

The seminar paper was written at the request of and for *The International Congregational Journal*. Therefore, it was written for a specific ecclesial audience. Dr. Jeff Guy rightly pointed out that the first portion, the biographical preface, is “overwritten,” i.e., it is a bit of a hagiography. My intention with the preface is to justify a reader’s further reading (capture his or her attention by relating Luthuli to Congregationalism) which from page six is more ‘objective.’

This is my first attempt to write on Luthuli and to have anything published. I understand I may have much to learn and much upon which to improve.

Cheers, Scott

“My People Let Go”

A Historical Examination of Chief Albert Luthuli and His Position on the Use of Violence as a Means by which to Achieve South Africa’s Liberation from Apartheid

Preface: A Life Worth Remembering

Chief Albert Luthuli. Does the name ring a bell? Probably not. Nor did I recognize the name, though I am a student of Africa and an ordained minister within the United Church of Christ, whose roots lie within the Congregational tradition. Only when requested to serve the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa as minister of the Groutville Congregational Church did I learn about one of our faith’s greatest heroes. Chief Albert Luthuli is a name that should be known by every confirmation student and minister in our faith tradition as he was the first African to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the only Congregationalist to receive the Prize (to my knowledge), and is arguably one of our polity’s greatest ancestor in faith. As Congregationalists, we have reason to be proud, for Luthuli is one of our own. In fact, the *New York Times* reported that a fellow Congregationalist, Dr. Andrew Vance McCracken, editor of a Congregational church magazine *Advance*, nominated Luthuli for the Prize.¹

Luthuli ought to be studied along side some of the most well known Nobel Peace Prize-winners such as Gandhi, King, Tutu, Mandela, Carter, and Anan.² Luthuli, like his American contemporary Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, with

¹ *New York Times*, December 11, 1961 and July 21, 1967. The nomination was subsequently supported by Norwegian Socialist MPs who put forward his name in February, 1961. Pillay, Gerald J. *Voices of Liberation, Volume I, Albert Luthuli*, (HSRC Publishers, Pretoria, 1993), p. 25, (footnote 57).

² In Kofi Anan’s Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech on December 10, 2001, Anan credited Chief Albert Luthuli, “one of the earliest leaders of the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa,” as being one who “set the standard I have sought to follow throughout my working life.”

whom he cooperated, advocated fiercely for a militant non-violent active struggle against oppression and racism. Like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Luthuli was a church leader and an ambassador of the “rainbow nation” to the world, even visiting the United States with the sponsorship of the American Board of Foreign Missions in 1948. Luthuli, like Nelson Mandela, was seen by many in South Africa and the world as the one statesman who could keep South Africa from self-destruction. Like Mandela following his release from prison, Luthuli’s keen intellect and powerful personality held together in solidarity against incredible odds Indians, Whites, Blacks, Communists, Liberals, Christians, Muslims, modernists and traditionalists within the ANC thus enabling the survival and future growth of the anti-Apartheid struggle and the creation of the present day democratic South Africa. Perhaps most importantly, despite rising to the heights of political power, like the Mahatma Gandhi, Luthuli remained in public and private a humble man. He lived in a rustic home and died as a simple farmer, a father of seven, and a faithful leader and member of his Congregational church.

The 1960 Nobel Committee selected Luthuli from the midst of obscurity to proclaim to the world the height to which humankind ought to strive. Luthuli was the oxymoronic ‘pragmatic idealist’ that, if remembered, can inspire us to accept more radical and relevant actions of faith. Luthuli contained within him a vast collection of complementary paradoxes that must be remembered and understood if Christians are to likewise be faithful and relevant.

Luthuli, a son of royal lineage, can be described as a ‘traditionalist,’ for he served his people as a proud Zulu *inkosi* (chief). However, unlike most chiefs, Luthuli’s power and prestige was garnered not through hereditary accession, but by ballot in 1936 as an elected chief of the *amaKholwa* (Believers). Luthuli demonstrates to all that ‘western’ concepts of democracy can be amalgamated responsibly with elements of indispensable indigenous heritage. Luthuli’s brand of leadership acknowledged the elusive reality that decisive and potent authority

need not come at the expense of benevolence, humility, accountability, and integrity. Luthuli was an intellectual – ‘western’ educated in the bosom of American congregationalism in South Africa. Luthuli’s education began at the Umvoti Mission Station (Groutville) established in 1847 by Reverend Aldin Grout of the American Board of Foreign Missions. Luthuli attended and taught at Adams College (founded by Reverend Newton Adams) and Luthuli’s wife, Nokukhanya, studied at Inanda Seminary (founded by Reverend Daniel Lindley) – all Congregationalist educational institutions founded by North Americans. Luthuli was even elected President of the Natal Teacher’s Association (1933). Yet, his western education did not separate him from his people or African heritage as a traditional Zulu leader.

As a leader and spokesman for fourteen million oppressed, humiliated and exploited South Africans, Luthuli was a militant. Luthuli fought unceasingly for freedom and justice during his twenty-two years in the African National Congress (ANC). Following a meteoric rise to the heights of black African political power, the recognition of Luthuli’s leadership abilities culminated in his election as the ANC’s President-General in 1952, a position he retained until his death in 1967.³ The battles he led and endured were often bloody, bitter, and grim. In 1953, Luthuli was first silenced by the racist Apartheid regime through its issuing of a ‘banning’ order thus proscribing his movements, prohibiting his presence in larger cities, and from forbidding him from attending or speaking at all public meetings for two years. Until his death in 1967, Luthuli’s ‘bannings’ (1953, 1954, 1959, 1964) became more severe and restrictive.⁴ His steely resolve to fight no matter the consequences made him a warrior worthy of his fierce Zulu ancestral kings. However, Luthuli was simultaneously a peace activist who, as a brilliant orator

³ Luthuli’s death was officially reported as an accident resulting from being struck by a goods train near his home in Groutville. Many within the ANC, especially Luthuli’s family, are suspicious of a much more malevolent cause.

⁴ Pillay, Gerald J. Voices of Liberation, pp. 19-21.

and author, fought not with sword or bombs, but with his mind and heart. His strong Christian convictions compelled him to advocate for a “non-violent, passive resistance technique in fighting for freedom” because he was convinced it was the only “non-revolutionary, legitimate, and humane way that could be used by a people denied...effective constitutional means” to further their aspirations.⁵ It is not an exaggeration to state that in the midst of Apartheid’s most draconian measures of oppression, Luthuli kept the country on course for a bright future that no one then could yet dream.

Luthuli, as President-General of the ANC for seventeen years, was a secular politician, yet he argued that he was first and foremost a Christian. His speeches and reports are peppered with theological rationale for the political struggle that he waged. His famous book, *Let My People Go*, prophetically demonstrated (decades before the *Kairos Document* was published) that the Apartheid context was as much a theological issue as it was a political issue.⁶ Luthuli’s family prayed daily in their humble home and Luthuli would regularly preach at the Groutville Congregational Church as a deacon. Following the Treason Trial, Luthuli expressed his strong Christian faith when he stated, “What the future has in store for me I do not know...I only pray to the Almighty to strengthen my resolve so that nothing may deter me from striving, for the sake of the good name of our beloved country, to make it a true democracy and a true union of all the communities of the land.”⁷

Luthuli arguably reached the greatest height of international acclaim, yet he lived and worked as the humblest of farmers in Groutville. Luthuli held what

⁵ “The Road to Freedom is Via the Cross,” Pillay, Gerald J. *Voices of Liberation*, p. 50.

