

Liberal Opposition to Forced Removals and Non-racialism in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper discusses the “black spot” work of the Natal branch of the Liberal Party as an early attempt to organise rural opposition to forced removals in South Africa. The Liberal Party was founded in 1953 as a new, multi-racial opposition to the National Party that devised the grand apartheid policy. Although the Party leadership was largely dominated by whites, it had a racially-mixed membership from the beginning and spearheaded the organising of African landowners against the apartheid policy of forced removals. This pioneering work was largely done by African liberals who had a stake in land ownership. Black spot work increased African members of the Party in Natal, which in turn had a role in transforming the Party into an organisation advocating for the realisation of non-racialism in the country.

Introduction

The 1950s was one of the key periods in the development of South African opposition politics. The radicalisation of opposition movements during the period was illustrated by the mass defiance campaign organised by the African National Congress (ANC), the chief protagonist in the history of liberation struggles in the country. A new generation of young activists, who had formed the ANC Youth League, took over the leadership of the organisation and succeeded in involving by far large number of ordinary people in the opposition politics (Welshe 1970: Chap. 13). The radicalisation of opposition against the government was not limited to black politics. A new group of white liberals, disappointed with the United Party and with the traditional methods of representing the non-white population, formed the Liberal Party in 1953.

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The Liberal Party differed from the earlier tradition of liberal opposition politics in South Africa in two important aspects. From the beginning it accepted racially-mixed membership, and later it came to argue for the universal franchise. It is true that its leadership was largely dominated by white liberals, but certain black members of the Party played critical roles in advancing the Party's activities. As I will show in this paper, this was particularly the case with the black spot¹ work of the Party in Natal. The universal franchise was a highly contested issue within the Party. When the Party eventually adopted it as its official policy, it lost several prominent white liberals in the Cape who had been known as leading liberal figures in previous decades. However, I would argue that it was the embracement of universal franchise that made the Liberal Party unique in a history of liberal opposition politics in South Africa. I will also show that the black spot work in Natal had a role in bringing this important change to the policy of the Party.

Although it was a nationwide political party, each provincial branch had distinctive characters. The Natal branch acquired the most racially-mixed character with several prominent African liberals as well as a considerable black membership, and it was distinctive in its campaign to address the government policy of forced removals of black spots in the province. This article looks into the black spot work of the Natal branch of the Liberal Party as an early attempt to organise rural opposition to forced removals in South Africa. How did white liberals based in the city come to be involved in tackling the problem? What role did the Party's African leaders play, and what were the responses from African landowners? To what extent the Party's organising efforts among black spot residents were successful and what were their limitations? In what way the black spot work contributed to transforming liberal opposition politics in Natal? This is a historical narrative of interactions between white liberals and African landowners in northern Natal and their joint efforts to realise non-racialism in

1. The black spot refers to the land owned by Africans in the area officially declared as white only in apartheid South Africa. The term was created by the apartheid government that saw African-owned farms in white farming districts in a map as "black spots" on white paper. Thus the term has a racist and derogatory connotation and can be replaced with a more neutral term like "African-owned land". However, as the term "black spot" also has a historical meaning not only in the documents of the apartheid government but also in the documents of support organisations for residents of "black spots", I will use this term describing African-owned land in this paper which discusses historical events.

apartheid South Africa.

The Liberal Party and African landowners in Natal

The Liberal Party was formed in 1953 by mainly white liberals who were greatly disappointed with the United Party's inability to mount a meaningful opposition to the National Party that came into power in 1948. Although the formation of the Liberal Party was a direct response to the tremendous victory of the National Party in its first defending election earlier of that same year, the gatherings of liberal-minded people had already taken place in different parts of the country. The leadership of three regional groups - Transvaal, Natal, and Cape - which had been formed separately in their respective provinces and decided to form the national body, had a distinctive character from the beginning. The difference largely remained throughout its brief existence of 15 years (Everatt 1990: chaps. 6 and 7).

In Natal, two liberal groups were formed separately in two biggest cities of the province, Pietermaritzburg and Durban. A leading figure in Pietermaritzburg was Peter Brown who hosted informal house meetings with liberal minded people. He was still in his late twenties working at the YMCA in a black settlement of Edendale outside the city. When the Party was formed, he became an unpaid full-time secretary for the Natal branch. His family owned a wholesale importing business in Durban and several farms in the Natal midlands. This privileged background enabled him to devote himself to the Party without worrying about earning a monthly income to feed his family.² Although relatively young and politically inexperienced at that stage, Brown was destined to perform the central role in the Liberal Party not only in Natal, but also at national level as a national secretary until he was banned in 1964. Alan Paton, an internationally famous writer based in Durban, attended the meetings organised by Brown and played a bridging role between two liberal groups (Alexander 1995: 286-287). Two groups together formed a region of the South African Liberal Association (SALA) in early 1953, a predecessor of the Liberal Party.³

Brown's liberal group in Pietermaritzburg had a multi-racial character from the

2. Alan Paton Centre (APC), KwaZulu-Natal Oral History Project (KZN-OHP), Interview transcript: Peter Brown, Tape 1: 14 and 21 August 1995.

3. PC2/9/11/1. Minutes, Natal regional association of the S.A.L.A., 25 March 1953.

beginning. He had acquired African and Indian contacts through working at the YMCA in Edendale and these contacts eventually joined the SALA. One of the most important African contacts he established there was Selby Msimang, a founding member of the ANC. Msimang remained close to the ANC, but did not like the communist influence on its new leadership. He was elected as a vice-chairman of the Natal region of SALA at its inaugural meeting and later served on the national committee of the Liberal Party (Vigne 1997: 15). Through Msimang, Paton and Brown were introduced to Chief Albert Lutuli, provincial president of the ANC, who alerted them to the proposed removal of African landowners from Charlestown in northern Natal. Upon returning from the meeting with Lutuli, the provincial leadership of the Party decided to investigate the position at Charlestown.⁴ Thus it was through the ANC that the Liberal Party got involved in the political campaign against forced removals.

