

# *Remembrance*

## *African Activist Archive Project*

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### **Friends of the ANC and the Frontline States: My Version**

**By Mabie Settlage**

The Southern Africa Support Committee (SASC) began in the mid-1970's to offer support to the liberation struggles of the Frontline States. We worked with freedom fighters and liberation organizations in Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa. I got involved in 1984.

Our members represented organizations and independents that also were involved in local U.S. struggles. Some of us were Revolutionaries who identified with the International Revolution against white supremacy and capitalism, and used confrontational politics against police abuse and racism in Los Angeles. The leader I most closely worked with was from the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, Michael Zinzun.

Our structure was loose, we shared duties of organization and logistics.

As the 1980's came to a close, the struggle in South Africa was intensifying. Some South African students at UCLA came and asked to work with us. There was an ANC member in the city, Vusi Shangasi, who was the nominal head in LA. There was another ANC member, Trevor Fowler. There was a tremendous frustration in our group because it seemed the two mentioned were more interested in preventing militant action instead of supporting it.

The UCLA young people, and an elder Tiyo Soga, encouraged us to form a new organization, the Friends of the African National Congress. We said it would have to be Friends of the ANC and the Frontline States.

So much was going on, throughout South Africa, our excitement took off and our organizing EXPLODED. There was so much work; Michael Zinzun stopped carrying a brief case and started carrying a big cardboard carton.

We had book studies, we wrote educational pamphlets, and newsletters, we organized regular and special demonstrations, with a youth movement local in LA. We got and devoured bulletins and newspaper clipping publications from South Africa, we met for analyzing events and theory, many times until late into the night. We ate, slept and breathed South Africa. In our minds their heroes were our own, their tormentors our

enemies, their camps and townships our stomping grounds. Revolutionaries would come through LA and have large meetings, and house meetings.

We met Oliver Tambo, Graca Machel, Sam Nujoma. It was a heady time!

We considered ourselves revolutionaries and the ANC was our sister organization. We declared **“Freedom from South Africa to South Central”** Los Angeles.

This created tensions in our movement, as some ANC members were with us, and others felt they had only been sent to the U.S. to fundraise for money to be sent back to the ANC, and who were not concerned with our US Black Struggle. In fact they wanted to court wealthy people to get larger donations, and were embarrassed by our ragtag militancy. Some ANC members actually wanted to model post-apartheid SA on the “success” of Black people here.

An unfortunate distraction we were all aware of, throughout the international movement, was alcohol. From reports internationally, nationally, and our own experiences with ANC and local LA members, alcohol played an unhappy role, taking away from our effectiveness. I don’t know what’s the answer to this. (I sat in a kitchen in Katatura, Namibia in 1989 and heard the lady of the house say “We will win, but what will we do with a drunken nation?”) We were aware of Lucky Dube’s “slave”, about alcoholism.

We ended our meetings on our feet with our fists held high, singing “Nkosi sikelele Africa”, at rallies we shouted “Mayi buye Africa”. We were ONE struggle.

Nelson Mandela was released and we celebrated triumphantly. Chris Hani was murdered and we wept- “Hamba Kahle!”

Then Nelson Mandela went on a world tour. Everything changed. Powerful, rich celebrities took over and pushed us to the back. The organization essentially ended. Though there were opportunities, none of us ever visited the New South Africa.