

“The Development of the African National Congress: 1942-1949”

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Introduction

From the mid-19th century forward, South Africa witnessed some of the most profound economic, social, cultural and political changes on the African continent. With the advent of the First World War, these changes were accelerated. As a consequence, millions of Africans were mobilized out of traditional society and into a non-traditional cash economy.¹ Subsequently, many were mobilized into non-traditional African separatist churches and other non-traditional organizations.² The rapid increase of African membership in the International Commercial Union (ICU) during the 1920s is a striking illustration of this phenomenon. Yet relatively few Africans joined the ranks of the African National Congress during this period of rapid and dramatic change.

We argue that membership in the African National Congress (ANC or Congress) represented a form of political participation.³ From its formation in 1912 until the creation of the Pan-African Congress in the 1950s, the ANC was the only nationally oriented African political movement in South Africa. Western-educated Africans organized the ANC to influence national-level policy makers because the founders of the ANC understood the importance of political influence at that level. They understood it but, evidently, large numbers of other Africans did not. At no point during the period 1912-1949 did the ANC have more than 7,000 members. This observation raises an interesting question: Why did so few Africans join the ANC in the 37-year period from 1912 to 1949?

From 1942 to 1949, ANC leaders attempted to transform Congress from an elite into a mass-based organization. This paper explores these efforts; it examines both the Million Member Drive initiated in 1942 and the reasons for the ANC's failure to attain its objective. This campaign will be evaluated in terms of its stated objective: an increased number of ANC members. The following questions will be addressed:

- 1) what factors influenced ANC leaders to attempt to transform the ANC from an elite to a mass-based organization?
- 2) How much potential support was there for the ANC during the 1930s and 1940s?
- 3) What efforts were made to increase membership?
- 4) What effect did this campaign have on the number of ANC members?

¹ M.H. De Kock, *Economic History of South Africa* (Johannesburg: Juta & Co. Ltd., 1924), 288. De Kock writes that the manufacturing sector of the South African economy grew by nearly 400 percent in the 18-year period from 1904 to 1922.

² Karl W. Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development," *American Political Science Review*, Vol LV, No. 3 (September, 1961), pp. 493-514. Deutsch, focusing on change in traditional societies, argues that the introduction of non-traditional practices on a large-scale leads to social mobilization which in turn leads to increased political participation. "Social Mobilization is an overall process of change which happens to substantial parts of the population in countries which are moving from traditional to modern ways of life." He argues that the many disruptions caused by this process lead to increased political participation as those affected by the process attempt to find new solutions to new problems.

³ We define political participation as any action taken with the intention of influencing public policy. This action does not have to be effective. In other words, an act of participation does not have to influence governmental policy to constitute political participation as we define the term. The effort simply has to be made.

- 5) What factors account for the failure of the ANC to attain its stated objective?
- 6) What contributions, if any, did the ANC of the 1940s make to subsequent political developments in South Africa?

A Mass-Based Movement

At its Annual Conference in December 1942, ANC leaders decided to initiate the Million Member Drive. They hoped that this campaign would enormously increase Congress membership. Walshe writes:

The Conference, in a mood of some optimism, then responded to Xuma's call for a mass membership drive, the involvement of the chiefs, ministers of religion, women, youths, indeed 'every African', by authorizing the National Executive to undertake a vigorous campaign for no less than one million members. This campaign was to make Congress more worthy to represent the ten million Africans of South Africa.⁴

When this drive was initiated, the ANC evidently had less than 1,000 members Union-wide.⁵ This 'mass membership drive' indicates a change in the methods or means by which ANC leaders intended to achieve their objectives.⁶ It represented a break with the political traditions of their Westernized predecessors who had expected "a gradual but steadily increasing participation of educated tribesmen, of Zulus, Xhosa, etc., in the wider and multi-racial South Africa."⁷ Clearly, a significant increase in membership would require a great deal of time, effort, and quite possibly enormous financial expenditures as well. Surely ANC leaders realized that the relatively powerful, white-dominated South African government would oppose the creation of a potentially very powerful, African political organization. It is hard to imagine that the decision to transform Congress into a mass-based organization was taken lightly.

Why did ANC leaders decide to transform the ANC from an elite to a mass-based organization? There are several plausible reasons. One is that during the 1930s, the South African government began to reduce the amount of political power available to elite Africans. In 1936, the Government eliminated the Cape Franchise which had permitted a limited number of Africans to vote on the common electoral role in one of South Africa's four provinces, the Cape.⁸ One result of its elimination was that more and more ANC members began to realize that Congress's moderate approach to change served little purpose, that well-argued appeals for justice had no effect on governmental policy. Another is that ANC leaders were very sensitive to the

⁴ Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (London: Horst Press, 1970), 390

⁵ We estimate that in 1940, the ANC had less than 1,000 members out of a total African population of over 10 million. There were 41 delegates in attendance at the ANC's 1940 Annual Conference when Xuma was voted in as President-General. According to Congress's constitution each delegate represented twenty members. This suggests that in 1940 there were about 820 members of Congress.

⁶ Coleman, James S, "Nationalism in Tropical Africa," *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 48, No. 2 (June 1954), pp. 404-426 Coleman argues that similar shifts in emphasis occurred in other parts of Africa.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8

⁸ ANC leaders had hoped that the Cape would become a model for the other three provinces of the Union of South Africa.

Government's charge that the ANC represented little more than a few middle-class Africans and certainly did not represent the mass of the African population who were best represented, the government argued, by their traditional chiefs. With less than a 1000 members out of a total African population of roughly ten million in 1940, there was some basis to this charge! Still another possible reason was the election of the American-trained medical doctor, Dr. Albert B. Xuma, as President General in 1940. Dr. Xuma lobbied for the transformation of Congress from an elitist organization into a massed-based organization open to all Africans.

Perhaps the single most important reason for this decision was the failure of the traditional methods of Congress to affect significant and positive political change. During a speech presented to the ANC Victory Congress Conference in December 1941, Xuma stated: "We realize that no real progress can be accomplished by the African people until the Africans' own organizations, apart from statutory institutions, are strong, united, and speaking with one voice."⁹ In the same year, he wrote of the need for effective organization. "The greatest task before us is the effective organization of Congress."¹⁰ He continued: "Once that is done, then half the battle is won and other things can be attended to almost at leisure."¹¹ Clearly, some 30 years after its formation, a new generation of ANC leaders was aware that a popularly-supported movement was needed to bring political pressure to bear on an increasingly recalcitrant and oppressive regime. Consequently, for the first time, these leaders were prepared to appeal to ordinary Africans for support. Were ordinary Africans equally prepared to respond to these appeals?

