were none the worse for it. Because of Mangaliso's presence our school at Bethal in 1953 swept all the cups offered at the Eastern Transvaal Music Competitions. Mrs R. Manguzi conducted the Junior Choir, Mrs Tembe the Intermediate Choir and Mangaliso the Senior Choir.

I enclose an aerial photograph of the school. It will do more justice to the description of ~~the~~ school than the verbal picture I would paint would. The Town Council of Standard when they put up this school tried to do

something commendable for the black people

Now back to the school. The river you see in the background is the Vaal River. In front of the tree you see are the latrines of the school. The long, flat-roofed building next to the latrines ^{is the} woodwork block. The one on this side of the woodwork block was the domestic science centre. In the picture enclosed this block building did not come out in full for it was just as long as the woodwork block.

The lower primary section of the school (Std. I to Std. II) used the left and the upper primary school (Std. III to Std. V) plus the secondary school ^{used} ~~used~~ the right side.

In each classroom there was a one range coal ^{stove}. The two front corner rooms were where the pupils and the staff could wash their hands. Every room in the school had a cement floor. Around the school there was enough space for its activities other than sports. The ~~of~~ classrooms were ideal and quite big.

All the time Robert was working at Standardton he lived at my home. In the location in which we lived all the houses were semidetached. Each house consisted of

two rooms and a kitchen. I found a house of that size too small for me. Because the house next door mine was occupied. I had to get one across the street. Robert occupied a room in the house I had across the street.

The houses which the municipality of Standerton built for black people were far from satisfactory. When means permitted, people got stands and built their own houses. Mangaliso lived with us ^{for} was like a member of the family.

Mangaliso was a conscientious teacher. In the evenings we would converse or my wife and I would be getting a political lecture from him.

His work however did not suffer ^{because of} ~~from~~ our conversations. He saw to it that all the marking that had to be done was finished before he retired for the evening. He was not one interested in getting about. As one interested in sport he always attempted attend whatever sporting activity was taking place in Standerton over the week-end. He was not much of a traveller.

He went to Johannesburg when he had to attend an A.N.C. meeting. Mandela and Oliver Tambo were his special friends. At Standerton Mangaliso had no political interests. In Johannesburg he was interested in when it came to politics. It was there that he knew he would get the 'big boys'.

Sobukwe's firm belief in politics was that he, as a leader, did not like to ask people to do what he himself could not do. It is not quite clear to me what it was that the ANC wanted to do in Johannesburg during the 1952 Africaners' celebrations. Mangaliso did not go to Johannesburg for them or to take part in A.N.C. activities at that time. He was at Standard's to hear ^{what} a certain politician had to say. I what group this man belonged to is hard to say. I no longer remember the name of the gentleman who came. It seems it was a Sotho or Tswana name — something like Motlane.

Mrs A. M'Cuabeni informs me that ~~before the~~ ^{say anything} meeting she had told Mangi not to ~~go~~ ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{the} meeting. He said that he would not speak at the Defiance Campaign meeting. At the meeting, however, she saw him addressing the meeting. He spoke in Xhosa. Because the Location Superintendent, Viljoen, was there, Mr. Gilbert Machi, his clerk, interpreted. In his speech Robert Sobukwe quoted from a Xhosa book "Ityala Lamawek" by Guy van Vixx. Sobukwe knew that the passage he quoted was Xhosa. Gilbert Machi did not know. If my memory serves me well the passage was: "Bamgweniwa iindlebe. Sobukwe was telling the people about the decapitation of the Xhosa King — Hintsa by Sir Harry Smith. Not only was Hintsa decapitated but his ears were cut off. Hintsa was riding a horse when he met Sir Harry, and some military aide, also on horseback. Hintsa raised

raised his hand, a sign of greeting, and was shot there. After killing him they decapitated him and cut off his ears. His corpse was taken to Grahamstown. Mr Viljoen heard all that Sobukwe had said, and reported it to the white Native - school inspector, Mr J. de Jager. This was a matter the Native Education Department could not leave unchallenged.

The following week Mr de Jager visited my school. We had already been informed that Mr de Jager, accompanied by another Native-school inspector, also ^{an} Afrikaans-speaking Afrikaner, would come to our school. I wired Mr Mzamane, a lecturer in Nguni at Fort Hare to send me a copy of "Iyala Lamaweki." Mzamane responded well and the copy for which we had asked arrived when Messrs Sobukwe, Viljoen, Madi, J. de Jager and his colleague were in my office. As I had lessons to teach I had to go to my classes. As soon as I got the page from which Mzangi had quoted I took the book to him. When I wanted to remain in my office to know what was going on Mr de Jager asked me to leave. When Madi was asked to interpret the sentence Mzangi had used it became clear that he had not interpreted correctly.

That week - end members of the Jandrell Public School Committee paid Mr Franz, the Transvaal Director of ~~the~~ Native Schools, a visit. They wanted to know why Sobukwe had

warned about taking part in politics. They did not want to lose a good and reliable teacher. They pointed out that to them Congress Congress (the A.N.C.) was not a political party. It was just a watch dog looking after the interests of Black people, and only spoke when it had to. Because clerics formed the majority of the School Committee Mr Frong agreed to let Sobukwe go on as a teacher at Jansdell. I know of no encounters Sobukwe ever had with the Security Police at Standerton.

I know of only one man who came to him to talk politics. If I remember correctly it was a bachalia, an Indian, from Johannesburg.

At the house behind the first house I had in the Standerton location lived a petty coal merchant. ^{Mr Moses Mkhlapo} he kept his coal in his yard. Both Sobukwe and I used to while away time with this man. Later on Sobukwe became interested in being in company with Moses Mkhlapo in his business. How the business went on I am unable to say as Mkhlapo was a cunning old fellow. What I have more details about is the bus Mkhlapo got Sobukwe, Pokela and others (including me) to buy a bus from an Orlando undertaker. The bus was bought but the venture was an absolute failure. The bus never ran. We all lost our money.

After Sobukwe had written Xhosa III he, Archibald

Jordan (who was a Xhosa lecturer at the Cape Town University) at an ^{South League} A.I.C. meeting in Bloemfontein. There he told Sobukwe he had deliberately not given Sobukwe a distinction in Xhosa. He advised Sobukwe to apply to the Wits for the post of Nyuni lecturer. Jordan advised him to make ~~him~~ ^{his} ~~ap~~ ^{re} ~~pe~~ ^{re}. Mangaliso applied and was appointed.

Sobukwe's family had settled in Graaff Reinet, a Xhosa-speaking area. The Sobukwes are Basotho people. Sobukwe's forebears migrated to the Xhosas because they, in their country of origin, were known as Batskoming, ~~and~~ were amongst the Xhosas known as people of the Amanjelu clan. For all practical purposes Mangi was a Xhosa. Xhosa was the language next to English he knew best. It takes one who has grown up with both of the groups - Xhosa & Zulu - to be able to speak both of them well - interaction included. A ~~big~~ Xhosa boy whose parents want and speak only Xhosa at home may grow up into a man who speaks Xhosa and Zulu well. Sobukwe met Zulu or Standerton.

Sobukwe was a ^{staunch} Methodist, a preacher of no mean standing. He was a big man among ~~many~~ ^{among} Methodists.

Because he was a ^{good} tennis player he influenced the teachers of Standerton to form a tennis club which failed to continue after he left for Johannesburg.

I am very sorry for having taken so long
to deal with your letter.

Yours sincerely

W. S. M. (WARGENT)

(W. S. M. (WARGENT))

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