⁶ *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church*, was a theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa first published in 1986. At the time, it was a radical text that challenged predominately white middle class churches to cease “sitting on the fence” and encouraged them to “take sides,” politically, against the South African State. The document biblically justified the liberation movement and called the theology of the State a heresy.

⁷ “The Road to Freedom is Via the Cross,” as cited above in footnote 5.

were at the time very lofty principles, such as the right of Africans to pursue unfettered development and to attain human rights for all people in South Africa regardless of race. In contrast however, Luthuli was also a utilitarian as he shaped and implemented the many practical and economic struggles launched throughout the 1950s and 1960s such as the Defiance Campaign (1952), the stay-at-home strikes, the bus boycotts, the mass campaign against passes for women, the struggle against Bantu education, the workers' struggles for a pound-a-day minimum wage, the Freedom Charter, and the public burnings of the Apartheid's dreaded "pass books." Luthuli's influence was local as much as it was national and international. As a founder of the local cane farmers union, Luthuli superseded platitudes demanding rights and worked practically to assist local black entrepreneurs to develop economically.⁸

Perhaps the greatest paradox of Luthuli's life is his consistent advocacy of non-violence previous to and during his last seven years of ANC leadership and the ANC's sanctioned and sponsored use of violence. This article does not attempt to provide authoritative or conclusive answers. Rather, this article begs a question. What was Luthuli's stance on the issue of violence as a means by which to achieve liberation? Virtually all my sources are secondary, and therefore can be considered academically superficial. I strive therefore to only demonstrate that the question exists, is relevant, and requires further primary source documentation, archival research, and analysis. I seek to demonstrate that the question was asked subsequent to Luthuli's reception of the Prize and argued about after his death. I suggest that current 'political memory' may be creating history with inaccurate assumptions as answers.

⁸ This short introduction, serving as a brief biography of Luthuli, was taken from two articles I wrote to various instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ. Though submitted, I have no knowledge that they were ever published or re-printed. Therefore, I have made use of them here, amalgamated.

Introduction: Luthuli's Existential Dilemma?

The following excerpt was delivered to a packed auditorium in Oslo, Norway, by Mr. Gunnar Jahn, the Chairperson of the Nobel Committee, on December 10, 1961:

Never has Luthuli succumbed to the temptation to use violent means in the struggle for his people. Nothing has shaken him from this firm resolve, so firmly rooted in his conviction that violence and terror must not be employed... Well might we ask: will the non-whites of South Africa, by their suffering, their humiliation, and their patience, show the other nations of the world that human rights can be won without violence, by following a road to which we Europeans have committed both intellectually and emotionally, but which we have all too often abandoned? If the non-white people of South Africa ever lift themselves from their humiliation without resorting to violence and terror, then it will be above all because of the work of Luthuli, their fearless and incorruptible leader who, thanks to his own high ethical standards, has rallied his people in support of this policy, and who throughout his adult life has staked everything and suffered everything without bitterness and without allowing hatred and aggression to replace his abiding love of his fellow men. But if the day should come when the struggle of the non-whites in South Africa to win their freedom denigrates into bloody slaughter, then Luthuli's voice will be heard no more. But let us remember him and never forget that his way was unwavering and clear. He would have not have had it so.⁹

What was Luthuli thinking as he heard these words, previous to his being called forward to accept the Nobel Peace Prize? Popular South African historiography would have one believe that Luthuli, as President of the ANC since 1952, seven months previous to receiving the Prize, was informed of and sanctioned the formation of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Spear of the Nation, or hereafter, MK) to initiate violence as a means by which to achieve liberation. In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela admits this historical contradiction, “The honor came at an awkward time for it was juxtaposed against an announcement that seemed to call

⁹ “Mr. [Gunnar] Jahn delivered this speech on 10 December, 1961, in the auditorium of the University of Oslo. At its conclusion he presented the Peace Prize for 1960 (reserved that year) to Mr. Luthuli, who accepted [the Prize] in a brief speech. The English translation of Mr. Jahn’s speech is, with certain editorial changes and emendations made after collation with the Norwegian text, that which is carried in *Les Prix Nobel en 1960*, which also includes the original Norwegian text.” Asmal, Kader, David Chidester, and Wilmot James, eds. South Africa’s Nobel Laureates: Peace, Literature, and Science, (Johnathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2004), pp. 20-21, 274.

the award itself into question. The day after Luthuli returned from Oslo [December 16, 1961], MK dramatically announced its emergence.”¹⁰

If the assumption that Luthuli, as the titular leader of South Africa’s liberation movement, sanctioned violence as a means by which to achieve liberation was true, what raced through Luthuli’s mind as Jahn declared that he was “unwavering and clear” as it regarded his position on the use of violence? Would Luthuli not have experienced a sense of panic and anxiety as he listened to Jahn declare that if the liberation movement is to resist the temptation to use violence, it will be due to Luthuli’s influence? Was not Luthuli bristling as Jahn concluded that if the liberation movement ever resorts to violence, it will be due to an abandonment of Luthuli’s voice?¹¹ Did Luthuli support the massive ethical and strategic change in the liberation movement’s policy? If we assume the answer is “Yes, Luthuli sanctioned the violence,” did Jahn’s introduction engender an existential dilemma within Luthuli? If we call into question assumed South African historiography and conclude, “No, Luthuli did not waver in his belief that violence ought not be employed as a means by which to achieve liberation,” what can account for the prevailing historiographic assumption that Luthuli did provide consent for the initiation of MK? Either answer to the question produces profound new historiographic dilemmas and therefore questions. This article is an attempt to explore more deeply these questions and perhaps suggest that the answer can not be answered “yes,” or “no.” The contexts and events were more complex and ambiguous to warrant such simplicity.

¹⁰ Mandela, Nelson. Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela, (Little, Brown and Company, Toronto, Canada, 1994), p. 284.

¹¹ How ironic are Jahn’s comments in light of the fact that the primary proponent and Commander in Chief of the armed struggle was a future Nobel Peace Prize-winner (Nelson Mandela)!

A Historical Question: A Practical Example

In February of 2004, I received a submission from Mr. Jabulani Sithole, the South African government's consultative historian for the Chief Albert Luthuli Legacy Project, recommending changes to a text that was soon to be engraved in granite at the Groutville Congregational Church where Luthuli served as a deacon.¹² One quotation under the heading "Religious Leader," in relation to a second quotation under the heading "National Leader" (Politics), raised special concern for Sithole. The concerned quotations by Luthuli read, respectively:

*My own beliefs as I have already said are to a certain extent motivated by Christian leanings. Because of my Christian leanings I would hesitate to be a party to violence...*¹³

*...in the face of the uncompromising white refusal to abandon a policy which denies heritage – freedom – no one can blame just men for seeking justice by the use of violent methods, nor could they be blamed if they tried to create an organized force in order to establish peace and racial harmony.*¹⁴

Sithole recommended:

*I would like to suggest that we drop [the first] quotation ... especially because it is quoted out of context.*¹⁵ *It does not capture the entire statement that Luthuli issued in 1964, and also gives an impression that he was condemning Mandela and others at the end of the Rivonia [T]rial. I particularly feel that it will feed*

¹² The quotations inscribed on the text mural were not referenced nor listed in any chronological order. The quotations were only associated together according to theme (Community, Religious, Political, and International leader).