Several African members of the Party had a personal interest in supporting African landowners in northern Natal. Msimang's family was one of those who bought land in freehold in the nineteenth century and had a background of *amakholwa* (Christian converts) as members of the Methodist Church (Etherington 1997). Although Msimang himself was born in Edendale, itself African freehold land (Meijnties 1988), he inherited a piece of land from his family in northern Natal.⁵ In addition, Msimang had been involved in Charlestown in previous years as a member of the Natives Representative Council that was abolished by the apartheid government.⁶ Jordan Ngubane, who was appointed by the Party to investigate the situation in Charlestown, also had a family connection in the Klipriver district, having been born in, and owned land near Ladysmith. Like Msimang, Ngubane was a prominent member of the ANC who had fallen out with Lutuli over the communists' influence on the organisation and had joined the Liberal Party.⁷

4. PC2/9/8/3, Minutes, Natal provincial committee, 15 October 1953.

5. Killie Campbell Africana Library, Oral History Project, Interview transcript: Selby Msimang, 3 May 1979, pp. 2-3.

6. On behalf of the African landowners of Charlestown and its adjoining areas, Msimang presented a petition to the provincial authority in 1948 complaining about unfair provision of services by the Charlestown Town Board in their area compared with their white counterparts. As a result of the petition, a commission was appointed to investigate the matter, but not much was improved (Paton 1959: 7-9).

7. Peter Brown, "A history of Liberal Party of SA, 1953-1966", unpublished manuscript, held at APC, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, p. 106. Brown wrote the manuscript when he was serving two consecutive banning orders from 1964 to 1974.

Ngubane's visit to Charlestown found a disappointing fact that the residents were rather divided on the matter. While small sections of the community clearly showed their determination to refuse their removals, on the whole they were the exception. He observed that while both Charlestown and its adjoining areas of Clavis and Clavis Extension were in the dangers of expropriation by the government, residents in the latter tended to regard the immediate targets to be residents of Charlestown and not themselves. This perception created an uneasy relationship between the residents of the two different areas and made it difficult to organise a united front against removals. In spite of "the absence of the will to resist" removals and division among the residents, however, Ngubane saw the possibility for the Party to assist the local population to set up new institutions through which they could defend their interests. At the same time, he urged the Party to consider helping to set up the African landowners association, arguing that the problem of dispossession was not limited to Charlestown.⁸ The provincial leadership of the Party endorsed Ngubane's proposal and decided to embark on organising African landowners in northern Natal.

In this new task, the Party hoped to work with the ANC in the province. There were at least two reasons for this. First, in spite of the overlapping membership of certain prominent black liberals such as Msimang and Ngubane in both organisations, the ANC and the Indian Congress had been hostile to the formation of the Liberal Party. They saw the Party as a rival organisation which sought to break the unity of the Congress movements. This was a totally unexpected reaction to white liberals and the provincial leadership of the Party was keen to improve its relationship with the ANC and the Indian Congress. Second, there were many members of the Party who also belonged to the ANC in rural black spots.⁹ After the Party completed its initial investigation into the threat of removals to black spots, Brown went to see Lutuli again and they tentatively agreed to cooperate on the matter.¹⁰

Securing provisional consent from Lutuli on cooperation, the provincial congress of the Liberal Party adopted a resolution in late 1956 to appoint an organiser for African landowners.¹¹ Present at this provincial congress was Elliot Mngadi who

8. PC2/9/7/1, Jordan Ngubane, Report on Charlestown, n.d. [July/August 1956].

9. Brown, "A history of LPSA", pp. 42-43.

10. PC2/9/7/1, Minutes, Natal provincial executive committee, 21 March 1956.

11. PC2/9/8/3, Resolutions, Natal provincial congress, 27 October 1956.

joined the Party two years before. Brown, who became a life-long friend of Mngadi, described him as “a bright-eyed, bristle-moustached, immaculately-dressed (in jodhpurs and leggings) young man.”¹² After the provincial congress, Mngadi proposed himself to be an organiser for the Party’s black spot work.

I am beginning to think that working in the Native Affairs Department [as a messenger of court] in making the machinery of oppressive laws towards non-white[s] succeed. I would, therefore, be too pleased to resign in favour of becoming an organiser of African landowners. I feel these Africans desperately need an organiser, before they are removed to the reserves, where they will fall under the Bantu Authorities Act, and that will be the end of their freehold title deeds.¹³

Mngadi too was a landowner of a black spot called Roosboom near Ladysmith. The implications removals would have to his family as well as neighbours were too clear to be ignored.

The formation of the Northern Natal African Landowners Association

As a full-time organiser for the Party’s black spot work, Mngadi began with visiting dozens of African-owned farms in the Klipriver district. He soon discovered different levels of organisation and political influences on these freehold farms. On the one hand, there were farms like Roosboom where local leaders had already organised themselves and persuaded the residents to oppose the removal. In most of such farms there was a strong ANC presence. In his report to the provincial leadership of the Party, Mngadi also noted that the ANC had resolved to resist removals at its regional meeting in Newcastle. On the other hand, on farms like Jonono’s Kop, he had to start by talking to different parties as there was no single representative body.¹⁴

Mngadi found his ANC counterpart in a small freehold farm called Siwangu in the Dannhauser district. Gabriel Nyembe served on the executive council of the ANC and became Lutuli’s deputy while the Chief was involved in the Treason Trial. Through Nyembe, Mngadi was introduced to local ANC leaders in African

12. Brown, “A history of LPSA”, p. 38.

13. PC2/9/14, Elliot Mngadi to Brown, 5 November 1956.

14. PC2/9/14, Mngadi to Brown, 1 April 1957; PC2/9/14/1, Mngadi, Monthly report, April 1957.

freehold areas around Dannhauser and Newcastle, far north of his home ground in the Klipriver.¹⁵ In mid-1957 Mngadi visited Nyembe together with two provincial leaders of the Liberal Party and discussed about convening a meeting to establish a central body for all black spots in northern Natal that would represent their resistance to removals.¹⁶ Just before the first meeting was convened, however, friction emerged between Nyembe and Mngadi over the nature of the new organisation. While Mngadi argued that the new organisation needed a constitution as an independent body, Nyembe told him that he had been instructed by the ANC that this new organisation of landowners should not have a constitution. Apparently the ANC was uneasy about setting up a new organisation other than itself in the area. Although Mngadi won the argument this time by reminding Nyembe that the new body was not a political organisation,¹⁷ the issue remained contentious between the Liberal Party and the ANC.