African Support for the ANC

How many members did Congress have before this drive was undertaken? There is little information on Congress membership prior to 1942. In 1941, James Calata wrote to Xuma that a major weakness of Congress consisted of having too many leaders and far too few followers.¹² Although by the 1930s, Congress had acquired a reputation in many quarters as an elitist organization by the 1940s membership was open to all Africans at least in theory.¹³ There was an annual membership fee of 2 shillings, 6 pence or between 50 and 60 cents a year. This does not

⁹ Speech by Dr. Albert B. Xuma, President-General, African National Congress (ANC), at ANC Victory Congress Conference, 14-16 December 1941. The Albert B. Xuma Collection, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, California. All the below referenced letters and ANC documents, unless otherwise indicated, are found in the Xuma Collection.

¹⁰ Dr. Xuma to A. Frank Pendla, President, Cape African Congress, 9 August 1941.

¹¹ Ibid. See also Dr. Xuma, ANC Pamphlet 'Memorandum on Post-War Reconstruction: Political Aspects', 1944 where Xuma writes: I have devoted my essay to the question of organization because I am convinced that no matter how comprehensive a statement on the life and conditions of our people may be, nor how politically correct the demands put forward, all issues are dependent on organization. Political pressure cannot be brought to bear upon the Government of this country...unless and until we can back it up by powerful organizations. We have tried flowery speech... Let us have a million Africans organized in active Congress branches.

¹² Reverend James Calata, President, Cape Provincial ANC, to Dr. Xuma, 15 June 1941.

¹³ Nevertheless even when there was interest in Congress membership, it was often difficult to get many Africans to pay for membership cards on the spot. In 1942 Rev. Calata wrote Dr. Xuma that "I could not get cash for the cards, but the local leaders at Uitenhage, Port Elizabeth, and Cookhouse asked me to leave 25 tickets at each place." Calata to Xuma, 19 November 1942.

seem like much until one considers that the average African lived well below the government-determined poverty level. So, in effect, membership may have been severely restricted. We estimate that in 1940 there were no more than 800 to 900 ANC members.

Walshe writes that: "From its inception Congress had anticipated incorporating the chiefs, hoping in this way to extend its influence from the educated elite and urban areas to tribal Africans and hence the whole nation."¹⁴ After the First World War, however, the ANC gravitated to the urban areas. Yet even within the urban areas, the ANC experienced considerable difficulty maintaining a following. This was especially the case by the late 1920s. Reader maintains that "...during the decade ended in 1930 the A.N.C. had to a certain extent fallen into disrepute."¹⁵ He adds that Congress "...was unpopular with the authorities...and with its own supporters."¹⁶ The primary reason for this unpopularity, according to Reader, were allegations that some Congress leaders were using the organization for their own personal purposes. Another development that limited the appeal of Congress during this period was that many had come to regard it as the exclusive preserve of a certain class of Africans.¹⁷ This development was especially evident in the province of Natal.¹⁸ It was not, however, confined solely to Natal. In a letter from W.H. Oliphant, apparently a regular member of Congress, to Bulana, a Cape Congress official, Oliphant observed that when he had first joined Congress, there were no distinctions made as to race or class. He wrote:

When I did join the A.N.C. it was in that understanding and spirit and Congress then had won a great respect and so I was made understood (sic) from members here that the A.N.C. had become lately at a system of Native Importants Only.¹⁹

Another letter to Bulana indicated yet another source of disillusionment with Congress: its lack of achievement. This unsigned letter read:

I have no members here in Paarl. The people of Paarl have lost confidence in Congress. Why because the leaders of Congress have failed to lead the people to that saide (sic)...the leaders of the African race they have failed to brinke (sic) the really programs to the people.²⁰

¹⁴ Walshe, *African Nationalism*, 387

¹⁵ D. H. Reader, *The Black Man's Portion* (Capetown: Oxford University Press, 1961), 30

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Roger Tangri, *Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Portsmouth: Heineman Educational Books, Inc., 1985), 86. Writing of African trade unions, Tangri observes that "Trade unions, however, have generally been led by middle-class 'outsiders' and working class membership and participation in them has been usually at a low level....National union leaders are often estranged from workers because of their higher incomes, different life-styles and the bureaucratization of union affairs on a national level."

¹⁸ ANC provincial organizations were as follows: Cape African Congress, Natal African Congress, Orange Free State African Congress, and the Transvaal African Congress.

¹⁹ W.H. Oliphant to Bulana, Cape Congress Official, 8 August 1942

²⁰ Letter, ANC Member, Paarl, Union of South Africa, to Bulana, Cape Congress Official, unsigned and undated, but possibly written in the early 1940s.

The above correspondent expresses his dismay with the ANC's failure to deliver on promises made. This writer's attitude seems to have been widespread in the African population in the 1930s and early 1940s. Such sentiments were not confined to any particular province. Many Africans throughout the Union felt that the ANC did not do enough to solve the problems confronting them. Evidently, this attitude did not change much in the first few years of Xuma's efforts to remold the ANC into a more effective organization.²¹ In 1944 an article in an African newspaper described the Natal Congress Executive, as "...unable to satisfy the demands placed on it by the African people's struggle for Freedom."²² According to this article, the Natal executive offered at best a "vague repetition of the Africans' problems."²³ But, it provided "...no programs of action by which these problems could be solved."²⁴

Nevertheless, by the 1940s, there is evidence of increased support for Congress. Lodge writes that "In contrast to the political lethargy of the previous decade, the 1940s was a period of ferment as political movements adjusted to the new pressures and opportunities created by the popular upheavals accompanying the massive wartime expansion of the African working class."²⁵ In a similar vein, the Reverend James Calata, ANC official, wrote of a meeting he held with local leaders in Bloemfontein, Orange Free State (O.F.S.) in 1941.

I had a meeting on Sunday afternoon 27th April. Practically all the leading men and Missionary agents of the Bloemfontein Location were present and gathering from the speeches which followed mine I think the meeting was effective...Some people joined the Congress then and there.²⁶

Throughout this period, despite lingering disillusionment with Congress in many quarters, there nevertheless existed some African support for Congress.²⁷ At the 1945 ANC conference, Xuma observed that: "There was never more enthusiasm for the A.N.C. among old and young, men and women, ministers, teachers, and people of all classes..."²⁸ This enthusiasm, if it were as widespread by 1945 as Xuma suggests, indicates that there existed a large potential support base from which Congress could recruit new members.

