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Fruits of Apartheid

A Special Correspondent Writes:

Will Nelson Mandela hang? This question is being asked not only in South Africa, but in capitals abroad. Depending on what happens to Mandela, the AfroAsian states may force a massive United Nations showdown over South Africa.

Mandela is on the way to becoming apartheid's first international martyr. Tall, good-looking, fit (he was an amateur boxer), he made a good impression on the political leaders he met when he slipped out of South Africa two years ago and toured the African states, Britain and elsewhere. He is listed as number-one accused in the trial in the Pretoria Supreme Court. The others are Walter Sisulu, veteran African National Congress leader, four other Africanis (Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Matsoaledi and Andrew Mlangeni), an Indian (Ahmed Mohamed Kathrada) and two white South Africans (Dennis Goldberg and Lionel Bernstein). They all face charges of sabotage, involving 192 counts. The state alleges that they, together with other men named in the indictment as co-conspirators (some of whom are now dead and others out of the country), planned the overthrow of the government, by violent revolution and by assisting an armed invasion.

The ultimate penalty for sabotage is death. The striking feature of the trial is that Nelson Mandela, called as the major defense witness, has admitted that he helped to form Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), which committed acts of sabotage. "I do not deny that I planned sabotage," declared Mandela. "I did not do this in a spirit of recklessness. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the situation, after many years of oppression and tyranny of my people by the whites." Umkhonto we Sizwe, he said, had been planned for two reasons. "We believed that as a result of government policy, violence by the African people had become inevitable, and that unless a responsible leadership was given to control the

feelings of our people, there would be an outbreak of terrorism which would cause bitterness between the various races of the country. We felt that without sabotage there would be no way open to the African people to succeed in their struggle against the principle of white supremacy. All other means of opposing this principle were closed by legislation. We had either to accept inferiority or fight against it by violence. We chose the latter." At the conclusion of his four-hour address to the court, Mandela said he had dedicated his life to ending white domination. "It is an idea I hope to live and see realized. But it is an idea for which I am prepared to die."

Mandela is already a convicted prisoner, serving a five-year sentence for leaving South Africa without a permit and for inciting people to strike in May, 1961. An attorney by profession, he was the partner of Oliver Tambo, now living in exile in London as leader of the ANC contingent outside South Africa. The former president-general of the ANC, ex-Chief Albert J. Luthuli, lives in Natal, confined to a small region around his home in Groutville, and prohibited from taking any part in political activity or from making any public utterances. Luthuli was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize two years ago. According to the prosecution, it was clear from Nelson Mandela's diary that Luthuli had approved of the decision of the African National Congress to give its blessing to a campaign of sabotage and violence. The proposition was put directly to number-two accused, Walter Sisulu, when he followed Mandela into the witness box, but Sisulu declared that he was not prepared to say anything about Luthuli.

In his address to the court, Mandela admitted that there was cooperation between the African National Congress and the Communist Party. This did not make the ANC Communistic, however. Because Britain and the United States had combined with Russia to fight Hitler, that did not mean that Churchill and the US leaders were Communists. The ANC itself had no links with Communism. "I am not a Communist and have never been a member of the Communist Party." Similar evidence was given by 42-year-old Walter Sisulu. He said he had never been a member of the Communist Party. He had joined the ANC in 1940, and at the time he had personally advocated keeping the Communists out of the organization.

An important point made by both Mandela and Sisulu in their evidence was that up to 1961 the ANC had followed a policy of non-violence. Sketching the history of the ANC, Mandela said it was formed in 1912. In 1948 the present Nationalist government came to power, and in 1949 the ANC launched a defiance campaign based on passive (not violent) resistance. In 1956 the Nationalist government mounted a massive treason trial, bringing 156 ANC and other leaders into the dock, but the trial eventually collapsed. Referring to this trial, Mandela said: "The non-violent policy of the ANC was tested by the court, and the court found that the ANC did not have a policy of violence." In 1960, the Sharpeville shootings occurred, the

Nationalist government proclaimed a state of emergency, and nearly 2,000 white and non-white political leaders and others were detained, some for nearly five months. The African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress, the two leading African political organizations, were both banned (and are still banned). But, said Mandela, the ANC refused to accept its banning. "The ANC refused to dissolve, and went underground."

Explaining how the ANC came to abandon its policy of non-violence, Mandela said that in 1960 a referendum was held in South Africa to decide whether the country should become a republic. Africans (numbering million, against three million whites) were not entitled to vote in the referendum, and it was decided as a protest to stage a "stay-at-home strike, a peaceful demonstration." However, the Nationalist government, declared Mandela, "answered by mobilizing its forces, sending armored cars into the African townships, to intimidate the people . . . this showed that the government intended to rule by force alone. This was a mile stone in the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe." Mandela said he came to the conclusion in June, 1961, that, if violence was inevitable, it would be unrealistic and wrong for African leaders to continue with a policy of non-violence when the government "met our demands with violence." This decision was not easily made. "The decision was made to embark on violent forms of struggle and form Umkhonto. I felt morally obliged to do what I did." Mandela denied strenuously that Umkhonto was a wing of the ANC or was connected with it, although some people were members of both organizations. The ANC itself was committed not to undertake violence, but it decided it was prepared to depart from its policy to the extent that it would no longer disapprove of properly-controlled sabotage. Sabotage was chosen because it did not involve loss of life. Strict instructions were given that on no account were people to be killed or injured. Mandela also made a study of guerrilla activities "because I wanted to stand - with my people and share with them the hazards of warfare." Guerrillas, however, would only be trained in case they were necessary.