The first meeting of landowners was held in late 1957 in Fairleigh near Newcastle. Twenty-six people from 12 farms in northern Natal attended. The meeting agreed to set up a working committee, which met the following month and elected three office bearers - Chairman J. Sithole, Secretary Mngadi and Treasurer Nyembe. The working committee agreed on a five pounds one-off registration fee for each farm and on different annual subscription fees for landowners (one shilling) and tenants (six pence).¹⁸ Membership of the new organisation was divided into three categories - corporate bodies such as trusts, individual landowners, and tenants. Each farm was entitled to send five delegates - one representing the corporate body, three representing landowners, and one representing tenants, to the meetings. In contrast to the detailed arrangements on the membership fee and representation of each farm, the programme of action identified by the working committee was rather vague. Mngadi as a secretary was tasked to visit and issue a circular letter to all African-owned farms about the new organisation which they were to set up. The committee also decided to contact the press to inform them of their organisation and investigate the possibility of getting a legal advisor.¹⁹

15. PC2/9/14/1, Mngadi, Monthly report, May 1957.

16. PC2/9/14/1, Mngadi, Monthly report, July 1957.

17. PC2/9/14/1, Mngadi, Monthly report, October 1957.

18. Later a one-off affiliation fee of 10 shillings per farm was added.

19. PC2/9/14/1, Mngadi, Monthly report, October 1957; November 1957.

In less than one year after the Fairleigh meeting, the new organisation for the residents of African-owned farms in northern Natal was set up. It was named the Northern Natal African Landowners Association (NNALA). By the time the NNALA ratified its Constitution at its general meeting in mid-1958, Mngadi claimed that about 40 African-owned farms in northern Natal had joined it. However the number of delegates who attended this general meeting was rather small: 25 delegates representing 12 farms in total.²⁰ Although the NNALA was not exclusively a landowners' organisation as its name suggested, it was clear from the differentiated status of their membership and limited representation that tenants were not given equal gravity and status in the organisation. Tenants' representation in the NNALA was much less than the 20% officially allocated quota at its meetings, given that by the 1950s tenants considerably outnumbered landowners in many of the African-owned farms. The NNALA was essentially a conservative organisation for landowners who were desperate to keep their assets and investments in properties.

The provincial leadership of the Liberal Party wanted the NNALA to be an independent body so that Mngadi could be relieved from working as an organiser for landowners in northern Natal. Impressed with Mngadi's success in forming the NNALA, the Party wanted to take on him as its provincial organiser who would engage in various tasks for the expansion of the Party. The Party intended to be a midwife for the landowners' organisation resisting removals, but it did not want to be a parental organisation dictating what they should do for the latter. On the other hand, the provincial leadership of the Party was concerned about how the ANC would react if it learnt that Mngadi, who had been helped by ANC members and had acquired valuable contacts in northern Natal through engaging in black spot work, was now exclusively working for the Liberal Party.²¹ Furthermore the ANC was suspicious about the nature of the NNALA as an organisation and it did not want it to become a politically independent organisation. As Lutuli wrote to Brown in late 1958:

We have no objection to any African Community forming Socio-economic Associations. But politically we would like to see African Communities aligning themselves with [a] National or major political body or bodies of

20. PC2/9/14/1, Mngadi, Monthly report, June 1958; Mngadi to Brown, 23 June 1958.

21. Brown, "A history of LPSA", p. 121.

their choice. We would not like them to form parochial and isolated political groups. This would weaken united African political progress. ... We feel that in the unsettled state of these areas brought about by the threat of removals their major need is united action under the advice or direction of a faithful political body.²²

Brown reassured Lutuli that there was no real danger that the NNALA would become such a parochial political body, given that Mngadi and Nyembe served on its committee.²³

In spite of Lutuli's concern over the threat of removals and his eagerness to provide a guidance to landowners' organisation resisting removals, the ANC failed to provide such support. This was in spite of the strong ANC presence in many black spots where Mngadi visited as well as in major cities such as Ladysmith and Newcastle in northern Natal. A white member of the Liberal Party noted his astonishment in 1959 that about 3,000 to 4,000 people packed the meeting organised by the local ANC and the Natal Indian Congress in Ladysmith where Lutuli was a main guest speaker.²⁴ It was the Liberal Party that continued to raise publicity and organise campaigns against the removal of black spots. While Mngadi was taken on by the Liberal Party as its provincial organiser, he remained as a secretary of the NNALA attending its meetings and supervising its activities.