¹³ Excerpts from Chief Albert Luthuli's evidence at the Treason Trial (1957 - 1961) dealing with his understanding of a non-violent liberation struggle. Pillay, Gerald J. Voices of Liberation, p. 154.

¹⁴ Following the "Rivonia Trial" (1963 - 1964) on June 12, 1964, Luthuli issued this statement when Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathada, Govan Mbeki, Dennis Goldberg, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi and Andrew Mlangeni were sentenced to life imprisonment. Pillay, Gerald J. Voices of Liberation, pp. 151-152.

¹⁵ Sithole is correct. However, more than "out of context," the quotations derive from completely different contexts. The second quotation possibly inferring support for a violent option is a statement made after the Rivonia Trial and the first quotation stating support for a non-violent option is from testimony given by Luthuli at the Treason Trial some five years earlier. Both quotations were taken from Pillay's book which very misleadingly includes the "excerpts from the treason trial" (small case) immediately after Luthuli's statement on the Rivonia Trial. The structure of Pillay's text is chronological, therefore, the reader easily mistakes the two quotations as contemporaneous. I found no date associated with the trial excerpts nor could I locate a reference for the testimony in the bibliography of primary sources (pp. 163-167).

into stereotypes that would do Luthuli [more] harm than good: Can we truly suggest that Luthuli publicly criticized the armed struggle? Are we suggesting that Mandela and Kotane were liars? Furthermore, the rest of the statement (appears as the last quotation under politics in this document) gives a different picture altogether. Let us not create confusion. Drop this quote and retain the last one under politics.¹⁶

Sithole's recommendation, and subsequent rationale, to retain the quotation that possibly infers Luthuli's support of violence as a means by which to advance the struggle for freedom and to delete the quotation that indicated Luthuli expressed a reservation to resort to violence as a means by which to advance the struggle for freedom *may* presuppose many understandings, namely that:¹⁷

1. Luthuli may have abandoned non-violence in the struggle for freedom;
2. a stated "*hesitancy* to be a party to violence" is synonymous with an absolute disavowal of violence;
3. Luthuli may have supported the decision to launch MK as one of many tactics to pressure the Apartheid regime's capitulation;
4. if Luthuli is portrayed as a non-violent human rights activist, who publicly disagreed with other ANC members to engage in violence, a negative stereotype would tarnish Luthuli's legacy and image for posterity. It can be surmised that Sithole is concerned with Luthuli's reputation. One can infer that if Luthuli were portrayed as a pacifist, that this would discredit him and diminish his reputation. The "stereotype" of Luthuli that Sithole

¹⁶ Sithole, Jabulani, SADET Project. Correspondence entitled, "Comments on Reverend Couper's Submissions." to Mr. Brian Xaba of the Department of Arts and Culture (Heritage Division: Legacy Projects), February 22, 2004. It must be noted that it can be assumed that, though in writing, Sithole was commenting extemporaneously and therefore informally and his comments of concern should not be inappropriately construed as "on the record" and publishable historical queries.

¹⁷ I stress the word "may," as Sithole does not necessarily harbor these assumptions. In fact, I doubt he does. I use Sithole's comment simply as a foundational example upon which to question general assumptions and to therefore to pose the questions I do in this article.

may wish to avoid is that of a leader who is weak, conservative, accommodating, and unresolved;¹⁸

5. a stated public preference for non-violent struggle therefore constituted “criticism” by Luthuli of those who had embarked on a violent struggle;
6. by “not blaming brave men for seeking justice by the use of violent methods,” Luthuli therefore may have supported their methods, in addition to their ideals;
7. perceptions of historical events by liberation icons (Mandela, Zuma, and Asmal) that differ with other more accurate perceptions may constitute an accusation that disingenuous deception was employed by those icons and therefore discredits their legacy and image for posterity;
8. questioning or revisiting historical assumptions may engender “confusion;”
9. that censorship of contrasting realities may be detrimental to a homogenization of the history of South African’s liberation;
10. a clear and homogenized understanding of history is beneficial to society.

In the end, both quotations were engraved and today can be read on a large text mural adjacent to Luthuli’s final resting place. At the time, I felt strongly that neither quotation be excised, for both quotations raise fundamental issues regarding a man who belongs in the pantheon of great human rights leaders of the twentieth century. I acknowledge Sithole as a gifted scholar, and one who is more learned and erudite than I, as it regards the life and times of Luthuli. However, historians, even nascent ones such as myself, ought to question assumptions, particularly assumptions that deal with issues related to a Nobel Peace Prize-

¹⁸ These are the characteristics that historical commentary have assigned to Luthuli’s predecessors, Doctors Alfred B. Xuma and James S. Moroka. The Youth League was prominent in the latter’s ousting in favor of a more decisive and courageous Luthuli.

winner and the process that led to the birth of a democratic country. Ernest Renan reminds us that “Forgetting history, or even getting it wrong, is an essential factor in the formation of a nation.”¹⁹ Archbishop Trevor Huddleson once commented, “History is never simply a chronicle of the past. It is always a challenge to contemporary thought for the future.”²⁰ At the February, 2005 launching of a documentary on Chief Albert Luthuli at the National Film and Video Foundation, Dr. Pallo Jordan, Minister of Arts and Culture aptly questioned, “What are you, as a South African, doing to ensure that Luthuli’s legacy lives?”²¹ Not being a South African, I therefore take the liberty of hearing the question, “What are you, as a Congregationalist, doing to ensure that Luthuli’s legacy lives?”

Prelude to a Violent Strategy: Was Luthuli Unaware?

Gerald Pillay, the editor of the book *Voices of Liberation: Albert Luthuli*, chronicles Luthuli’s history of advocating non-violence and comments upon the irony of the first strikes by MK so soon after his reception of the Peace Prize. Pillay asks, “Had the ANC changed course without Luthuli?”²² Pillay concludes, for one that is not familiar with the intimate details of the history in question, hypocritically, in the affirmative: “It is clear that after 1960 the option of armed struggle was accepted by the leadership [of the ANC] without jettisoning the view that Luthuli and others of maintaining non-violence.”²³

Was Luthuli aware of discussions considering violence within the ANC previous to June, 1961 when armed resistance was formally agreed? If so, at what point in time was he aware? Luthuli’s testimony in the Treason Trial (1958-1961)

¹⁹ “The Legacy of a Legend: Chief Albert J.M. Luthuli,” documentary film, produced by the National Film and Video Foundation, sponsored by the Department of Arts and Culture, 2005.

²⁰ Callinicos, Luli. *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains*, (David Philip Publishers, Claremont, South Africa, 2004), p. 8.

²¹ Jordan, Pallo. “Address at the Launch of the Chief Albert Luthuli Film (NFVF),” Johannesburg, February 25, 2005, p. 7.

