

# ZAPU IN THE STRUGGLE

## EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF ZAPU

There are no photographs within the Zenzo Nkobi collection at SAHA which reflect the initial development and growth of ZAPU, other than ones that were taken of historical photographs of trade unionists from the 1950s. But several of the people interviewed were elderly survivors who recalled events of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Jack Ngwenya describes the awakening of his political consciousness in Johannesburg in the mid-1950s through acquaintance with members of the ANC, thus establishing the regional link in the growth of the liberation movement:

I attended my first political meeting in South Africa in 1954, an ANC meeting. It was a man from our home area there who was a member of ANC..... when I went there one Sunday morning he said, “No, no, no, today I wanted to go to a meeting. At a place called Sophiatown [inaudible] Square,” ... so we went there ... I was surprised. Big speakers, JB Marx, Moses Potane ... so one man spoke about the way Africans were being treated. ... He mentioned all the things ... at that time you ... in the evening at night there if you did not have a pass you would be arrested. He mentioned all those things ....then I said, “Yes, we should ... take over power then we’ll play *amadice*<sup>1</sup>, we will not be arrested” ... it was a high .... I really was very impressed. ... It was from that day I stopped going to church. Whenever I heard there was a meeting I would not miss that meeting. Then I began to think about what was happening in my country.

Ngwenya tells how he returned home in 1957 and immediately sought to locate the nationalist leadership in Bulawayo, joined up and attended crucial meetings such as the formation of the NDP and the January 1963 executive meeting of ZAPU, already banned, which confirmed the earlier decision not to form another legal party and to prepare for armed struggle. Later he was sent to open an office in Lusaka, Zambia, in March 1963.

By that time weapons were already being smuggled into Rhodesia through Zambia. Abraham Nkiwane describes how he was approached in 1962, before Zambian independence, to act as a weapons runner:

In 1962 when ZAPU was banned we were summoned to UNIP headquarters by President Kaunda .... At the end of the meeting I was summoned to Mr Kapwepwe’s home where I met Joshua Nkomo, Kenneth Kaunda and Simon Kapwepwe. At that meeting they asked me if I could spare some time[s] in the following weeks and months in assisting ZAPU cadres who were to do some missions between Mbeya in Tanzania and Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. It is from that time, it is where I got involved in ZAPU. The mission was all about moving arms of war from Tanzania into then Rhodesia...

...When I did the transfer of weapons first I was not trained because Zambians did not train anybody for anything. They didn’t go in for the armed struggle. But later on at the .... beginning of ‘63 ... Nkomo had arranged that the Tanzanian camps take me for three months doing some training because the type of weapons that were being moved included detonators, grenades and other things which could not be handled by a person without any knowledge of that type of equipment.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Dice’ in Ndebele

Thereafter he relates some of the adventures. At the other end of the pipeline, Thomas Ngwenya was delivering the weapons to hiding places through other contacts within the country:

Arms were coming in now, I remember the year - vital year - that was 1962. Arms were coming from Tanganyika through Northern Rhodesia, by Sikhwili Moyo and other people, right through to Bulawayo. They would not come by train up to Bulawayo but they would be off-loaded [before] Bulawayo - Dete, Hwange and then taken by cars to their rightful places which was Matopo Hills, where they were being kept ... I was the main contact with Salisbury. Salisbury had one man who would contact me and I would deal with that man and he would not deal with anybody else... Until one time when he was arrested. So this man I think he was squeezed a little bit. He did mention my name, even the house number....

Ngwenya was able to flee while on bail at the end of 1962 and joined the comrades in Lusaka from where he proceeded in 1963 for military training in Ghana. From those early beginnings ZAPU built an army, first known as the Special Affairs Department, and later from 1971, the Zimbabwe Peoples' Revolutionary Army (ZPRA or ZIPRA).

## RECRUITMENT

Many of those interviewed spoke about how they joined the struggle, what attracted them, and how they journeyed out of the country. Most passed through Botswana, and some of the photographs which relate to recruitment were taken at Francistown transit camp, close to Zimbabwe's western border. Others were taken at Nampundwe in Zambia, where new recruits were sorted out after they were flown to Zambia from Botswana. But the photographs were taken in the late 1970s when there were large numbers of military recruits as well as refugees flooding to Zambia. One interviewee, Precious Nleya, was asked specifically about Francistown, while another spoke specifically about Nampundwe, but all had something to say about how they joined the struggle.

Many joined the struggle much earlier. Some, like Amos Ngwenya, were first acquainted with ZAPU in South Africa; others were challenged by their elders to go and join, while still others encountered guerrillas who then interested them in joining the struggle, others were inspired by the stories of ZAPU's Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns in 1967-8. But for all, their immediate reasons came against a backdrop of the history of disempowerment, of repression by a government that operated in the interests of the white settlers.

Mtshana Ncube, who joined ZAPU while in school and attended the Cold Comfort Conference in 1963, explained how the movement of his family from their ancestral land in the 1940's when he was a child made an indelible impression on him:

One of my great grandparents died in the movement and was lost and never seen again in the process, and this is one of the things that triggered my interest in the nationalist movement and the independence movement as it subsequently became. So I joined the youth movement. In fact I was interested in this as early as 1957 when I was at Tekwani<sup>2</sup> and quietly followed the process and linked up with people that were later to become very active in the movement – 1958 and joined the NDP in 1960 when it was formed, and later ZAPU.

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<sup>2</sup> A Methodist mission school near Plumtree, also referred to by Mzila-Ndlovu