The growing number of African members and its impact on the Party policy

Black spot work boosted African membership of the Party in Natal. The province had the smallest number of members when the Party was formed in 1953. By the end of 1956 it had the largest. In spite of the fact that the provincial leadership repeatedly encountered the problem of non-renewal of annual subscriptions by a considerable number of its members, new members continued to join the Party. Its membership grew continuously until 1961 when it reached a peak of 1,500 and the number of local branches reached 40.²⁵ The majority of them were Africans in black spots. By the end of the 1950s quite a few branches were established in

22. PC2/9/14/1, Lutuli to Brown, 22 September 1958.

23. PC2/9/14/1, Brown to Lutuli, 26 September 1958.

24. PC2/9/15/2, Roy Coventry to Secretary, Liberal Party, 17 April 1959.

25. PC2/9/7/2, Minutes, Natal provincial congress, 23&24 March 1962; Brown, "A history of LPSA", pp. 78, 94, 123, 274. The annual subscription fee was two shillings and six pence.

black spots in north-western Natal including Charlestown, Khumalosville and Hambrook.²⁶ When a new branch was formed at Polela near Bulwer, the Party's influence on residents of black spots extended to the southern Natal midlands. The chairman of the Polela branch was Neil Alcock, a local farmer and former chairman of the United Party branch in the area. Born on a farm, Alcock was completely fluent in Zulu. He actively recruited African farm labourers and residents of black spots in southern Natal.²⁷

An increasing number of African members, and the establishment of local branches whose membership consisted almost entirely of Africans, brought a new challenge to the Party's provincial leadership. They felt that a majority of African rank and file members at many rural branches of the Party were passive and politically inactive. Moreover, in spite of having high political awareness, a few white members of these branches were wary about their isolation. An active member in northern Natal expressed the frustration and loneliness of white liberals in the countryside:

A white Liberal in an isolated area usually is looked upon as a sort of 'charity man'. Recently I was phoned by two different members, one to come and bail him out of gaol should he be 'locked up' and the other to come and get his cattle which had been driven off by the Police for some reason. I am afraid I am not in the position to go and extract people from their plights.²⁸

In order to bridge the gap between the expectations of white liberals and that of black members, the Party devised a political education and training scheme called the Organisation School. Leading African members of local branches were asked to attend weekend school to get the basic training in political organisation. Part of the training related to social manners in associating with white people such as "how to behave at a meal if you were going to eat in a white house."²⁹ The need for active African members with organising skills became more pressing

26. The paid-up membership of branches in black spots in northern Natal in 1962 was as follows: Charlestown (153), Rookdale (24), Greenpoint (17), Hambrook (68), Bethany (5), Khumalosville (51), and Ekuphumuleni (10). PC2/9/23/1, Provincial office of Liberal Party to Mngadi, 23 July 1962.

27. PC2/2/7/3, National chairman's report for July and August, 1959.

28. PC2/9/15/2, Coventry to Brown, 24 September 1959.

29. APC, KZN-OHP, Interview transcript: Peter Brown, Tape 3: 31 August 1995; *Umdlanganisi*, Sep-Oct, 1959.

when the Party lost some white members to the Progressive Party which was formed in 1959 and some other white members decided to go overseas.³⁰ However, the frustration of the provincial leadership did not entirely disappear. In his memoir of the Liberal Party, Brown recollected that “in country areas, the liveliness of a branch often depend[ed] on the enthusiasm and drive of a single person. Take that person away and the branch [went] into a decline.”³¹

Why were African members of the Party not as active as the provincial leadership of the Party hoped they would be? And why then did African members join the Party in the first place? At the beginning, the Party was rather unpopular among Africans. In 1956 Ngubane wrote in his confidential memorandum to the national executive committee of the Party that the “non-European regard[ed] the word Liberal as virtually synonymous with traitor or spy.”³² While the principle of non-racialism was perfectly sound, he argued that the Party’s qualified franchise policy and its adherence to constitutional methods to defeat apartheid were undermining the potential expansion of liberalism among Africans.

The atmosphere inside the Party is that of well-intentioned, sincere and decent people unconsciously awed by the fearful complexity of race problems. We act as though the evils we oppose are amenable to reason of the type we respect. The African sees the race problem from [a] wholly different perspective. To him his struggle against apartheid is a fight for survival. He argues that for nearly three hundred years he has been in the forefront of the fight; he has shed blood in that fight and continues to suffer because he is determined to be free. When we tell the world how we are going to build a common society by sticking strictly to constitutional methods ... he smiles at us - with shall I say, benign tolerance?³³

Nonetheless Ngubane argued that the Party and the liberalism it advocated had the potential for winning the hearts of more Africans by strengthening its relationship with “the liberal democrats” within the ANC, embarking on extra-parliamentary activities and revising its franchise policy.³⁴

30. *Umdlanguzisi*, Nov-Dec, 1959; Brown, “A history of LPSA”, p. 258.

31. Brown, “A history of LPSA”, p. 340.

32. PC2/2/9/1, Jordan Ngubane, Confidential memorandum on the African and the Liberal Party, n.d.[1956].

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

The black spot work met two criteria suggested by Ngubane for gaining African support for the Party. It was a joint project with the ANC and required the Party leadership to visit and interact with residents of black spots. To the disappointment of the Party leadership, most of the African members were not as politically conscious as they had hoped. Moreover some saw white leaders as people who could help them with their personal predicaments or who could provide them with legal assistance. Still there were others who understood the Party's message in black spot work and were determined to fight against removals together with the Party.

After 1960 external factors also contributed to the increasing African membership of the Party. Although the 1960 State of Emergency, which followed the Sharpsville massacre, saw the detention of several provincial leaders including Brown and Mngadi as well as leading local African members in several black spots, it did not cause serious damage to the Party. Rather it enhanced the image of the Party among residents of black spots, as white liberals were seen to have been paying for their cause. The banning of the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in the same year brought another advantage to the Party. The old members like Msimang, who had been involved in both the Liberal Party and the ANC at leadership level, could now officially only be active in the Liberal Party. The Party also gained new members who had been actively involved in the ANC. Certainly political freedom in South Africa was rapidly diminishing and the Party was beginning to face the problem of finding venues for its meetings in various places, as "nobody wanted to take [the] risk of having a meeting with racially-mixed attendance."³⁵ But during the short period of time between the banning of the mainstream black organisations and increasing police harassment of more moderate political organisations, the Liberal Party provided an alternative political platform for local African activists as well as ordinary people.