²² Pillay, Gerald J. *Voices of Liberation*, p. 29.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 31.

suggests he was not aware. His response to the court's question, "Have you at any level of the ANC heard a suggestion that the policy [of non-violence] should be changed?" is "My lords, I've never heard any such suggestion, nor a whisper to that effect." However, there exists much evidence that some within the ANC were discussing violence. It is debatable whether Luthuli, as President of the ANC, knew of these discussions.

As early as March, 1955, Jordan Ngubane, a founding member of the ANC Youth and prolific political commentator, alludes to discussions within the ANC of an armed option in a correspondence to a future colleague in the Liberal Party, Patrick Duncan.

...I am asking myself at the moment if it would serve the cause of racial accord better if I threw my lot with those who are trying, no matter how faltering, to rally men of good will to the ideal of race equality. For it sometimes appears to me, to look on while the advocates of violence on our side (i.e. ANC) are making preparations might one day be indistinguishable from conniving at violence (sic)...And whenever I reach this point in my thinking – note I say the feeling – swells up within me that I should join the Liberal Party...to...convince the African that salvation for him lies, not in violence but in race tolerance and conciliation.²⁴

Mandela recounts in his autobiography, "The debate on the use of violence had been going on among us since early 1960. I had first discussed the armed struggle as far back as 1952 with Walter [Sisulu]."²⁵ Furthermore, Ahmed Kathada states in a documentary entitled, "The Legacy of a Legend: Chief Albert J.M. Luthuli":

There were talks, for instance, already in 1953, when Walter Sisulu was smuggled out of the country and he was going to China. Already at that time, Mr. Mandela told Walter that, "Look, when you have discussions with the Chinese leadership," because the Chinese had just emerged four years before them, after an armed struggle, and Mr. Mandela told Sisulu that, "Look, discuss the question of an armed struggle in South Africa." So already in '53, they had this talk, of course, Mr. Sisulu did discuss with senior [Chinese] leadership, and

²⁴ Wahlberg, Barbara. "Jordan Khush Ngubane: Journalist or Politician," A dissertation to the Faculty of Arts, University of Natal, Durban, in partial fulfillment of the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Honors, November, 2002, pp. 33-34.

²⁵ Mandela, Nelson. *Long Walk to Freedom*, pp. 270- 271.

The biography on Walter Sisulu (footnote 55) also cites 1952 as the year in which Sisulu and Mandela began to discuss a violent struggle, p. 146.

they said, "No, you people are not ripe yet" in '53, "for an armed struggle. It needs a lot more political work before you can embark on an armed struggle."²⁶

It could be the case that Luthuli was not informed of discussions within the ANC regarding an armed option by Mandela and Sisulu, as they were in fact colluding about the possibilities of an armed struggle. The deception proves even greater if as an ANC representative, Sisulu, upon Mandela's advice, initiates a discussion with a foreign government regarding an armed struggle without the knowledge of the ANC's President (Luthuli). However, it could also be the case that Luthuli was deliberately deceiving the court during the Treason Trial which was held a number of years after Sisulu's visit to China (1953) and Mandela's discussion with Sisulu (1952). However, the emphatic nature of Luthuli's response, that he "has never heard a whisper to that effect," seems to reinforce Luthuli's understanding that neither did he support violence nor was he aware that it was being discussed within the party leadership prior to the decision to launch MK.

In his 1975 biography of Moses Kotane, Brian Bunting stated his view that Luthuli did not know of, and never participated in, the discussions to adopt the armed struggle.²⁷ Bunting goes further to indicate that there were three reasons for delaying reporting to Luthuli the decision to adopt a violent campaign.²⁸ The first justification for delay was communication and logistical

²⁶ "The Legacy of a Legend: Chief Albert J.M. Luthuli," 2005. When Kathada refers to the "senior leadership," I assume that he is refereeing to the Chinese leadership and not the ANC leadership. The context of the evidence supports this interpretation.

²⁷ This is in direct contradiction to his view as a co-author of the SACP's publicized tribute to Luthuli in 1967. Therefore, this evidence is highly suspect. Sithole, Jabulani and Sibongiseni Mkhize. "Truth or Lies? Selective Memories, Imagings, and Representations of Chief Albert John Luthuli in Recent Political Discourses," pp. 10 and 11, (footnotes 23 and 27, respectively). The above article, published, can be found in History and Theory, Theme Issue 39, (December, 2000). The page and footnote numbers I reference here, and henceforth in this paper, come from a copy of the original paper provided to me by Sithole and not from the published article (above). Sithole cites: Bunting, Brian. Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary. A Political Biography, (Inkululeko Publications, London, 1975), pp. 268-269.

²⁸ This would confirm Mandela's version of his "disconcerting" conversation with Luthuli whereby Luthuli scolded Mandela for not informing him of the creation of MK. However,

difficulties resulting from Luthuli's banning. The second, Luthuli was preoccupied with preparations to receive the Nobel Prize in Oslo. The third, fear existed that Luthuli would veto the change in policy if it were intimated to Luthuli at an inappropriate time. In his biography, Bunting claims that after the initiation of violence, Luthuli demanded that he be apprised of events, whereby the ANC leadership was obliged to send Kotane to Groutville to explain the decision to initiate violent hostilities. The third concern appears to be quite valid. In an authorized biography of Nelson Mandela, Anthony Sampson writes that two months previous to the initiation of violence (October, 1961) Luthuli had told a Canadian diplomat "that younger ANC members were thinking of violence, but that it would in his opinion be 'suicidal folly' to try to overthrow the government by force."²⁹

The Case for Luthuli's Support of a Change of Strategy that Included Violence

Sithole and Sibongiseni Mkhize, in an article entitled "Truth or Lies," comment extensively on changing view points regarding Luthuli's stance on violence as a means by which to achieve liberation. Sithole notes:

Controversy over the role that Luthuli played in the formulation of the decision to set up the ANC's and SACP's armed wing...in 1961 had been going on for more than five years at the time of Luthuli's death.³⁰

therefore, the three reasons for a delay in reporting would contradict Mandela's (and other's) reports that Luthuli was present and presided over the two all-night meetings (NEC and Congress Alliance) whereby a compromise initiating MK was agreed to, though autonomous from the ANC (see pages 17-18). Sithole's concern, as it regards Luthuli's text mural quotation calling into question Mandela's and Kotane's testimony that Luthuli was present at and agreed to the change in policy, therefore coincides with Kotane's (Bunting's) initial understanding that Luthuli knew of, supported, and participated in the formation of MK (see p. 15, footnote 32). However, Sithole's same concern above contradicts Kotane's (Bunting's) later understanding that Luthuli did not know of or support violence (above).

²⁹ Sampson, Anthony. Mandela: An Authorized Biography, (Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 1999), p. 151.

³⁰ Sithole, Jabulani. "Truth or Lies?" p. 9, (footnote 19).

