



A QUEST FOR FREEDOM

Liliesleaf and the
struggle against
apartheid in the
early 1960s

We study history to learn more about social interaction. History teaches us to make connections between things and it deepens our understanding of cause and effect.

During your visit to Liliesleaf, you learnt about a particular time in South African history. When we study history, we are always looking back and finding the connections between whatever information we have about the past.

The ability to ask critical questions and make connections in a meaningful way will help you with any project or job you do now or in the future. These skills are essential in the world today.

This booklet offers a brief account of the Liliesleaf story. The context in which this story took place is very important: it was the time of apartheid in South Africa and there were far-reaching consequences following the events at Liliesleaf. In this way, the Liliesleaf story serves as a window on an important chapter in the struggle against apartheid.



The Communist Party of South Africa (SACP) was founded in 1921 to fight against exploitation and inequality. The party was banned in 1950 by the apartheid government and had to operate in secret until 1990, when it was unbanned. During apartheid, SACP and ANC members often worked together. Today, an alliance still exists between the two parties.



Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) was the military wing of the ANC, launched in December 1961. After many years of trying to bring about peaceful change in South Africa, the ANC reluctantly decided to start using weapons to fight against apartheid. This was known as the armed struggle. With the advent of negotiations in 1990, MK was disbanded.



The African National Congress (ANC) was founded in 1912 to fight for the rights of black South Africans. It was banned by the apartheid government in 1960 and then had to organise its activities in secret. In 1990, The ANC was unbanned and in 1994, won the first democratic elections to become the governing party of South Africa.



The Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) was founded in 1958 when 300 ANC members, led by Robert Sobukwe, decided to break away and form their own party. The PAC believed that South Africa should be governed only by black Africans. Like the ANC, the PAC was banned in 1960 and unbanned in 1990. It is still an opposition party in Parliament.

THE FREEDOM CHARTER

We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white,

During the 1950s apartheid was in full force. Millions of black South Africans were affected by laws telling them where they couldn't live, where they couldn't go, who they could marry and what work they could do. They showed their resistance to these laws by getting involved in mass actions and campaigns like the Defiance Campaign. Then, in 1955, people in South Africa came up with a vision of what the country could look like without apartheid.

"We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white..."

These are the opening lines of the Freedom Charter, one of the most important documents in our history. It was created almost 40 years before South Africa became a democracy. It served as an inspiration and guide for many people who were involved in the Liliesleaf story.

Thousands of people from all over the country contributed to the Freedom Charter by sending in their wishes for a different South Africa. The Charter was launched at the Congress of the People on 26 June 1955 in Kliptown, Soweto.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What would you include in a Freedom Charter for your generation?

NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE

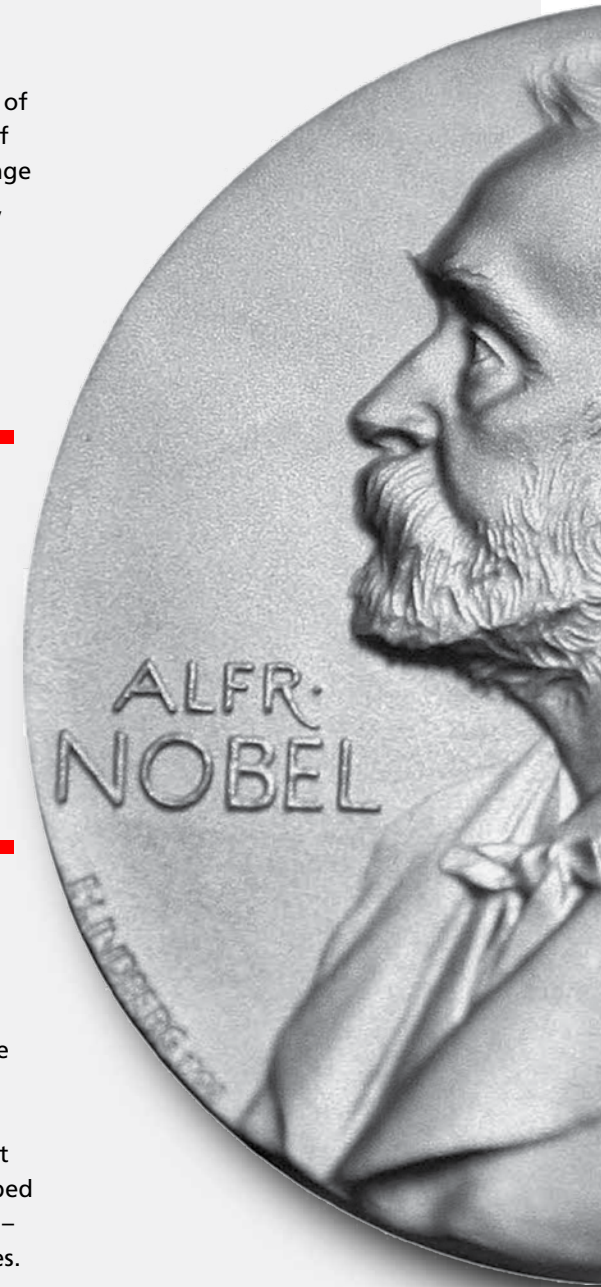
The ANC and other organisations took a stand against apartheid. Before 1960, many leaders believed that it wasn't right to fight the violence of apartheid with more violence. As a result, the ANC and its allies used peaceful methods to show their resistance. They wanted to make the apartheid government change the unjust laws of the land.