Expansion of the Party during this period was reflected by an increased number of black organisers paid by the Party³⁶ and attempts to set up four sub-regional structures - the Southern, Northern, Midlands and Coastal regions in the

35. PC2/9/16/2, Mngadi, Report on northern Natal region, April 1961.

36. In addition to Mngadi, the Party employed Christopher Shabalala, former security guard at a factory, and Jack Nkosi, formerly of the Polela Health Centre. The latter was employed only for a short period due to lack of fund.

province. In 1961 each region elected its chairman and began producing its newsletters. The increased responsibility of regional structures was also an attempt to involve rank and file members of the Party more directly in its activities. However, the strength of each region and frequency of its newsletter seemed to be determined by the availability of committed white members. The northern region where Mngadi was based managed to produce its newsletter *Ivulandlela* (path-finder) at least four times. In the southern region, Alcock was a driving force in running the regional structure and publishing its newsletter *Sibanye* (we are one). The contents of regional newsletters varied. While *Ivulandlela* contained more news on local events and Party meetings,³⁷ *Sibanye* carried editorial articles on important political developments in the country.³⁸ The regional system did not survive long and the publication of regional newsletters soon dwindled.

Increasing African membership had a role in shaping fundamental changes in the franchise policy of the Party. Originally the Party advocated a qualified franchise. By the end of the 1950s, this policy stance came to be repeatedly challenged within the Party. At the 1958 Natal provincial congress, a resolution was proposed to change its policy to support of universal suffrage. After considerable discussion, the provincial congress decided to send the resolution to the national committee for its inclusion in the agenda for the national congress.³⁹ However, at the request of the national committee and for the sake of keeping some of the conservative members in Cape Town, the Natal provincial leadership agreed to postpone the resolution for at least another year. Soon afterwards a similar resolution was sent by the Alice branch in the Eastern Cape to the national committee. In order to avoid the Party breaking up, the 1959 national congress resolved to postpone the matter.⁴⁰ Nevertheless it was a matter of time for the Party officially to adopt the policy of universal suffrage. The 1960 Natal provincial congress again passed a resolution proposing to adopt the universal franchise policy.⁴¹

Some of those who advocated a universal franchise within the Party were strongly aware of new political developments in the rest of the African continent, i.e.

37. *Ivulandlela*, Vol.1, No.1, May 1961.

38. *Sibanye*, No.4, Feb-Mar 1961; No.5, Apr 1961.

39. PC2/9/7/1, Minutes, Natal provincial congress, 17&18 October 1958, p. 6.

40. Brown, "A history of LPSA", p. 130.

41. PC2/9/7/2, Minutes, Natal provincial congress, 18&19 March 1960.

decolonisation and independence. For instance Ngubane attended the Accra Conference on the eve of independence of Ghana. Upon returning from West Africa, he enthusiastically talked about political developments in the rest of Africa at the Party's public meetings.⁴² For others the interaction with black members through the Party's activities became an eye-opening experience. As Brown explained to the Cape vice-chairman:

I started off as a strong advocate of a franchise on a high basis of qualification. The last few years have persuaded me that it is impossible to lay down a franchise qualification that will guarantee a responsible electorate. White South Africa enjoys compulsory, free education up to a high standard, its income level is high, its members own property on a substantial scale, yet politically it is quite irresponsible. I have canvassed many voters who knew virtually nothing about what was happening in South Africa and who voted almost entirely by habit. On the other hand, I have attended LP meetings where nobody could speak a word of English but where the degree of responsibility shown in discussion has been remarkable.⁴³

Eventually the Party undertook a comprehensive revision of its policies in 1961 and published its new policy handbook entitled *Non-racial democracy: the policies of the Liberal Party of South Africa* in the following year. For the first time the Party publicly declared its rejection of a qualified franchise and its support for universal suffrage as its official policy (LPSA n.d.[1962]a: 3). It also published a summarised version of the handbook entitled *Blueprint for the future*, which conveyed the message of universal suffrage in a simple slogan of "one man, one vote" (LPSA n.d. [1962]b: 1).

Removals, the mass prayer meeting and banning orders

Ever since the National Party came into power in 1948, the prospect of removal was always hanging over the heads of black people who were living in the "wrong area". Large-scale multi-racial communities in big cities became the first target of the apartheid government when it implemented its policy of forced removal. The underlying cause of popular riots led by women in Cato Manor near Durban in

42. *Umhlanganisi*, June 1959; Jul-Aug, 1959.

43. Brown to Jack Causton, vice-chairman, Cape division, 8 June 1959 (inserted in Brown, "A history of LPSA").

1959 was their forthcoming removal to the new township of KwaMashu (Yawitch 1977; Walker 1991: 230-234). In the following year the government removed residents from Sophiatown near Johannesburg, destroying a vibrant multi-racial urban community. Destruction of large urban settlements where people of different race had lived side by side for decades symbolized the National Party government's determination to implement its grand apartheid policy.

Security of tenure for African landowners in black spots who had freehold right to their land was also rapidly disappearing. In 1962 the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development announced in parliament that he was planning to eliminate all black spots as soon as possible.⁴⁴ Upon hearing this, the provincial congress of the Liberal Party in Natal decided that black spot work should become the central focus of the Party. It formed a sub-committee to conduct research and prepare articles for publicity on black spot removals.⁴⁵ The NNALA also resolved that it would resist removals in the courts in order to negotiate terms of their removals and force maximum concessions from the government.⁴⁶ When the Party first employed Mngadi for its black spot work in the late 1950s, it went on to organise African landowners. In contrast, the key component of the Party's second black spot campaign was publicity through media and mass demonstration. With the ANC already being banned, the Party had to carry on its black spot work on its own and relied on its extensive network of white clergy and philanthropists.