The Million Member Drive

How did Congress attempt to capitalize on the support which existed for it? How did it go about recruiting members? Basically, Congress employed two methods in its efforts to

²¹ We use the term 'effectiveness' in two senses. First, we use the term to refer to Congress's ability to recruit members. Second, we use the term to refer to Congress's ability to influence governmental policy.

²² *Bantu Forum*, June 1944

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (New York: Longman, 1983), 11

²⁶ Reverend James Calata, President, Cape African Congress, to Dr. Xuma, 13 May 1941.

²⁷ Walshe, *African Nationalism*, 397. Walshe observes that: "By 1944 Congress was attracting more widespread if informal support, having re-established its ability to call mass meetings in all four provinces. These tended to number several hundreds in small towns and 1,000 to 5,000 in the major urban areas."

²⁸ Dr. Xuma, Presidential Address to ANC Annual Conference, 25 December 1945.

increase its membership. We term these two methods informal and formal. The informal method consisted of urging Congress members to recruit other Africans. Xuma placed considerable emphasis on this method. In an undated ANC Pamphlet, he wrote: "let the Africans be up and doing and rise to the demands of the times....and every member must play his part in building up the case for the Africans' freedom and progress."²⁹ He urged Congress members to do all they could to induce their fellow Africans to join Congress.³⁰ Other ANC leaders, as well, stressed the necessity of members actively recruiting new members. V.V.T. Mbodo, in an undated pamphlet to Congress members, urged ordinary members to help increase membership and to help organize Congress branches. Mbodo wrote that members should act as though the goal of increasing membership was not only the responsibility of the Congress executive. On the contrary, argued Mbodo, every member should actively seek to attain this goal: "Let every member of Congress register ten new members for Congress each year. Within five years, the Million Drive for members would be a reality."³¹

This method was certainly the most cost-effective. In the 1940s, for the first time, "The ANC began to attract a wider range of African support from among the literate unskilled workers and semi-skilled artisans, clerks, messengers and domestic servants."³² Given the scarcity of Congress resources, this was most often the method used. Despite its shortcomings, it had its advantages. In July 1946, Xuma wrote a senior governmental official, the Secretary of the Bantu Welfare Trust Fund, that "As requested at the last meeting of the Trust, I am able to state that 2778 members have been enrolled since the first of the year."³³ Significantly, he attributed this increase to "systematic organization, but largely through correspondence with individuals and casual meetings."³⁴

Congress, however, did not rely solely on the voluntary efforts of its members. Congress leaders early recognized the need for persons who could devote full-time to the recruitment of new members. It was believed that this would better enable Congress to establish and maintain a more effective contact with the African population. Consequently, Congress instituted a system of paid officials known as 'organizers' who were responsible for recruiting members and organizing branches throughout the provinces. Initially, two organizers per province were employed.³⁵ These organizers worked under difficult conditions. Xuma wrote one congratulating him on his outstanding work in the Transvaal: "Through the courtesies of Mr. Ramahanoë, I saw the good work you are doing over there and the list of the members you have enrolled."³⁶ This formal method represented a positive attempt on the part of Congress to increase its membership. Nonetheless, despite some success, this system also had serious drawbacks.

²⁹ ANC Pamphlet, 'The Crime of Alexandra Township,' undated.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ V.V.T. Mbobo, 'The Challenge of Youth', ANC Pamphlet. Given the title this article was probably written after the formation of the Congress Youth League in 1943.

³² Walshe, *African Nationalism*, 396

³³ Dr. Xuma to the Secretary of the Bantu Welfare Trust Fund, 13 July 1946

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ C.S. Ramahanoë, President of Transvaal African Congress, to Dr. Xuma, 18 July 1947

³⁶ Dr. Xuma to J.M. Nkosi, Congress Organizer, Transvaal, nd.

This campaign required a large number of organizers because of the size of the territory which Congress sought to organize. Possibly several dozen would not have been sufficient. Yet Congress never had more than two organizers per province. In some cases, it had to make do with one organizer per province. When it is realized that the African population in 1945 numbered in the millions, then it is obvious how totally inadequate 6 to 8 organizers were. Yet Congress was unwilling or unable to hire a sufficient number of organizers. The ANC found itself in what might be termed a 'catch-22' situation: it needed money to recruit members and, at the same time, it needed members to raise money. Walshe observes that "If a mass membership could have been built up, the financial means for full-time officials at provincial and national levels would also have been present."³⁷

Congress leaders were aware that in terms of what needed to be done, one or two organizers per province would not suffice. C.S. Ramahanoe, the President of the Transvaal African Congress, recommended supplementing paid organizers by part-time organizers. According to Mr. Ramahanoe, many Africans were prepared to work for Congress. He maintains they were only prevented from doing so by lack of traveling expenses and observed that if Congress would provide these volunteers with traveling expenses, then "We can do much to comb the entire Transvaal area and successfully be able to give our message to the people in general."³⁸

Finally, the very vastness of South Africa made it extremely difficult for Congress headquarters, national or provincial, to control the activities of those organizers that Congress could afford. In 1948, The President-General lamented that the organizers appointed in July 1947 had only worked for a short time and after the first month failed to fulfill the conditions under which they were employed.³⁹ Despite some success, neither Congress's informal method of recruitment nor its formal method of paid organizers produced the results ANC leaders had hoped for.

Results of the Drive

What effect did the 'Million Member Drive' have on Congress membership? The question of how many Africans entered ANC ranks as a result of this campaign cannot be answered with any degree of accuracy given the limited amount of information available. Often Congress leaders themselves did not know how many members the organization had. We can only estimate the number of members for any given year.

In 1944, two years after the drive was initiated, evidently the total membership of Congress was considerably less than 1,500. This figure is based on the number of delegates attending the ANC Annual Conference of 1944. The Congress constitution stipulated that each branch was entitled to one delegate for every twenty members. There were 64 delegates.⁴⁰ Thus one delegate per each twenty members would mean that Congress had a total Union-wide membership of 1,280. The actual number of members could have been less than this.⁴¹ For the

³⁷ Walshe, *African Nationalism*, 382

³⁸ C.S. Ramahanoe, President of Transvaal African Congress, to Dr. Xuma, 18 July 1947

³⁹ Minutes of the ANC National Executive Meeting, 8 January 1948.

