

PAC Leader Zephania Mothopeng — Lifelong Azanian Revolutionary

Up until his death in late October 1990 Pan Africanist Congress of Azania leader Zephania Mothopeng remained a staunch fighter for liberation from white settler rule, for which he spent much of his life in apartheid's dungeons. Rather than being broken by the enemy's efforts to silence him, Zeph, as he was widely known by the people, fought consistently to lead the struggle forward through difficult conditions and periods of severe repression, seeking to arouse the masses and to heighten their capacity for combativity. While in his late 60s he was closely associated with the fresh outpouring of youth rebellions in 1976 that shook South Africa from one end of the country to the other.

As part of the emerging Africanist current in opposition to the compromising "Freedom Charter" of the African National Congress — a programme that conciliated on the central questions of national liberation and land dispossession, offering the white minority an equal place instead of fighting for the overthrow of the white oppressor state — in 1959 Zeph and others split off from the ANC and formed the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), a separate organisation.

The PAC led tens of thousands of masses throughout the country in 1960 to defy the hated laws requiring Blacks to carry identification passes. The regime's repressive forces tried to stop the campaign by massacring demonstrators in Sharpeville and Langa, declaring a state of emergency for the first time, and banning, arresting and jailing the PAC leaders, including Zeph, as well as numerous Azanian activists. The armed wing of the PAC at that time, POQO ("to stand alone"), was formed shortly afterwards and supported the peasant rebellions in the 1960s against the bantustan system, its tribal chief collaborators, and to demand land. Its attempts to engage

the white colonialists in armed struggle struck an enthusiastic and deep chord among the Azanian masses who on their own had resisted many times before, but the opposition movement, especially the reformist ANC, had always advocated peaceful protest. The PAC did try to develop work in the countryside and applied some notions of guerrilla warfare, but rapidly became a target of government counterinsurgency, although sporadic fighting continued to erupt over a period of years. The PAC was strongly influenced by the Chinese Revolution and, alongside its Panafricanism, borrowed from Mao's teachings on the oppressed countries. But they never fully embraced the science of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought that Mao had further developed and that was the political and ideological basis of his pathbreaking contributions that attracted national liberation movements like the PAC. They were therefore unable to carry through on their aims to liberate the land through a genuine people's war and failed to take the decisive step of forming a Maoist party in order to lead the oppressed in waging such a war. Forming such a party remains the key task of Azanian revolutionaries today.

After getting out of prison in 1969, Zeph actively encouraged the growing black consciousness movement and, following the youth and student uprisings that blazed across the country in 1976-77, he and 17 others were among those the state blamed, with charges of predicting the riots and "sowing the seeds of anarchy and revolution", of maintaining underground organisation and sending youth abroad for military training. A secret political trial was held in the remote town of Bethal, and Zeph, the number one accused, turned his back on the judge and refused to recognise the court. He was sentenced to 30 years

in prison.

In November 1988, as part of a facelift effort by the apartheid government which was politically cornered after the mass upsurge of the mid-1980s, Zeph and a few other political prisoners were released unconditionally. He remained strong and called for the struggle to continue. Unlike Mandela, who immediately jumped into the international frenzy to negotiate away Azania's future and wrench it out of the hands of the oppressed, including by calling on the masses to throw their arms into the sea, Zeph stood firm on the need for the oppressed to liberate themselves. The state's tactics of "sharing a little power with a few Blacks" have begun to have the intended effect of provoking crisis and division within the ranks of the liberation movement, including some PAC circles, where discussion of acceptable "conditions and climate for negotiation" is increasingly heard — a far cry from its original defiant aims of organising the oppressed and dispossessed majority to fight arms in hand to liberate their land and determine their own future. Despite battling lung cancer for several years, Zeph refused to buckle in the face of the pressures on the PAC to sit down and bargain with the enemy. A little over a year before his death he said, "There exists a fallacious notion that the demise of apartheid can be realised by a change of heart on the part of the racist regime. No oppressor in history has willfully abdicated! Equally, the notion that apartheid can be reformed is based on deception. On the other hand there are some who are peddling the line that the racist army can sustain the system indefinitely. Greater empires have fallen!"

The spirit of Zeph Mothopeng will continue to fire the youth who will shoulder much of the responsibility for charting a revolutionary path in Azania. □