Apparently, in order to counter Nationalist (Apartheid) propaganda claiming, among other things, that Luthuli was soon to publicly renounce violence, the Communist Party in its tribute to Luthuli “argued that as a leader and spokesperson of the ANC, Luthuli shared a view that the nature of the struggle, ‘whether it should be violent or non-violent, was a matter of policy to be decided from time to time by the leadership...’”³¹ The Communists also claimed that the collective decision to form MK was unanimous.³² Sithole writes that Brian Bunting, one of the authors of the South African Communist Party’s tribute to Luthuli, approved in 1967 a statement that claimed Luthuli participated actively in the decision to turn to violence.³³

It is true that Luthuli himself declared on various occasions that he was not a pacifist. Contemporary South African history repeatedly emphasizes this, almost defensively. For example, in a commemorative brochure sponsored by the South African government entitled “A New Example for the World: A Tribute to Chief Albert John Mvumbi Luthuli (1898-1967)” it states:

*And whilst he was a peace loving leader Chief Luthuli was not a pacifist. He knew that progressive change came only out of struggle and that it was only through on going contestation that the progressive values for which he stood would become a living reality.*³⁴

One can surmise that the word “contestation” is perhaps euphemistically referring to “violence,” as the sentence falls immediately after the assertion that Luthuli was not a pacifist.

Kadar Asmal, South Africa’s former Minister of Education, in the book *South Africa’s Nobel Laureates*, aptly demonstrates the ‘acceptable’ portrayal of

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 10, (footnote 23).

Sithole cites, “Chief Albert Luthuli: A Tribute,” in South African Communists Speak, p. 360.

³² *ibid.*, p. 10, (footnote 24).

³³ *ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁴ Chetty, Dasarath (Prof.), “A New Example for the World: A Tribute to Chief Albert John Mvumbi Luthuli (1898-1967),” a publication by the University of kwaZulu-Natal and the Department of Arts and Culture, Durban, 2004, p. 1.

Luthuli as one who though favoring non-violence, reluctantly acquiesced if not supported and approved the decision to change tactics to include violence.

Clearly, Albert Luthuli favoured non-violent means of struggle against apartheid. For example, he advocated economic sanctions against the apartheid regime as a way to advocate a 'relatively peaceful transition.' Yet he was not a pacifist. He once observed that anyone who thought he was a pacifist should try to steal his chickens.³⁵ I believe that he came to appreciate – under the pressure of events – that some measure of force was inevitable, but he felt that any use of force should be done through a military formation that was separate from the political movement of the ANC. I know that the plans for an armed struggle, under the auspices of a new military formation, were submitted to Chief Albert Luthuli for his approval. Just days after Albert Luthuli received the Nobel Peace Prize, on 16 December 1961, the military wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe, engaged in its first use of force to sabotage a government installation. In the hope of peace, an armed struggle had begun.³⁶

From the very outset of violence, the external mission of the ANC sought to utilize Luthuli's name to engender legitimacy for the armed struggle. Oliver Tambo, the leader of the exile mission, expected difficulties in persuading the world of ANC's new initiative in the wake of Luthuli's Peace Prize reception. Allies of the non-violent movement were not prepared to support an armed movement. In Tambo's careful defense of the violent struggle, he quoted Luthuli's 1952 statement refusing to relinquish his chieftainship or his presidency of the ANC.

Who will deny that 30 years of my life have been spent knocking in vain, patiently, moderately, and modestly at a closed and barred door? What have been the fruits of my moderation?³⁷

Though Luthuli's quote was almost a decade old, and certainly not intended by him to be used to justify the armed struggle, Tambo realized how apropos the

³⁵ This famous tale about chickens seems to derive from Mandela (see footnote 46). Sampson, *Mandela*, p. 151.

³⁶ Asmal, Kader. *South Africa's Nobel Laureates*, pp. 9-10. Curiously, Asmal does not state that Luthuli granted his approval for the plans for a new military formation that was submitted to him. Asmal shared essentially the same sentiments in the documentary film, "The Legacy of a Legend."

³⁷ Callinicos, Luli. *Oliver Tambo*, p. 289.

statement sounded and sought to bring Luthuli's prestige to convince those concerned that the tactics of moderation had reached the 'end of the road.'

Current South African historiography concludes that Luthuli supported the ANC's shift to a violent struggle. Acknowledged leaders of the South African liberation movement, such as Mandela, Zuma, Nair, and Kathrada, etc, provide the bulk of evidence supporting this claim. Mandela states in his autobiography that he was hesitant to propose the initiation of armed resistance at a meeting of the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) in Durban because:

*Chief Luthuli would be in attendance and I knew of his moral commitment to non-violence. I was also wary because of the timing: I was raising the issue of violence so soon after the Treason Trial, where we had contended that for the ANC nonviolence was an inviolate principle, not a tactic to be changed as conditions warranted. I myself believed quite the opposite: that nonviolence was a tactic that should be abandoned when it no longer worked.*³⁸

Mandela states that throughout the night, Luthuli resisted his arguments. For Luthuli, "non-violence was not simply a tactic."³⁹ However, Mandela said, "In his [Luthuli's] heart he realized we were right. He ultimately agreed that a military campaign was inevitable."⁴⁰ Mandela recalls that on the following night (after the NEC meeting) at a meeting of the Joint Executives of the various Congresses (Congress Alliance):

*although the ANC had endorsed a decision on violence, Luthuli stated that "it is a matter of such gravity that I would like my colleagues here tonight to consider the issue afresh." It was apparent that the Chief was not fully reconciled to our new course.*⁴¹

By dawn, the congresses authorized the formation of a military wing, separate from the ANC and "not subject to the direct control of the mother organization." The ANC would retain its non-violent policy.⁴² Mandela reports that the ANC

³⁸ Mandela, Nelson. Long Walk to Freedom, p. 272.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 272.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 273.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 274.

and MK were separated enough to divert attendance from ANC meetings to MK meetings without the ANC being aware that MK had been established.⁴³ Mandela states that when it was announced in December, 1961 that Luthuli won the Nobel Prize, Luthuli's "heart was strained and his memory was poor."⁴⁴ Was Luthuli's health poor enough during this time to effectively incapacitate Luthuli as it regards his ability to think strategically and lead a liberation movement? Mandela remembers:

Before leaving (for Addis Ababa), I secretly drove to Groutville to confer with the Chief. Our meeting - at a safe house in town - was disconcerting. As I have related, the Chief was present at the creation of MK, and was as informed as any member of the National Executive Committee about its development. But the Chief was not well and his memory was not what it had once been. He chastised me for not consulting him about the formation of MK. I attempted to remind the chief of the discussions that we had in Durban about taking-up violence, but he did not recall them. This is in large part why the story [from Kotane/Bunting, 1974-1975?] has gained currency that Chief Luthuli was not informed about the creation of MK and was deeply opposed to the ANC taking up violence. Nothing could be further from the truth."⁴⁵

One can reference Mandela's autobiography to discover that the issue of a change in strategy from militant non-violence and violence was very contentious.⁴⁶ Sithole is correct in suggesting that Mandela understood Luthuli as a supporter of the change in strategy. It is important that we examine Sithole's comments referencing Mandela and Kotane. By including Luthuli's "I would be hesitant to be a party to violence..." quotation in the text mural, Sithole suggests that Mandela could be accused of a 'tactical' coup of sorts within the ANC and therefore of historical deception.

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 283-284. The link between the ANC and MK was generally well known subsequent to Robert Resha's pronouncement of their merger within eighteen months after MK's formation.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 284.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 287-288.