⁴⁰ ANC Bulletin Number Two, May 1945

⁴¹ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* 3d. ed. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1964), 81-82 Duverger argues that there is a tendency for branches in mass-based parties to inflate their membership figures where possible in order to increase their representation at conferences and or to impress party higher-ups. According to Duverger, one device often

period from about 1945 on, there is data which makes possible a more accurate estimation of the number of Congress members. In a letter written to Xuma in 1946, Calata estimated the number of Congress members in the Cape province. Significantly, Calata wrote that he could not arrive at the exact number of members in this province because not all branches had reported their memberships to their respective provincial headquarters. (As we shall discuss below, inadequate communication between the different echelons of Congress was a perennial problem.) Nevertheless, Calata estimated that there were 960 Congress members in the Cape in 1946.⁴² Evidently, the membership situation in the Cape did not improve much in the following two years. In 1948, the Congress organizer for the Cape, D.D. Ngubeni, wrote that the membership situation in the Cape remained "very disappointing."⁴³ Ngubeni observed that the leadership of the Cape was all very "progressive and militant" but that they had failed to attract large numbers of Africans into the ANC.⁴⁴ One cannot help but wonder from the tone of his letter what it was that Ngubeni - a paid organizer - believed he was paid to do. Nevertheless, his remarks indicate that Congress, at least in the Cape, still suffered from the problem which had Calata identified in 1941: too many leaders and too few followers.⁴⁵

There is no information on the total number of Congress members in the Orange Free State during this period. For the year 1946, however, we have data on the total number of women who were Congress members. The minutes of a 1946 provincial executive meeting list the number of women members as 262.⁴⁶ It seems reasonable to assume that there were more male than female members. It also seems reasonable to assume that male members did not outnumber female members by much more than two or three to one, if that. Therefore, it seems likely that the number of ANC members in the O.F.S. was more than 700 but quite likely less than 1,000. There is no evidence of a substantial increase in Congress membership in the O.F.S. by the time the Million Member Drive ended in 1949.

Durban, the largest city in Natal, did not have a branch of the ANC until 1945. Little wonder the question which appeared in an African newspaper, The Bantu Forum in 1944 two years after the National Executive launched the 'Million Member Drive:' "Shall all those Africans who want to be members of Congress be left out in the cold?"⁴⁷ It was not until the latter part of 1944 that the ANC launched a concerted effort to increase its membership in Natal. Despite its late start, by 1945 it was making some progress. The annual report of the Natal African Congress states that 536 membership cards were sold during the year 1945.⁴⁸ This report points out that this figure included 50 tickets sold to a branch in advance of the actual enrollment of members. Five months later, in April 1946, the Provincial Secretary of Natal, H. Selby Msimang, reported to

employed by the branches to inflate their numbers is to buy membership cards in advance of the actual enrollment of members.

⁴² James Calata to Dr. Xuma, 7 February 1946

⁴³ D.D. Ngubeni, Organizer, Cape Provincial Congress, to Dr. Xuma, 26 February 1948

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ James Calata, President to Dr. Xuma, 5 July 1941. Calata wrote: "Our fault lies in having too many leaders and too few followers. Why should there be so few constituted branches in the Cape Province? Why is it that the Cape Province is unable to raise funds?"

⁴⁶ Minutes of Orange Free State Provincial Executive Meeting, 19 September 1946

⁴⁷ *Bantu Forum*, 17 September 1944

⁴⁸ Annual Report, Natal Provincial Congress, ANC, 13 November 1945

Xuma the enrollment of another 500 members.⁴⁹ Possibly by April 1946 the Natal Provincial Congress had between 1,200 and 1,500 members.

In his efforts to estimate the number of Congress members in the Transvaal Province, David Bopape, the provincial secretary, confronted the same problem that Calata had faced in the Cape Province: inadequate communications from the branches. Consequently, he, too could only give a rough estimation of the number of Congress members in the Transvaal. Bopape estimated that in 1946, there were only 518 dues paying members of Congress in the Transvaal.⁵⁰ Nearly a year and a half later, the number of members had scarcely increased. In November of 1947, Calata wrote Xuma that the estimated number of Congress members in the Transvaal and in Natal combined was over 3,000.⁵¹

If we assume that in 1947 the ANC had roughly 3,500 members in the Transvaal and in Natal combined, between 700 and 1000 members in the Orange Free State, and between 1,500 and 2,000 members in the Cape, then we can conclude that five years after the 'Million Member Drive' was launched the total number of Congress members in all four provinces of the Union was less than 7,000.⁵² Needless to say, this figure represents one far short of the one million members which ANC leaders hoped to recruit when Congress launched the 'Million Member Drive' in 1942.

Reasons for Failure

In 1945, the ANC national executive published a memorandum which sums up the difficulties Congress faced. This memorandum, entitled "Memorandum on the Post War Reconstruction of Congress: The Political Aspects 1945," read:

The Africans support Congress. The Africans all over the country are clamoring for the Congress, but the Congress has been failing them because of a lack of consistent day-to-day leadership and practical work. The 'would be' branches mainly consist of scattered individual members who, unless something is done immediately, will remain an idea, logical supporters of Congress and not its all time members. The fact there are no offices of the Congress anywhere where members could bring their grievances and pay their dues is a glaring example of a very bad state of affairs.⁵³

In essence, this memorandum was as revealing of the state of Congress affairs in 1949 when the 'Million Member Drive' ended as it was when it was written in 1945. Clearly, there were many reasons the ANC failed to recruit a million members into its ranks during the 1940s. We argue that the most important of these were: 1) Governmental opposition; 2) ANC organizational weaknesses; 3) the ANC communications system(s), and 4) the ideology of ANC leaders.

⁴⁹ H. Selby Msimang, Secretary, Natal ANC to Dr. Xuma, 21 June 1946.

⁵⁰ David Bopape, Secretary, Transvaal ANC, to Dr. Xuma, 1946.

⁵¹ Calata to Dr. Xuma, 17 November 1947

⁵² We rounded up.

⁵³ ANC Memorandum on the Post War Reconstruction of Congress: The Political Aspects, 1945.

Governmental Opposition: How did the government interfere with ANC efforts to organize and to recruit members? To address this question, we shall briefly explore the following factors: the government's 'Native' policy; direct governmental interference with ANC activities, and the cost (difficulty) of participation for the African population.

