

1964

Robert Mangaliso Sobulaw, former leader of the banned Pan-Africanist Congress who is now South Africa's only prisoner without a sentence, is applying to the Government for an exit permit to leave the country. He has told his wife to instruct Johannesburg attorneys to make a formal application for a permit.

I learned this during an interview with Mr. Sobulaw on Robben Island - the maximum security prison seven miles from Cape Town which has been his home for the past nine months.

Mr. Sobulaw completed a three year sentence for incitement, arising out of the 1960 PAC anti-pass campaign, in May last year. Since then he has been kept in prison without any further trial in terms of a special provision of the General Law Amendment Act.

He is the only person jailed in this way.

PAC leaders overseas have continually alleged in public statements that Mr. Sobulaw is being starved and beaten. I found this to be completely untrue - and it was also repudiated by Mr. Sobulaw himself.

More/

He has regained much of the weight which he lost during his three year jail sentence. Apart from rheumatic-type pains, which he attributes to his lengthy spell in jail, his health /is good.

During the hours we spent together, without any prison warders being present, he was relaxed and spoke freely and easily.

In granting permission for Mr. Sobukwe's interview, the Minister of Justice, Mr. Vorster, impose only one restriction: that Mr. Sobukwe's views on the law under which he is jailed not be sought.

During our interview, Mr. Sobukwe:

- Emphatically denied that he was anti-white.
- Said he had not been involved in last year's Pogo terrorist movement.
- Predicted that changes were imminent in South Africa which would enable white and non-whites to achieve "broader agreement".

By order of the Minister of Justice, Mr. Sobukwe enjoys privileges which make him the country's No. 1 prisoner. Although I was not allowed to visit his quarters, and interviewed him in the visitor's room, this is the description of Mr. Sobukwe's conditions which he gave me:

He occupies a neatly-furnished two-roomed bungalow -- formerly part of a Coloured school -- set inside an enclosure ^{about} of 150 ft. by 170 ft. which is surrounded by a barbed-wire fence.

There is hot and cold running water and a shower in a separate ablution block.

He can receive and write two letters a week and is even able to send telegrams. A wide range and number of books, magazines and newspapers is allowed.

His time is entirely his own. He can get up and go to bed when he pleases and can keep on the lights as late as he wishes.

~~His meals are of a better quality than normally supplied to African prisoners.~~

His meals are of a better quality than normally supplied to African prisoners. Sometimes, his meals are supplied from the white warders' mess. He can spend up to R10 a month buying extra food and other goods.

He wears his own clothing.

He has a radio - a medium - wave ~~set~~ set, as he is only allowed to listen to the S.A.B.C.

He spends most of the time reading and studying for the Bachelor of Economics degree which he is doing through the University of London.

More/

"All the prison officials show me every consideration," Mr. Sobulac told me. "They go out of their way to make my stay here as bearable as possible.

"But the fact remains that this is a prison.

"As I see no prospect for my release, I have told my wife to instruct attorneys to apply for an exit permit for myself and my family.

"I am doing this for the sake of my wife and our four children. I want to give them the chance of living a full family life.

"Also, I cannot pretend that I relish the idea of being fossilised on Robben Island. I want to use whatever talent I have usefully and creatively for the benefit and advancement of mankind.

He added: "I finished three years in jail for whatever I had done. I served my sentence. Straight from there I was moved to prison precincts and made subject to prison regulations with the exceptions which the Minister of Justice has allowed.

"The consideration which the prison officials are showing me is not anything I can claim as of right. Guards are on duty where I live 24 hours a day. And I am affected by being in the presence of other prisoners, even though I only see them from a distance. I cannot but compare my situation with theirs.

"I am allowed newspapers and a certain number of letters. But as a result, I am in contact with the world while at the same time I am detached from it. This leaves me unsettled and frustrated.

"I am virtually in solitary confinement, as the only people I see, apart from a very few visitors, are the warders."

I asked Mr. Sobukwe about reports linking his name with last year's Pogo movement.

He said: "I was behind bars in Pretoria jail when it happened, and when I was allowed contact with the world again the immediate causes of it were over. So I do not know what gave rise to it.

"I was not involved in the Pogo movement in any way at all."

On his attitude towards whites, he said: "I know I have been accused of being anti-white, not only by the Government but also by others. But there is not one who can quote any statement of mine which bears this out.

"When I say 'Africa for the Africans' I have always made clear that by 'African' I mean those, of any colour, who accept Africa as their home. Colour does not mean anything to me."

and on the South Africa situation he said that he thought there were prospects for change in the near future.

"The fact that those who are opposed to apartheid are taking up an uncompromising attitude means that the issues will be highlighted. Both the economic development in the country and the intellectual stirrings, particularly among Afrikaners, will bring about an initial modification of attitudes. Once that is achieved it will be easier to reach a broader agreement.

"I think the Government is quite aware of this and that is why it is trying to prevent not only contact across the colour line but also the free circulation of ideas."

/ends.

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- **Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand**

Location:- **Johannesburg**

©2010

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

DOCUMENT DETAILS:

Document ID:- **A2618-Cg6-15**

Document Title:- **Draft report about Sobukwe as a prisoner without a sentence**

Author:- **Benjamin Pogrund**

Document Date:- **18 January 1964**