True to the words of the Minister, the government took active steps to remove black spots in northern Natal in the following year. The first mass-scale removal of black spot residents was carried out in Besterspruit near Vryheid. Some 4,000 Africans were moved from there to the municipal location and a resettlement village of Mondlo. It is not clear why Besterspruit was chosen as the first black spot to be cleared out in northern Natal, but it seems that its residents did not put up a good amount of resistance. For some reason Besterspruit refused to join the NNALA and as a result the Party was not aware of the urgency of its removal. Nonetheless the Party was immediately alerted to the inhumane situation in both Besterspruit and Mondlo by Richard Fallows, the Anglican priest based in

44. PC14/5/1/3, Anon, The Blackspots, n.d. [1963].

45. PC2/9/7/2, Minutes, Natal provincial congress, 23&24 March 1962; Minutes, Natal provincial committee, 25 September 1962.

46. PC2/9/23/1, Mngadi, Report on northern Natal region, 14 August 1962.

Vryheid. Fallowes offered his church in the location as a shelter for sick and elderly people among the evictees. Anthony Barker, medical doctor at Charles Johnson Memorial hospital in Nqutu, also provided the Party with information on living conditions in Mondlo. The Party included a tragic story of the Besterspruit people in its publicity booklet *Blackspot* and published it in 1964. The removal of Besterspruit received considerable press coverage, partly because of the outbreak of typhoid and diphtheria among residents of Mondlo shortly after the resettlement (LPSA n.d.[1964]: 1-3).

Three months after the removal of Besterspruit, about 200 tenant families at Charlestown received notice from the government to vacate their houses. Soon after that, the government brought in tractors to demolish their houses and they were taken to a resettlement village called Duckponds (later renamed as Madadeni) on the outskirts of Newcastle (LPSA n.d.[1964]: 4). Then, African owners of three farms in the Dannhauser district were induced to sell their land to a white coal mine owner in exchange for a promise of preferential access to alternative land in the reserve. The NNALA felt bitter about private land transactions by the landowners of these farms, but could not stop it.⁴⁷ The Liberal Party suspected that black spots in the districts of Dannhauser and Newcastle were particularly targeted so that the government could establish a large African township in order to supply labour to planned border industries (LPSA n.d.[1964]: 4). In addition mining interests were operating in some cases. Nevertheless the government did not have a priority list on exactly which farm would be cleared up next.⁴⁸

Faced with a series of black spot removals, the NNALA and the Party felt a necessity to strengthen solidarity among black spot residents and demonstrate their objection to removals. Because of their emphasis on non-violent means, the mass demonstration took the form of a prayer meeting which was held in Roosboom in late 1963. Roosboom was chosen as a venue not only because it was Mngadi's home ground and the Party had a local branch, but also because of its strategic location - it was situated on the old main road between Durban and Johannesburg (R103) and therefore it was quite visible to passing traffic. It was a mass protest meeting, but it was also an occasion of large feast. Organisers

47. PC14/5/6/13, Interview with Mr Ngadi [sic], secretary NNALA, 12 April 1963.

48. PC14/5/2/3, Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner (CBAC), Natal, to South Africa Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), Durban, 19 October 1963.

slaughtered and skinned three cattle the day before the meeting and prepared food for the participants. A giant marquee was pitched for speakers including Mngadi, Msimang and three priests from different churches.⁴⁹ Several white members of the Party attended the meeting, but white leadership of the Party kept away in order not to give the meeting an obvious political look. According to the *Post*, the only newspaper present at the gathering, about 1,200 people attended the meeting.⁵⁰

The resolution adopted at the Roosboom meeting reflected the sense of powerlessness among themselves as well as their faith in God and in the conscience of “White fellow Christians”:

Pray for us that we may be given courage and be left in peace on our lands.
Speak for us who have no voice to speak for ourselves.
Intercede for us with the Government and the authorities.
Work for us so that this terrible plan of removal may be abandoned.
In the name of God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ amen.⁵¹

At the end of the meeting the organisers encouraged participants to sign the petition to the State President. However, the presence of the Special Branch who sat next to the table where signatures were collected prevented many from signing the petition. Mngadi reported that “people were visibly frightened” and “only about 350 people were brave enough to sign the petition.”⁵² A few white members of the Party who were at the meeting were also questioned by the Special Branch and had their names taken.⁵³

The Roosboom resolution was later sent to influential members of the white community in the province in order to appeal to their conscience.⁵⁴ Most of the recipients simply ignored the appeal and a few responses Mngadi received were invariably unsympathetic and ignorant. One white recipient replied that: “It will

49. They were Bishop J. Gwala of United Independent Bantu Churches, Estcourt, Reverend R. Fallows of the Anglican Church, Vryheid, and Reverend I. Nyembezi of the Methodist Church, Edendale.

50. *Post*, 8 September 1963.

51. PC14/5/6/13, Mngadi, NNALA, Prayer meeting 1 September 1963.

52. *Ibid.*

53. PC14/5/6/20, John Aitchison, Special branch interference, Roosboom 1 September 1963.

54. PC14/5/6/13, Appeal letter from Mngadi, secretary, NNALA, September 1963.

be very interesting to learn your people's feelings if you ask them whether they are in favour of Europeans and companies being allowed to buy up Zululand and all the other very fertile and vast Bantulands, if your organisation claims ownership in European areas."⁵⁵ Given that the Liberal Party was not gaining any meaningful support among white constituencies in elections, it was not surprising that the resolution failed to stir the conscience of the white public.