The primary objective of the South African government was to reduce African influence on governmental policy to the absolute minimum.⁵⁴ Until 1936 Africans (and a limited number at that) could vote in only one of South Africa's four provinces, the Cape. In 1936, the Representative of Natives Act eliminated the Cape Franchise that had permitted a small percentage of highly qualified Africans to vote on the common roll. With the elimination of the Cape Franchise all Africans were reduced to the status of vote-less subjects. Kuper writes of the Representative of Natives Act that it "...provided some means, though largely symbolic, for relating Africans to Parliament through the election of four white senators for the Union as a whole, and three white members of Parliament for the Cape...."⁵⁵ This Act also provided for a Native Representative Council which considered all proposed legislation affecting Africans. But this council had merely advisory powers. The government could and often did ignore its advice. Kuper writes that the Council was "inserted between the dominant white group and the subordinate African masses, and designed for consultation with, and more effective government of, Africans."⁵⁶ It was not intended to provide Africans with a means to influence governmental policy.

The government used pass laws to keep Africans' wages as low as possible and to provide European employers with a sufficient supply of cheap African labor. These laws had still another objective: to limit the number of Africans who resided in the urban areas.⁵⁷ Work was the only legitimate reason for an African to be in an urban area. "By 1930 in the Transvaal, for example, an African entering a proclaimed urban area was obligated to report to an official within twenty four hours and obtain a permit to seek work."⁵⁸ Local authorities could and did "...expel Africans if they did not carry registered service contracts or permits to seek work."⁵⁹ Pass laws and the authority granted municipal authorities under the Native Urban Areas Act to remove unemployed Africans from the urban areas, had a dampening effect on the political activities of urbanized Africans. The Simons note that "The perpetual rotation of Africans under intensive police surveillance has a crippling effect on African labour and political organization"⁶⁰ The government took steps to reduce African political activities in the rural areas as well:

⁵⁴ Despite its ultimate demise, there is no question that the white-controlled government was enormously powerful vis-a-vis its African population during this period. Nevertheless, all power is relative. Governmental power was a function of African weakness. Looked at this way, the question becomes: "How effective were African leaders and African organizations at maximizing African potential power?"

⁵⁵ Leo Kuper, "African Nationalism in South Africa," in *The Oxford History of South Africa*, ed. Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 452

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 166-167

⁵⁸ Ibid., 169. Thompson writes: "As early as 1910 there were laws in the Cape Colony, Natal, and the Transvaal authorizing the colonial governments to create and control urban African 'locations' for Africans...."

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ H. J. Simons, and R. E. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1880-1950* (Baltimore: Penquin Books, 1969), 616

The pressures used to restrain Congress activity in the rural areas were exercised under the Native Affairs Department's system of government by proclamation. This had been extended under the Native Administration Act of 1927 and retained as the most flexible and efficient means of controlling the African population. Under this act permission was required from chiefs and District Commissioners for gathering of more than ten people in the reserves.⁶¹

Chiefs, as well as District Commissioners, of course, depended on the government for their tenure in office. Moreover, the Riotous Assemblies Act of 1914 empowered the Department of Justice to regulate African political activities in both the urban and the rural areas. Under the provisions of this act local magistrates could ban meetings. They could also prevent the attendance of specified individuals at those meetings which were authorized. This act also empowered the Department of Justice to ban individuals from specific areas of the Union.⁶² Perhaps most serious of all, from the African perspective, was that the Riotous Assemblies Act contained a clause, the hostility clause, which prohibited the promotion of ill-will between the races. This clause could be, and often was, liberally interpreted.

How did the government use its enormous powers against the ANC specifically? Within a year after Xuma assumed office, the government banned several ANC meetings. These bannings suggest that the government was taking the ANC's efforts to organize seriously. In 1943, police raided the Cape ANC Headquarters at Cradock and its offices at Naauppoort. "Buildings were surrounded by police, documents removed en masse and Congress officials and their wives searched, thus provoking anguished and outraged protests from Calata and Xuma."⁶³ In 1944, Xuma again lodged a complaint against "...the State's 'studied effort to obstruct organization and leadership amongst Africans' and the increased use of deportation orders."⁶⁴

The government's land tenure policies, its tax policies, and its labor policies made it very difficult for Africans to survive in the rural areas.⁶⁵ Many had to make their labor available to white employers.⁶⁶ But rural impoverishment did not merely make Africans more willing to provide their labor for what wages they could get in order to avoid starvation. It also, we argue, made many less willing to involved themselves in political activity. The fact that living conditions were generally far worse in the rural areas enhanced the intimidating effect of the

⁶¹ Walshe, *African Nationalism*, 388

⁶² *Ibid.* "The considerable potential of State repression remained an ever-present threat to ANC organization, being used more ruthlessly after the Nationalist Party victory of 1948."

⁶³ Walshe, *African Nationalism*, 388

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Union of South Africa, Report of Commission on Native Education 1949-1951, U. G. No. 53/1951 (Pretoria: The Government Printer)

⁶⁶ Thompson, *A History*, 164. Thompson writes that: "After 1910, the people in the reserves became unable to produce enough food to feed themselves and to pay taxes imposed by the municipal, provincial, and central governments... African farming gradually collapsed. Prosperous peasants, who had been producing a substantial surplus for the market, were wiped out. The quality of life declined for all Africans in the reserves."

threat of being endorsed out (forced out) of the urban areas. To be forced out of the urban area for any reason amounted to a virtual death sentence.⁶⁷

Even ordinary members had to behave with a great deal of circumspection to avoid being forced out of the urban areas. Yet, despite the dangers, some ordinary members of Congress made great sacrifices to further ANC objectives. What Feit wrote of one ANC member in the 1950s was equally applicable to some Congress members in the 1940s:

One volunteer in Port Elizabeth, N. Ntsangani, described his efforts in evidence at the Treason Trial: he came home from work between 6:30 and 7:00 P. M. and went to the Congress offices at 7:30 P.M., often working there until late at night.⁶⁸

Feit observes that "It is hard to imagine that there were many others willing to make such a sacrifice, and the difficulty Congress had in finding workers indicates there were not."⁶⁹ The government did not have to prohibit African political activity; it simply had to make it extremely difficult. The powers which the South African government conferred on governmental officials and the rigor with which these officials at all levels enforced the government's policies raised the threshold of effective African political participation to a very high level. By this, we mean that Africans had to put forth a great deal of effort to have any effect on state policy and even then, the influence was unlikely to be in the direction desired.⁷⁰ Moreover, the government's economic policies seriously limited the resources available to Africans in general. In effect, the government employed a policy of 'resource denial' against the African population. Grinding poverty rendered political activity a luxury which many Africans simply could not afford. In 1944, a governmental commission reported that the average African family earned 3 pounds, 5 pence less per month than was required to maintain a minimum standard of living in Johannesburg. We assume that Africans in other urban areas were no better off than those in Johannesburg.⁷¹ Writing of ANC activity in the 1950s, Feit argues that:

Since most Africans were manual workers, dependent on inadequate means of transport between places of work and homes, the amount of time and energy they could devote to political activity was severely limited. The working day, lengthened as it was by journeys to and

⁶⁷ The Simons, *Class and Colour*, 616 The Simons argue that "The fear of being 'endorsed out' of towns has been a major deterrent to mass action against apartheid."