⁴⁶ The biography of Walter Sisulu (*Walter and Albertina: In Our Lifetime*) repetitively cites Mandela's autobiography (five times in one page), thus leaving the reader with an understanding of the events that differ little from Mandela's version. One can surmise that there is a concern to present one unified understanding of the events as they concern the ANC's tactical change.

In the 2005 documentary on Luthuli produced by the National Film and Video Foundation, Billy Nair provides the following testimony:

He [Luthuli] already knew, before he left for Oslo, to receive the Nobel, he knew that night, that Umkhonto was going to be launched. Chief is safe in his home, nine o'clock that night, throughout South Africa there were bombings taking place. And I was part of that campaign.⁴⁷

The former Deputy President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, goes so far to say that it was Luthuli himself who named the military wing of the ANC. Zuma tells the listener an anecdote that Luthuli intimated to rationalize the name.

At the end [of our discussion] when we were saying, "What is this organization going to be called?" he [Luthuli] told a little story and said, "If you are a man and you fight with somebody out there, and this somebody is stronger than you are, and you retreat to your home, and this somebody gets into your home, attacking you in front of your wife and the children, what do you do if you are a man?" [Luthuli] says, "You take up you spear, and use your spear to fight the man."⁴⁸

The reality that Luthuli utilized the Nobel Peace Prize 'winnings' to purchase farms in Swaziland for refugees can be seen as his approval of ANC tactics after MK's launch. It was his wife, Nokukhanya, who worked tirelessly on these farms in an effort to make them viable.⁴⁹ One would need to determine what kind of 'refugees' were these farms intended to serve? It is true that the line between a 'combatant' refugee and a 'political' refugee were very blurred during the struggle. Perhaps, the distinction was not even attempted as it regards the use of the farms. Second, were the farms utilized as "safehouses," or as launching pads for military operations across the border? Either case is very doubtful. The answer to these questions can point to whether the farms in exile suggest Luthuli's support of the ANC's change of strategy.

⁴⁷ "The Legacy of a Legend: Chief Albert J.M. Luthuli," 2005.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Rule, Peter and Marilyn Aitken and Jenny van Dyk. Nokukhanya: Mother of Light, (The Grail, Johannesburg, 1993), pp. 1-180.

The Case for Luthuli's Non-Support of a Change of Strategy that Included Violence

Perhaps the greatest proponent of Chief Luthuli's unwavering support of non-violence came from Chief Mangaosuthu Buthelezi, President of the Inkatha Freedom Party and former Chief Minister of kwaZulu. In a vitriolic speech at the Groutville Mission School grounds on Sunday, August 29, 1982, Buthelezi utilized Luthuli's stature to make many subtle, and some not so subtle, broadsides against the ANC in exile.⁵⁰ Buthelezi's primary ammunition used to accuse the ANC in exile of not being worthy of inheriting the leadership of the liberation struggle on behalf of the South African people was its deviation from Luthuli's (and the historic ANC's) policy of non-violence. Buthelezi took issue with Asmal's later understanding that Luthuli "came to appreciate – under the pressure of events – that some measure of force was inevitable."⁵¹ Buthelezi stated that no matter the dire circumstances "Luthuli found no reason to abandon the things of value." Buthelezi attempted to clarify the then confusing stance advocated then and now by the ANC leadership as it regards Luthuli's support of non-violence

⁵⁰ I must inform the reader of several elements that cause Buthelezi to be a questionable source. First, within the speech I quote, Buthelezi contradicted himself numerous times as it regarded his personal stance on the use of violence. He did not, however, contradict his view of Luthuli's stance. Second, Buthelezi obviously (some would say 'shamelessly') utilized Luthuli's memory as a means to empower himself. Buthelezi, in using Luthuli's name, sought to dis-empower those with whom he was politically competitive. Third, I understand from Sithole's paper, "Truth and Lies," that Dr. Albertinah Luthuli (Chief Luthuli's daughter) was herself very upset at Buthelezi for his utilizing her father to forward his own political agenda against the ANC and even accused Buthelezi of abusing his relationship with the Luthuli family to manipulate her mother (Nokukhanya Luthuli) into allowing Buthelezi to commandeer the memorial services during these years. However, despite all the above, the possible malevolent motivations for using Luthuli do not necessarily invalidate the perspective that Buthelezi had as it regards Luthuli's stance on violence. Hence, I utilize Buthelezi's position in this essay to demonstrate that there is a question regarding Luthuli's position on violence.

⁵¹ Buthelezi, Mangosuthu C. "Inkatha Yenkululeko Yesizwe Kgare Ya Tokoloho Ya Setjaba National Cultural Liberation Movement," address presented by Buthelezi at the Groutville Mission school grounds during "a prayer meeting to commemorate the last leader of the banned African National Congress who was democratically elected before the organization was banned – Chief Albert Mvumbi Lutuli President-General of the African National Congress and Nobel Peace Prize-winner," Sunday, August 29, 1982, p. 6.

tactics by explaining that Luthuli “was a great man who stood firm when others wavered.” Buthelezi harangued the ANC leadership for not only breaking away from Luthuli’s non-violence stance, but also for pursuing an unrealistic and almost suicidal policy resorting to violence:

In the great tradition in which Chief Luthuli was a participant is where we must take the struggle another stage forward. This is not to leap off the precipice of reality, and pretend to each other that we could win the struggle only with the crook of our finger around the trigger of a gun. Many misguided patriots will die on the gallows, or in jail, because they think they can put our meager resources against the might of the South African army and the cunning of the Security Police. We dare not go hunting for lions and elephants in dark forests bare-handed. We dare not leap off the precipice of reality. For the sake of everything we hold dear, we must be realists and pursue achievable goals. Chief Albert Luthuli had that realism in his politics...By no stretch of anyone’s imagination can we conclude that Chief Luthuli’s wish was that we cease to seek peaceful solutions after his death. Nowhere do I find his life as the terminating point in his thinking for peaceful solutions. He was prepared to suffer all things and would have chosen death itself rather than abandon his commitments.⁵²

The “I would hesitate to be a party to violence” quotation that Sitole and I took issue of further illuminates our analysis of Luthuli’s position on violence. The quotation, in response to two questions posed to him by the court in the Treason Trial, ought to be read in its full context.

Court: *...As far as you personally are concerned, would you be party to violent struggle to achieve your aims?*

Luthuli: *In the circumstances that obtain in the country(sic) – I must say this first – I may have indicated that there may be differences of point of view among different members, but as far as the [C]ongress is concerned, in the circumstances that obtain definitely we are for non-violence (sic). When it comes to a personal level, as to whether at any time one would, I would say that if conditions are as they are, I would never be a party to the use of violence because I think it would be almost national suicide, in the circumstances as they are.*

Court: *And quite apart from that point of view, what would you say with regard to your own beliefs?*

Luthuli: *My own beliefs as I have already said are to a certain extent motivated by Christian leanings. Because of my Christian leanings I would hesitate to be a party to violence, my lords. But, of course, I must say in that*

⁵² *ibid.* pp. 12 and 14.

connection that I am not suggesting that the Christian religion says this and that I am not a theologian, but my own leanings would be in that direction (sic)...