Soon after the Roosboom meeting, another removal of black spot in northern Natal was completed. After 10 years of negotiating with the government over the amount of compensation, Khumalosville where the Party had held a branch office was finally cleared up. Five years before there were about 200 families (1,004 people) living in Khumalosville.⁵⁶ Due to years of negotiation and insecurity, many residents left Khumalosville subsequently, but some 25 families refused to move. Led by Mike Ndlovu, a local leader who was later recruited by Mngadi to work for the NNALA, and assisted by a lawyer arranged and partly paid by the Liberal Party, the remaining residents of Khumalosville fought over the amount of compensation in the court. In the end their resistance was not successful and the remaining residents were forced to move out of the village.⁵⁷ However, not everyone moved to Hobsland, a resettlement village identified by the government for them. Ndlovu moved to Rookdale, a black spot in the Bergville district which was never expropriated by the government.⁵⁸

If the Roosboom resolution did not appeal to the white conscience, the peaceful mass gathering demonstrated at the meeting certainly alarmed the government. Even before the meeting, black organisers as well as ordinary members were increasingly subjected to police harassment. Police continuously followed black organisers and the Special Branch raided Mngadi's house in Roosboom late at night.⁵⁹ The Special Branch always attended branch meetings of the Party, and they began to report the names of people who had attended the meetings to their employers.⁶⁰ Anonymous pamphlets cursing Mngadi and Brown and encouraging

55. PC14/5/6/13, J.P.C. Le Roux, MPC, Vryheid, to Mngadi, 9 December 1963.

56. *Daily News*, 10 September 1957.

57. PC2/9/16/4, Khumalosville, n.d. [1963?]; *Daily News*, 3 October 1963. An official source says that the number of families who remained until the last day of removal of Khumalosville was 38. PC14/5/2/4, Office of the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development to Chairman, Anglican Society, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 13 August 1964.

58. Interview, Mike Ndlovu, 31 October 2002, Ecombe.

59. PC2/4/16/1, Mngadi to Meidner, 25 November 1963.

60. Brown, "A history of LPSA", pp. 237-238.

people to move from their homes were distributed at Charlestown and Khumalosville.⁶¹ The government was closely watching the black spot work of the Liberal Party and trying to make it more and more difficult to be a black member of the Party.

Six months after the Roosboom meeting, Mngadi received a banning order. He was the first person among Natal liberals who was committed to black spot work to be banned under the Suppression of Communism Act. He was confined to the Klipriver district for five years and was not allowed to attend any meeting during that period.⁶² Four months after that, Brown, the national chairman of the Party and the white liberal who was most extensively involved in black spot work, was also banned. He was confined to the Pietermaritzburg district. The banning of Brown was a serious blow not only to black spot work, but also to the Party's activities in general.⁶³ After Brown was banned, police activities against the Party members "increased to a hitherto unprecedented extent." The police was trying to finish off the Party. Many prominent members of the Party in local branches were raided several times. People who attended the meetings were taken to the local police station for questioning and interrogation. From early 1965, anonymous notes and pamphlets written in Zulu began to be posted to, or thrown attached to rocks at, homes of African members of the Party. These papers invariably denounced the Party and its leading members and urged them to quit the Party.⁶⁴

The Party still tried to continue its activities. Mike Ndlovu took over Mngadi's job as a secretary of the NNALA and northern Natal organiser for the Party, but by then the NNALA was about to collapse without an effective committee.⁶⁵ Gabriel Nyembe, ANC counterpart of the NNALA, was also banned (Vigne 1997: 97). John Aitchison, theology student at the local university, took over the post of provincial secretary and tried to revive the Party's black spot work. However, in 1965 both Ndlovu and Aitchison were banned. Ngubane had already been banned and Msimang was also banned. More black organisers and local leaders in black spots were banned in the second half of that year. In a situation where the Party's principal contacts in these rural branches were broken, it became impossible for the Party to maintain its contacts with ordinary residents of black spots.

61. PC2/8/16/2, Minutes, Khumalosville branch monthly meeting, 24 August 1963.

62. PC14/5/1/7, LPSA National statement, 19 March 1964; *Natal Witness*, 20 March 1964.

63. *Daily News*, 1 August 1964.

64. PC2/4/16/1, John Aitchison, Intimidation, n.d. [1966].

65. PC14/5/3/15, John Aitchison, Memorandum on blackspots, n.d. [1964].

The disbanding of the Party and the emergence of new protest group

After a series of banning orders were imposed on its leadership in 1964 and 1965, the Party's active members decreased considerably to a small number of intellectuals based in Pietermaritzburg. In the next two years however the government softened its banning campaign. Nobody was banned and unexpectedly, bans were lifted for Mngadi, Ndlovu and Msimang. Still they were unable to revive their organising drive among African landowners in northern Natal. The banning orders on white leadership were not lifted and this seriously hampered the Party in keeping contact between its urban and rural branches, as "the number of people willing and able to drive long distances to country meetings [had] dwindled".⁶⁶ The issue of black spot removals continued to be a point of discussion at the Party's provincial committee meetings. Moreover many individual members of the Party more or less maintained their concern over the matter in the subsequent decades. Nevertheless, since the ban was imposed on its leaders, the Party never embarked on the organised black spot work again until it disbanded in 1968. The decision to disband the Party was made as a response to the Prohibition of Political Interference Act that prohibited people from belonging to a racially mixed party or assisting a political party not of their own race.

Just before the Liberal Party ceased to exist in South Africa, the government carried out another series of removals of black spots in northern Natal. Later this came to be known as Limehill removals, as more than 9,000 Africans were taken to resettlement villages in Limehill.⁶⁷ A series of protest meetings were organised by church leaders in Durban and Pietermaritzburg in response to this government action. Although the Party was not an official organiser, many white members of the Party attended these meetings.⁶⁸ Out of these protest meetings, the Natal Citizens' Association was formed. The aim of this association was "to study the effects of population displacements, and assist where possible to alleviate family and social disruption."⁶⁹ This clearly shows that its main concern

66. PC2/9/8/4, Natal provincial report. 1966-67.

67. PC14/5/2/2, SAIRR: Natal, "Planned 'black spots' removals. Natal", Information Sheet No. 5/1968.

68. PC2/9/8/4, Minutes, Natal provincial division, 21 November 1967. The Party also sent a white member to Limehill to gather first-hand information on conditions in resettlement villages. This was the last black spot work arranged by the Party. PC87/1/1, Bunty Biggs, Visit to Limehill closer settlement, 27 February 1968; Biggs, Report of the meeting, n.d. [1968].