⁶⁸ Edward Feit, *South Africa: The Dynamics of The African National Congress* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 74

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ N. Ntsangani, the ANC member Feit refers to, may represent an individual who, in effect, participated for participation's sake.

⁷¹ Union of South Africa, Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Operation of Bus Services for Non-Europeans on the Witwatersrand and in the Districts of Pretoria and Vereeniging, 1944 (U.G., 31-1944), p.13. In 1943-44, this commission analyzed the incomes of 182 African families in the urban areas. It reported that 86.5 percent of these families were well below the government's Poverty Datum Line of 8 pounds per month. (By our calculations 8 pounds sterling times 4.5 equals \$36.)

from work, left little leisure for extra activity.⁷²

Feit's observations are equally applicable to the ANC of the 1940s. Not surprisingly, throughout this period, the vast majority of Africans evinced more concern with survival than with political participation.⁷³

ANC Organizational Considerations: In a 1956 issue of *World* magazine, Xuma, no longer in office, observed that "When he had taken over as President-General in 1940, the Transvaal provincial organization was divided into seven sections, Natal into two sections, and the Cape Province into two."⁷⁴ In the Orange Free State, Congress affairs had reached such a state, according to Xuma, that the ANC could only claim Bloemfontein.⁷⁵ There were at least eleven separate groups which referred to themselves as the ANC in 1940. In effect, the ANC had ceased to be what its title implied. In other words, by 1940, the ANC as a national organization did not exist. In order to do transform Congress into an effective organization, three basic tasks had to be accomplished. The first was to reestablish national control over the provincial organizations. The second was to heal the schisms at the provincial level. The third was to establish provincial control over the branches.

In many respects the Transvaal, the most important center of Congress activities, created the greatest organizational difficulties for the President-General. In 1943, the ANC national executive held a meeting extra-ordinaire to discuss the situation in the Transvaal. The primary purpose of this meeting was the serious divisions which existed in the Transvaal African Congress (T.A.C.). Evidently, a number of individuals within the Transvaal had unconstitutionally divided the provincial Congress into several contending factions. The results were so serious that even that faction which had been attending the annual conference of the national organization was "...regarded by many as merely a section of the Transvaal."⁷⁶ The situation in the Transvaal was such that not even the National Executive could identify which section most represented Congress in the Transvaal. "There was money belonging to the province, but the General-Executive found it difficult to give it to any section."⁷⁷

In order to resolve the organizational difficulties which existed in the Transvaal, it was necessary for the national executive "...to break up the whole machinery and to declare the Transvaal vacant until an election had taken place."⁷⁸ In the meantime, the leaders of the various factions were directed to report to the President-General and to "...submit to him all funds,

⁷² Feit, *The Dynamics*, 74

⁷³ Alan P. Merriam, *Congo: Background of Conflict* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1961), 32. Merriam writes that the Belgian colonial administration in the Congo was very paternalistic. Belgian policy differed from that of South Africa in that - although political power remained firmly in Belgian hands - 'Les Belges' provided far better for the material welfare of its subjects than did the South African regime.

⁷⁴ Dr. A. B. Xuma, *World*, 28 January 1956

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ ANC Minutes of Meeting Extra-ordinary held in Johannesburg on Sunday, 31 August 1943.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

records, etc. in their possession"⁷⁹ The National Executive resolved that all moneys and records belonging to the province would be handed over to the provincial executive after an election which would determine the composition of the provincial executive committee. The decisions of this meeting were carried out. This did not, however, completely resolve the problems of schisms in the Transvaal. Almost a year after this meeting the national executive was once again concerned with this problem.

Throughout his tenure as President General, Xuma had great difficulty controlling the provincial organizations. He wrote:

We have to admit that the ANC, that much valued National liberatory movement of the African people in South Africa is marching at a very slow pace in tightening up its administration as well as co-ordinating its activities. The idea of self-consideration on and Provincial independence is perhaps, still the underlying cause for the little progress that has been made in this direction, and unless this idea is checked and combated at its earliest stages, our movement stands out exposed for being unable to escape the disease, stagnation, tribal frictions, and perpetual mal- administration.⁸⁰

In a letter to H.P. Ngwenya, Xuma wrote "In every province the inactivity of the various executives, their lack of vision as well as lack of interest in building up the organization has tended to stagnate the work of Congress."⁸¹ Xuma suggested that the provincial executives fall in with the national movement.⁸²

The failure of the provincial leadership to provide adequate direction to the branches is brought out most clearly in a letter which G.I.H. Magquash, Secretary of the Cape Town branch addressed to Xuma. Magquash wrote that the Cape town branch believed that the provincial executive was not doing its work properly. According to Mr. Maquash, "...branches were not given the leadership they needed on organization and national questions."⁸³ Significantly, he wrote that the provincial leadership failed especially in the area of provincial control of branch activities. The secretary of the Cape Town branch evinced a deep concern about the failure of the province to issue directives to the branches in regard to their role in Congress affairs. As an example of this failure, he cited a recent boycott decision:

The confusion which was displayed by our branches on the boycott decision was embarrassing and wounding to those who have the welfare of Congress at heart. We witnessed the spectacle of one branch keeping in line with the decision and another flagrantly canvassing against the decision.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Dr. Xuma in an untitled ANC Pamphlet, undated.