Court: *...Have you at any level of the [ANC] heard a suggestion that the policy [of non-violence] should be changed?*

Luthuli: *My lords, I've never heard any such suggestion, nor a whisper to that effect.⁵³*

Court: *As far as you personally are concerned, what would be your attitude if such a suggestion were made?*

Luthuli: *I would oppose it.*

Court: *Why?*

Luthuli: *Well, I would oppose it on two grounds really: firstly, from a personal angle, but also because it's not – or it would not be – in the interest of the liberation movement, it would not be a practical thing...*

Court: *...Why is it that from time to time, if that is the accepted policy, one finds at meetings reference to your non-violent policy; why should it be necessary to do that?*

Luthuli: *Well, it is very necessary that we should do so, firstly because in so far as we are concerned we are embarking on something which people may not be fully acquainted with, so that our task is to educate our own members and the African people. Then, of course, the other reason is that we so believe in it that we feel that we should take no chance of anybody not knowing and being tempted to deviate...⁵⁴*

It seems clear from the “hesitate to be a party to violence” quotation and its context that during the late 1950s to early 1961 (Treason Trial), Luthuli states that he was fundamentally against any change in ANC strategy from non-violent mass action to violence as a means by which to achieve liberation. However, should this testimony be taken at face value? What was Luthuli’s view of the

⁵³ Luthuli may be contradicting himself here as earlier he stated, “...there may be differences of point of view [regarding violent struggle] among different members...” (see above).

⁵⁴ Excerpts for Chief Albert Luthuli’s evidence at the Treason Trial (August, 1958 - March, 1961) dealing with his understanding of a non-violent liberation struggle. Pillay, Gerald J. *Voices of Liberation*, p. 152. Indeed, that which Luthuli feared in his Treason Trial testimony would happen (leaders were tempted to deviate) did in fact happen shortly thereafter (see p. 17).

judiciary? Was it an authoritative body to which his morals would require truthfulness? Or, would deception be justified so as to not jeopardize the accused and the ANC movement as a whole? After all, the penalty for treason was death.

In the book *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime*, Elinor Sisulu reports that “at a meeting to review the launch of MK, Chief Albert Luthuli was clearly embarrassed about the timing [of the launch] and unhappy about the apparent recklessness that led to the casualties.”⁵⁵ This information does not necessarily point to Luthuli’s non-support of MK. However, Luthuli’s alleged embarrassment does call into question Nair’s claim of Luthuli’s foreknowledge of a resort to an armed struggle and/or its launch date.

Given Mandela’s mid-1961 date of Luthuli’s knowledge and support of MK (even if separate from the ANC), Luthuli’s public pronouncements thereafter call into question his support or acquiescence of a resort to violence. In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, Luthuli confirms the rationale upon which I propose the issue of Luthuli’s stance on violence as a means by which to achieve liberation be explored.

*Through all this cruel treatment in the name of law and order, our people, with a few exceptions, have remained non-violent...But nothing which we have suffered at the hands of the government has turned us from our chosen path of disciplined resistance. It is for this, I believe this award is given.*⁵⁶

Assuming that this was written during or shortly after the decision to launch MK, and given that Luthuli was the leader of the ANC at the time, it does indicate that ambiguities exist that must be explored. Furthermore, in the epilogue of his 1962 autobiography, *Let My People Go*, Luthuli states:

We do not struggle with guns and violence, and the Supremacist’s array of weapons is powerless against the spirit. The struggle goes on as much in gaol

⁵⁵ Sisulu, Elinor. *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime*, (David Philip Publishers, Claremont, South Africa, 2002), p. 147. Ben Ramotse was critically wounded and Petrus Molefe was killed when a bomb they intended to detonate did so prematurely.

⁵⁶ Asmal, Kader. *South Africa’s Nobel Laureates*, pp. 28-29.

*as out of it, and every time cruel men injure or kill defenseless ones they lose ground.*⁵⁷

Buthelezi comments at length about Luthuli's autobiography in his speech at Groutville in 1982:

We can be sure that after Chief Luthuli was banned and he was working through his memories to write his autobiography, his statements about the role of the African National Congress would have been carefully considered and recorded with wisdom of all his experience. In his book "Let My People Go," he writes:

"The business of Congress is not deliberation and legislation. Its business is to right the total exclusion of the African from the management of South Africa, to give direction to the forces of liberation, to harness peaceful, growing resistance to continued oppression, and by various non-violent means, to demand the redress of injustice (p. 90)."

*There are those who would have us believe that by this time, the ANC was already working on a strategy of violence behind closed doors. I think it is fitting, as we remember Chief Luthuli to note that his life was spent in opposition to violence. He as much as anyone else resisted the militancy of those who broke away to eventually form the PAC. There is in his whole career no hint of a switch to violence, and in his own life no indication that he espoused violent means towards political ends.*⁵⁸

It seems as likely that Mandela, in his autobiography from which others seem to have taken their cue, may be misleading.⁵⁹ Three interesting statements arise from the book, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains*. The first is a quotation from Luthuli during the height of the all night discussions at which Mandela claims that Luthuli ultimately gave his support to the formation of MK. Callinicos explains (as does Mandela) that Luthuli resisted the change of strategy and wavered more than once. However, she departs from Mandela's version and states quite clearly:

⁵⁷ Luthuli, Albert. *Let My People Go: An Autobiography*, (Collins Fount Paperbacks, Glasgow, 1962), p. 204.

⁵⁸ Buthelezi, Mangosuthu C. "Inkatha Yenkululeko Yesizwe Kgare Ya Tokoloho Ya Setjaba National Cultural Liberation Movement," pp. 17-18.

⁵⁹ Virtually all recordings of these events stem from Mandela. The biography of Tambo and Sisulu are the most significant works that are dependent on Mandela. Obviously, others depend on Mandela's memory (Asmal and Sithole/Mkhize, for example).

*...but he could not in all honesty accept the change [to a violent option]. Subsequently, however, Luthuli understood why people embarked on an armed struggle. "When my son decides to sleep with a girl," [Luthuli] explained to Moses Kotane, he does not ask for my permission, but just does it. It is only afterwards, when the girl is pregnant and the parents make a case, that he brings his troubles home." Though he himself would not countenance armed struggle, he could not condemn anyone who could no longer tolerate the conditions at home.*⁶⁰

Callinicos concludes that Luthuli disagreed with a change of policy that would utilize violence (among others, especially from Indians who ascribed to Gandhi's ethics of *Ahima* and *Satyagraha*) but agreed to the compromise which established MK autonomous from the ANC. From this version, it seems clear that Luthuli never did agree to armed violence but was forced into a 'compromise' which Joe Slovo termed as a "necessary fiction."⁶¹ The second statement is a private confession to Colin Legum, a South African-born journalist and a friend while on his trip to North Africa (the trip subsequent to his and Luthuli's "disconcerting" meeting in Groutville). Mandela confided to Legum, "I dread going back and telling Chief [Luthuli] I'm now committed to the armed struggle."⁶² How could Mandela dread this confession to Luthuli when in his autobiography Luthuli attended two-all night sessions in which Mandela advocated for the violent struggle and at which Luthuli at least acquiesced to the formation of MK? Second, it seems that during Nelson Mandela's three weeks home (following his External Mission and his arrival in South Africa in August, 1962), Tambo wrote to his wife Adelaide about his receiving a message from the National Executive Committee indicating that there was a "hot problem from the South." The "hot problem" was probably to do with Chief Albert Luthuli's unhappiness with armed

⁶⁰ Callinicos, Luli. *Oliver Tambo*, p. 280 (footnote 17, *Reinventing the ANC*). Callinicos sites Brian Bunting. *Moses Kotane*, p. 269 and Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow*, (Mayibuye Books, 1999), p. 18.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 280, (footnote 18). Joe Slovo. *Dawn*, cited in Barrel, Howard. *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, (Penguin Forum Series, 1990), p. 5.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 287, (footnote 41).

struggle.⁶³ It is likely that during these three weeks until he was arrested that Luthuli and Mandela may have disagreed further over the option to pursue violence as a means by which to achieve liberation, hence the report back at this time that there was a “hot problem in the South.”