69. PC14/5/1/6, Natal Citizens' Association, Press statement, 6 September 1968.

was not about removal per se, but about the horrible conditions of resettlement areas. Archbishop Denis Hurley was elected as an interim chairman of the interim committee of the association. Although they were aware of the nationwide petition initiated by the Citizens' Action Committee in Johannesburg to oppose population displacements, they chose to be an independent body.⁷⁰

The association was a prompt response by white liberals and church leaders to the immediate crisis caused by Limehill removals, but it was rather an ad hoc organisation and did not survive for long. Hurley explained the limitations of their activities:

We did form bodies trying to raise our voices against removals, but again all we could do was hold meetings, give speeches, pass resolutions and address them to the government, but they didn't bother too much about that kind of opposition to their policies.⁷¹

Even if the Natal Citizens' Association could not influence the government as much as it hoped, the Limehill removals achieved a hitherto unprecedented scale of embarrassing publicity for the government. The effective publicity was made possible through the fact that there were concerned whites who were exactly on the site of the removals. Neil Alcock, a one-time very active member of the Liberal Party, happened to run an agricultural development project called the Church Agricultural Project (CAP) on one of the farms whose African residents were targeted for the removal to Limehill. Alcock distanced himself from the Party by the mid-1960s in order to avoid getting banned and founded the CAP together with the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran Churches. Fully aware of the devastating effects of removals on African residents through the knowledge of earlier removals such as Besterspruit and Khumalosville and of dreadful living conditions in Limehill, Alcock convinced church leaders to intervene and negotiate with the government authority on behalf of the African residents on the farm.⁷² This intervention did not stop the removal of people from the farm, but at least it succeeded in delaying it (Desmond 1970: 27-29).

70. PC14/5/1/6, Minutes, 21 August 1968; A circular letter from Denis Hurley, Chairman of interim committee, Natal Citizens' Association, 10 September 1968.

71. APC, KZN-OHP, Interview transcript: Archbishop Denis Hurley, Seventh interview: 16 June 1997, p. 8.

72. PC14/5/1/7, [Neil Alcock], Memorandum on government schemes for the removal of Africans from 'white' to 'black' areas, n.d., [1967?], p. 1.

Alcock had also some influence in prompting Cosmas Desmond, a Catholic priest based on the same farm, to tour the resettlement areas nationwide and record people's sufferings.⁷³ Desmond hoped to get some official backing from church authorities for his project, but he did not get any and felt bitterly disappointed about it (Desmond 1970: 23-24, 36). After visiting many resettlement villages in the country, he published a book entitled *The Discarded People* in 1970. It was the first to expose the appalling conditions in resettlement camps and it aroused public condemnation of removals both nationally and internationally. After completing the book, he became a director of the Christian Institute, a radicalised anti-apartheid ecumenical organisation founded by Beyers Naude and other clergy in 1963, in Pietermaritzburg. It was the Institute that published his book. He stayed there until 1977 when the Institute was banned and its office was closed down. Due to the various threats to his life, he left South Africa immediately afterwards (Borer 1998: 89-91).⁷⁴

Conclusion

This article discussed the Liberal Party's attempts to organise African landowners in northern Natal and to generate opposition campaigns against the government policy of removing black spots. It showed that African leaders of the Party, Msimang, Ngubane and Mngadi played a large role in the Party's black spot work. All of them had a background of landowning families and therefore had a stake in land ownership. Msimang and Ngubane, though belonging to different generations within the ANC, were both prominent members of the organisation and became leading African liberals in the Liberal Party. Mngadi started his political career with the Liberal Party with a firm belief in non-racialism, but worked closely with ANC supporters in his job of setting up the NNALA. Mngadi's efforts in forming the NNALA not only raised the general awareness of the implications of removals among the residents of black spots, but also gave local leaders of individual farms a platform to discuss their common fate. Quite a few of them joined the Party and gathered at the Roosboom prayer meeting to show their solidarity against removals. African landowners did not exclude tenants from their organisation, but did not fully involve them either,

73. APC, KZN-OHP, Interview transcript: Peter Brown, Tape 6: 17 October 1996, p. 13.

74. APC, School of Theology Oral History Project, Interview transcript: John Aitchison, 20 April 1998.

especially in its leadership structure.

Black spot work and the resulting increase in African members of the Party in Natal gave the Party radicalising influences in terms of its fundamental policy regarding the franchise. In the 1950s the question of the franchise was crucial and contentious for the Party to the extent that it repeatedly postponed discussing the matter in order to avoid splitting up the Party. The transformation of the Party from a predominantly white liberal organisation to a multi-racial political organisation in its brief existence of 15 years was remarkable and the role played by black liberals in the process cannot be overemphasised. The interaction with black members through Party activities provided certain white liberals in the Party with a different kind of political education. Except for a few farmers, most white members in the Party were academics and students. The experience of visiting the African countryside must have had a tremendous psychological impact on white liberals in Natal.

The strategy that the NNALA adopted was that of appealing to the white conscience and asking whites to act on their behalf, which was clearly illustrated in the resolution adopted at the Roosboom prayer meeting. In a situation where Africans were deprived of their right to voice their opinion in politics through the vote, their action could be interpreted as the desperate behaviour of rightless people. The desperate appeals from African landowners fell on the deaf ears of the average white citizen of South Africa at that time, for whom non-racialism was far too advanced. However, the liberal conscience aroused through injustice and the brutal manner in which several removals were carried out in northern Natal in the 1960s remained. Even after the Party leaders who engaged in black spot work were banned, white liberals and church leaders continued to investigate the conditions of removals and raise public awareness through publicity embarrassing to the government, as was the successful case with the Limehill removals. Their protests against removals and liberal activism did not stop with Limehill. A decade after the Limehill removals, their activism was reborn in a different form, that was later to be recognized as a pioneering NGO in land sector.

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