⁸¹ Dr. Xuma to H.P. Ngwenya, 24 March 1943.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ G.I.H. Magquash, Secretary, Cape Town Branch, Cape African Congress, to Dr. Xuma, nd.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Magquash argues that, if all branches had been sent instructions regarding what action they were to take, "...a display of this kind would have been avoided."⁸⁵ Magquash believed that poor leadership from the provincial organization was not so much the result of inept personnel as the result of the absence of a sufficient number of people who could devote full-time to the coordination of Congress affairs. "We therefore suggest that some provision be made to set up an office with a part or full time official."⁸⁶

Here Magquash put his finger on what constituted a fundamental weakness of Congress during this period: its inability to afford a sufficient number of full-time paid officials and administrative staff. But, even if Congress had been able to fully staff its national and provincial headquarters, this would not have overcome the organizational difficulties which Congress leaders confronted throughout this period. Branch-level officials tended to resent and resist directives from their provincial headquarters. Moreover, provincial organizations tended to resist the efforts of the national organization to control their activities. Throughout this period, subordinate organizations made it almost impossible for the national executive to exercise any control over their activities.

Congress Communications The ability of an organization to communicate with its subordinate elements is closely related to its ability to coordinate and control these elements. An appreciation of Congress' communication system can provide an excellent idea of Congress' effectiveness as an organization. How effective was Congress' communications system? What difficulties did Congress confront in the area of communications? What efforts did ANC leaders make to overcome these difficulties?

Feit's description of the ANC's communications system, as it existed in the 1950s, is even more applicable to its system in the 1940s. He writes: "Congress consisted of not one system, but a collection of systems, each separately steered toward a shared if ill-defined goal."⁸⁷ According to Feit, what he terms the 'decision centers' of each of these systems supplied each other with a trickle of information, and sometimes not even that.⁸⁸ Walshe writes that, despite considerable effort by Xuma and other Congress leaders, a year after Xuma's election in 1940 "There were still no detailed reports from the Provincial Congresses, but Xuma and Calata had toured in the Transvaal and Cape, with the President having exerted himself 'almost to the breaking point.'"⁸⁹ Throughout his tenure as President-General, Xuma had to put forth a great deal of effort to get a modicum of information! Such efforts were necessary because of the lack of co-operation between the various levels of Congress. The National and Provincial executives were almost totally dependent on the branches for information. All too often, this information was not forthcoming in a timely manner.⁹⁰ In 1946, Xuma wrote the Secretary of the Natal African Congress: "Will you kindly send me by return post the numbers of members enrolled in Congress

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Feit, *The Dynamics*, 117

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Walshe, *African Nationalism*, 390

⁹⁰ Feit, *The Dynamics*, 78

during the present year since the last conference."⁹¹ One can almost detect a 'pleading tone' in the requests for information which national-level leaders made to their nominal subordinates.

Even had there existed complete co-operation, however, it would have been very difficult for the various elements of Congress to exchange information and to coordinate their activities. A number of factors made it difficult to integrate the ANC's various communications systems into one comprehensive system. One of the most important of these factors was physical distance. The two major centers of Congress activity, Johannesburg in the Transvaal and East London in the Cape, are separated by a distance of 600 miles. The distance between Capetown, another major center of Congress activity, and Johannesburg is 1,000 miles. The population between these centers is sparse, rendering some sort of relay system virtually impossible. Very few Africans had telephones during this period. Of course, a newspaper would have made it possible for Congress to disseminate information to a much larger audience. This would have solved some of its 'top to bottom' communications problems. It would not, however, have had any direct effect on Congress' 'bottom to top' communications problems. Despite the efforts of Xuma and other leaders, Congress did not significantly improve its communications system during Xuma's nine-year tenure. In 1949, a Congress official, G.I. Mzamane, observed:

It has not been possible to arrange meetings of the Executive Committee on account of certain difficulties and the expense of traveling long distances. These militate against co-ordination of work.⁹²

It is only to the extent that the different elements of Congress were able and willing to communicate with each other that we can speak of an African National Congress during this period. Ironically, our discussion of Congress communications suggests that the South African Government, because of its system of paid African informers, had a far better grasp of what was going on in most Congress branches than did the ANC National Executive.

Elite Ideology: We argue that the founders of Congress intended that it promote an alliance between the chiefs and the modern, westernized elite. There is no evidence that they intended to recruit large numbers of non-elite Africans directly into the organization. During the tenure of Josiah Gumede as ANC President, 1927 to 1931, Congress leaders, possibly influenced by the rapid increase in ICU membership in the mid-1920s, entertained the possibility of transforming Congress into a mass-based organization with viable local branches. No significant steps were taken in this direction, however. Again possibly influenced by the rapid decline in the fortunes and membership of the ICU in the late 1920s, the ANC elected Pixley Seme, a conservative founding member of the ANC, as President in 1931 by an overwhelming majority of the votes cast: 39-14. Under Seme's leadership, the ANC concentrated on strengthening its ties with the chiefs.⁹³

Many observers of early ANC leaders argue that they were heirs to a political tradition, liberalism, which was ill-suited to the political realities of 20th century South Africa. In other words, early ANC leaders operated with an ideology that was not appropriate for South African political conditions. The prevailing idea held by many modern African leaders well into the 20th

⁹¹ Dr. Xuma to Msimang, 21 June 1946. Dr. Xuma wrote: "I know you sent a report for five hundred and then took another 1000 tickets. I shall be glad if you can merely report that you have enrolled another 500 or 700 new members more than the previous 500."

⁹² ANC Memorandum, June 1949

⁹³ On the other hand, Dr. Xuma was voted in as President General by a simple majority: 21 of the 41 votes cast. This was not exactly a mandate for change.

century was that as Africans became acculturated to Western culture, more and more of them would be integrated into the political system as full citizens on an individual basis. In 1910, this idea was challenged by the implications of the color bar clauses of the Union Constitution. Yet throughout the period 1912-1949, there was no direct challenge of the right of Europeans to rule Africans in Africa.⁹⁴

Lodge argues that the government took steps to mollify the petty bourgeois concerns of ANC leaders and members frightened by the increase in the number of volatile, unemployed, urban Africans in the post-WWI period. Lodge contends that the ICU grew and the ANC declined in membership during the 1920s largely because ANC leaders, in effect, turned their backs on the non-elite elements of the urban population. He argues of the ICU that "...it nevertheless attracted (and possibly diverted) massive support from Congress - an indication of considerable receptivity to political ideas among the urban and rural poor."⁹⁵ This, according to Lodge, "...freed Congress's elitist leadership from the radicalizing pressures emanating from below...."⁹⁶ Nelson Mandela writes of Xuma that he:

presided over the era of delegations, deputations, letters, and telegrams. Everything was done in the English manner, the idea being that despite our disagreements we were all gentlemen. He enjoyed the relationships he had formed with the white establishment and did not want to jeopardize them with political action.⁹⁷