Conclusion

Four understandings exist. None being mutually exclusive:

1. Luthuli’s authority as an international leader was dependent upon his moral prestige that was based upon his uncompromising stand on the use of non-violence. Luthuli’s political authority was dependent on the democratic will of the members of the ANC. The context of the struggle could no longer support his arguments for non-violence and Luthuli’s position, or lack thereof, on violence following the decision therefore demonstrated, what the South African historian Shula Marks refers to as, an “ambiguity of dependence.”⁶⁴
2. Luthuli did acquiesce to a strategic change to violence. However, Luthuli personally objected to the use of violence and as President of the ANC could not countenance the ANC adopting the policy but agreed that a separate organization could be formed (MK). His decision was not of his own free-will but rather a result of the ANC’s ‘consensus decision making’ and/or he was ‘out-voted’ and acquiesced to the majority.
3. Luthuli (silently?) retained his support for a non-violent policy following the initiation of violent hostilities.

An adequate summarization of the above can be found in Pillay’s book *Voices of Liberation*.

⁶³ Callinicos, Luli. *Oliver Tambo*, pp. 288 and 644 (footnote 47, *Reinventing the ANC*).

⁶⁴ Marks, Shula. *The Ambiguities of Dependence: Class, Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth Century Natal*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1986), pp. 1-171.

There appears to be two approaches in ANC history. The dominant and the older tradition of non-violence was part of its initial political philosophy in 1912, reached its best manifestation in the life and approach of Luthuli, and continued after his death. The other approach of armed struggle was a development after 1960 and was continued by the military wing during the exile of the ANC. Luthuli was among those who maintained the non-violent approach even when the armed struggle began.⁶⁵

The “No one can blame” quotation, mentioned earlier, is generally cited as evidence of Luthuli’s support for violence (Sithole). However, a more complete quotation, in context, calls this assumption into doubt and raises the prospect of deliberate ambiguity.

The [ANC] never abandoned its method of a militant, non-violent struggle, and of creating in the process of militancy in the people. However, in the face of the uncompromising white refusal to abandon a policy which denies the African and other oppressed South Africans their rightful heritage – freedom – no one can blame brave just men for seeking justice by the use of violent methods; nor could they be blamed if they tried to create an organized force in order ultimately to establish peace and racial harmony.

Luthuli’s above statement is a negation of the negative (blame) and not an affirmation in the affirmative (support). The difference is fundamental to Luthuli’s position on violence at this late date (1964). Was Luthuli providing support for violent methods, but not stating so explicitly? Or was Luthuli, by juxtaposing the ANC’s unqualified belief in non-violence with “brave men” (note, *not* the ANC, of which he was the President-General), thus making a distinction, and therefore not condoning their motives, but not stating so explicitly. The word “nor” within the quoted statement seems to suggest, not a conjunction between “seeking justice by the use of violent methods” and “create an organized force...to establish peace...,” but rather a contrast. Luthuli seems to state that within the ANC there are differing tactics and methods of preference, some violent and some non-violent militant, and that though the ANC had never changed its policy of non-violent militancy, some have opted for violence, and

⁶⁵ Pillay, Gerald J. Voices of Liberation, p. 30.

that neither position can be condemned. The quotation reeks of ambiguity. No doubt, it was painstakingly crafted. I assert that the quotation and its context can serve only as evidence of Luthuli's (and the ANC's) preference for and policy of militant non-violence. Therefore, the "No one can blame" quotation is only a statement of support, sympathy, and solidarity with the individual men (comrades) convicted and not an affirmation of their methods.⁶⁶ This assertion is supported by Joe Matthews in his testimony in the film documentary "The Legacy of a Legend."

The generation of Inkosi Luthuli, of Professor Z.K. Matthews and others, they said, "Well, you young people, you seem to be determined to do this, we can't condemn what you are saying because you have got powerful facts to support your argument. But, we, as a leadership, do not agree that "we have reached the end of the road," as you are saying. But, if you create instruments and organizations which are prepared to embark on an armed struggle, we will not condemn you."⁶⁷

Future examination of this issue will be founded upon the methodology Marks' text, *Ambiguities of Dependence* and Sithole's and Mkhize's article "Truth or Lies." The discrepancies discovered in my article can perhaps be explained by examining the development of South African "nationalism" as derived from historical memory. Sithole and Mkhize write in their article an excellent analysis of how differing parties, and therefore individuals, may interpret the life and thought of Luthuli in such a manner as to benefit their given agendas at various times in their political evolutions. As a new country emerges, the memory of a 'founding father' emerges, yet the image of its hero rarely represents truth or deception. The perspectives in this essay may be construed as

⁶⁶ Nowhere else in the Rivonia Trial statement does Luthuli suggest that he supports violence as a means to achieve liberation. However, Luthuli does state, "They represent the highest in morality and ethics in the South African political struggle." I understand this remark to infer that Luthuli does not hold those sentenced morally or ethically culpable or deficient to others who may prefer, say, militant non-violence. Rather, the statement suggests that strategic differences of opinion do not equate to moral or ethical differences of opinion. Hence, support for the men, but no stated support of their means.

⁶⁷ "The Legacy of a Legend: Chief Albert J.M. Luthuli," 2005.

“contradictions.” However, I concur with Marks when she affirms that “ambiguity,” rather than “contradiction,” is a more exact term to describe respective leadership tactics. The word “contradiction” contains within it connotations of incompatibility and even deceit, whereas “ambiguity” connotes a sense of “what is stated and done” is not necessarily “what is” and that the actors are in fact wise in their tactics for they achieve their objectives without ‘showing their hand.’ A “tightrope” is an appropriate metaphor. It is not a contradiction for a tightrope walker to lean right and then lean left. The seeming contradictions are actually short-term corrective measures to remain in the middle, and thus alive. For Luthuli, it was not his political career which he held valuable, but rather the survival of the liberation movement as it regards internal cohesion and well as external support. Thus, Luthuli remained ambiguous, neither supporting nor condemning, despite his personal faith, views, and ethics. Clearly, the decision to resort to violence led his followers to turn away from Luthuli as the leader of the ANC despite his retention of the titular position as General-President. Luthuli’s people had let him go.