The above observation by President Mandela brings us back to our central question. It is: Why did so few Africans join the ANC in the 37-year period from 1912 to 1949? We must provide a two-fold answer. First, the ANC made no concerted effort to recruit large numbers of ordinary Africans into its ranks during the period 1912 to 1942. This was the case because its leaders were not ideologically disposed to do so. Second, after the decision was made to recruit a large number of Africans into its ranks starting in 1942, it failed to do so. We argue that there were several reasons for this failure. The most important of these reasons were governmental opposition, organizational weaknesses, and elite ideology. This ideology centered around the notion that as Africans became more acculturated to western culture, more and more would be integrated into the political system as full citizens on an individual basis. Such a notion could not possibly have had much appeal to ordinary Africans who were struggling to survive under extremely harsh, politically determined conditions.

ANC Contributions

⁹⁴ Walshe, *African Nationalism*, 10

⁹⁵ Lodge, *Politics*, 6

⁹⁶ Ibid. Recall that we use the term 'effectiveness' in two senses. First, we use the term to refer to Congress's ability to recruit members in the 1940s. Second, we use the term to refer to Congress's ability to influence governmental policy. Clearly, these 'abilities' are related. In the early 1920s the ICU demonstrated an impressive ability to recruit Africans into its ranks. It did not, however, demonstrate any ability to influence governmental policy. Not surprisingly, by the late 1920s its membership had declined and it had split into several factions.

⁹⁷ Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1994), 85-86. See also p. 57 where Mandela writes that he and several others requested that Dr. Xuma find employment for them on the mines. "Dr. Xuma said he would be glad to assist us, and immediately telephoned a Mr. Wellbeloved at the Chamber of Mines...." Mandela and his companions got the jobs.

Given the failure of the ANC to attain its stated membership objective during the 1940s, what were its accomplishments? What, if anything, did it contribute to subsequent African political activities? We argue that the ANC made several significant contributions during this period. The first and most important may have been the development of a sense of purpose. Recall that the ANC was established in 1912 with a certain purpose in mind. It took 82 years to realize this purpose or to begin to realize it. Yet throughout this long period, this purpose took on a life of its own, and this purpose began to shape the behavior of more and more Africans.⁹⁸ Another contribution was organizational. Important lessons were learned from the many failures of the 1940s. In 1949, the ANC with its mere 7000 members, was seven times larger than it had been in 1940. It can be argued that the ANC became a national organization during the 1940s. This took a lot of effort on the part of its essentially moderate leadership. Recall that in 1940, the ANC was divided into eleven factions. By 1949, there was an ANC in South Africa. It was a national organization in being. Still another contribution was financial. Mandela writes that when Xuma assumed the presidency in 1940, Congress had seventeen shillings and sixpence in its treasury. This was less than four dollars at the time. Mandela reports that Xuma increased the amount to over four thousands pounds (\$16,000.00).

One of the more significant contributions was the ANC Youth League which would eventually change the very nature of the African National Congress. In 1943, Xuma agreed to the creation of the ANC Youth League as a means of recruiting young Africans into the ranks of Congress. Three of its original members were Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Walter Sissulu, who were to play such prominent roles in the events of subsequent years. Youth League leaders rejected Congress's moderate non-confrontational approach to change. Instead, they argued for direct action in the form of boycotts and strikes employing the weapons of civil disobedience and non-cooperation as the best means of winning popular support for Congress. In effect, whereas leaders such as Xuma had argued that Congress should organize the masses and then act, Youth League leaders argued that in the very process of acting, the ANC would generate mass support. Was this the case? Is there any historical evidence to support the Youth League position?

The results of the Defiance Campaign can be viewed as evidence in support of the Youth League position. In 1952, now under the leadership of former 'Youth Leaguers,' the ANC launched its Defiance Campaign which involved a national stoppage of work in protest against the reactionary policies of the Nationalist Government. Above, we estimated that in 1949, the last year of Xuma's tenure as President-General, the paid up membership of Congress was less than 7000. After the Defiance Campaign, ANC leaders reported a paid-up membership of over 100,000.

Direct action appealed to many (not all) ordinary Africans, however, such action was made possible by the development of an ANC organizational culture, increased organizational unity, money, and the development of a cadre of ANC members. My dictionary defines the term cadre as a nucleus around which an expanded organization can be built. Beginning during the tenure of Dr. Albert B. Xuma, the ANC gradually built up a cadre of dedicated members. As

⁹⁸ Political Culture: A broadly shared set of ways of thinking about how politics and governing ought to be carried out. See Walshe, *African Nationalism*, 72. Walshe writes of the post-World War period that "...the congressmen were in fact a moderating influence in a situation of general unrest..." This fact, according to Walshe, was not lost on the authorities. See also Paul Rich, *State Power and Black Politics in South Africa, 1912-1951* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), 22

mentioned above, Edward Feit writes of one ANC member that: “He came home from work between 6:30 and 7:00 p.m. and went to the Congress office at 7:30 p.m. often working there until late at night.” This was written of an ANC member in the 1950s, but he could easily have been one of those seven thousand recruited in the 1940s during the Million Member Drive. We argue that such members were the nucleus around which the ANC was able to drastically expand its membership in the 1950s.

When I first began to examine the Million Member Drive, I thought of it as a stupendous failure. Later, I became convinced that to recruit seven thousand members was a monumental accomplishment in the South Africa of the 1940s. The African National Congress, organized as an elite political organization in 1912, became a mass-based institution open to all Africans in the 1940s. By the 1980s, when all hell broke loose in South Africa, the then banned-ANC had a greater hold on the minds of the African population than at any point in its long history.

The Simons write:

The achievements of Congress were considerable. It exposed the myths of white superiority and prevented them from hardening into sacred taboos. It kept the spirit of resistance alive and prevented Africans from sinking into a condition of submissiveness, or apathetic acquiescence to white power. It awakened a national consciousness that transcended language, tribal, provincial, and class barriers. It gave the people dignity, pride in their cultural heritage, and a determination to regain their land and liberty.⁹⁹

All that by 1950 when the ‘powers that were’ thought they were at the very heights of their power!

President Nelson Mandela is correct: It was a long walk to freedom.

⁹⁹Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 616 The year 1950 is the ‘cut-off’ date of this fine study.

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