Chief Albert Luthuli was president of the ANC at the time of the Liliesleaf story. He believed in peaceful change and non-racialism. For a long time, he tried to get the apartheid government to sit down and talk to the leaders of the liberation movement – but they always refused. He said:

“Who can deny that thirty years of my life have been spent knocking in vain, patiently, moderately and modestly at a closed and barred door?”

Chief Albert Luthuli was the first South African to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. The international community saw that he showed great integrity and discipline in the struggle against the brutal forces of apartheid. Chief Luthuli never lived to see a free South Africa. Yet throughout his life, he never stopped believing that change was possible – even when he faced great obstacles.



TO SUBMIT OR TO FIGHT?

“The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit...”

Manifesto of Umkhonto we Sizwe, 1961



In March 1960, the police shot dead 69 people protesting against the pass system at Sharpeville, and injured more than 200. The massacre sent shock waves around the world. Soon after, the government banned the ANC, PAC and other political organisations, which forced them to start operating in secret. There was a growing feeling within the ANC that it needed new strategies to liberate the people of South Africa – and that these strategies would involve greater risks than ever before.

After much debate and discussion, ANC leaders reluctantly decided that they had no choice but to turn to armed struggle to fight for freedom. Umkhonto we Sizwe, or MK, the ANC’s military wing, was launched in December 1961. The plan was to attack government buildings and other structures – but to avoid the loss of human life.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What would push you to use violence?



A SECRET HIDE-OUT

Phone 835-5905/6
PARTNERS
ATTORNEYS-AT-LAW
Sec...
ANCE HOUSE,
Commissioner Sts.
JOHANNESBURG.

22-8-1961
CLIENT *V. Kgira*
Address

RECEIVED from *V. Kgira*
Address

the sum of *Two thousand Six Hundred Rand* 2600
Cents

Re: *Purchase*

Cash

Cheque

N.B.—Cheques will be
honoured by the Drawee
to client's rights.



In 1961 the Communist Party leadership realised that they needed a safe place to meet. They created a front company and through it bought Liliesleaf farm in Rivonia, Johannesburg. It was ideal: the property was quite remote and people could come and go without attracting too much attention.

Communist Party member Arthur Goldreich and his family moved on to the property at Liliesleaf, which was in a 'whites-only' area. This created a good cover: what people saw was a white family living there with their black staff. In October 1961 Nelson Mandela moved there too, disguised as a 'houseboy' called David Motsamayi.

Between 1961 and 1963, Liliesleaf served as the secret headquarters of the liberation movement. It was a place of safety for people fighting against apartheid.

Many liberation activists met at Liliesleaf, and many important discussions took place there. Amongst other things, they debated a document called *Operation Mayibuye*, which was a plan to intensify the armed struggle.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

How far would you go to support a cause you believe in?

In July 1963, several leaders of the struggle were present at Liliesleaf: Ahmed Kathrada, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Lionel Bernstein, Denis Goldberg and Bob Hepple.

SECURITY BREACH!

For Liliesleaf to serve as a place of safety, many people had to trust one another and keep it secret. Still, the police were informed that Liliesleaf was being used as a meeting place and hide-out for liberation leaders.

Struggle leader Ahmed Kathrada said:

“The truth is, we never found out who or what led the police to Rivonia that day. Every version that has been bandied about over the years is based on nothing more than speculation.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

How do we know which stories about the past are true?

The question of who gave up Liliesleaf to the police has never been answered with certainty. There were many theories and suspicions about who gave the secret away. For example, it could have been:

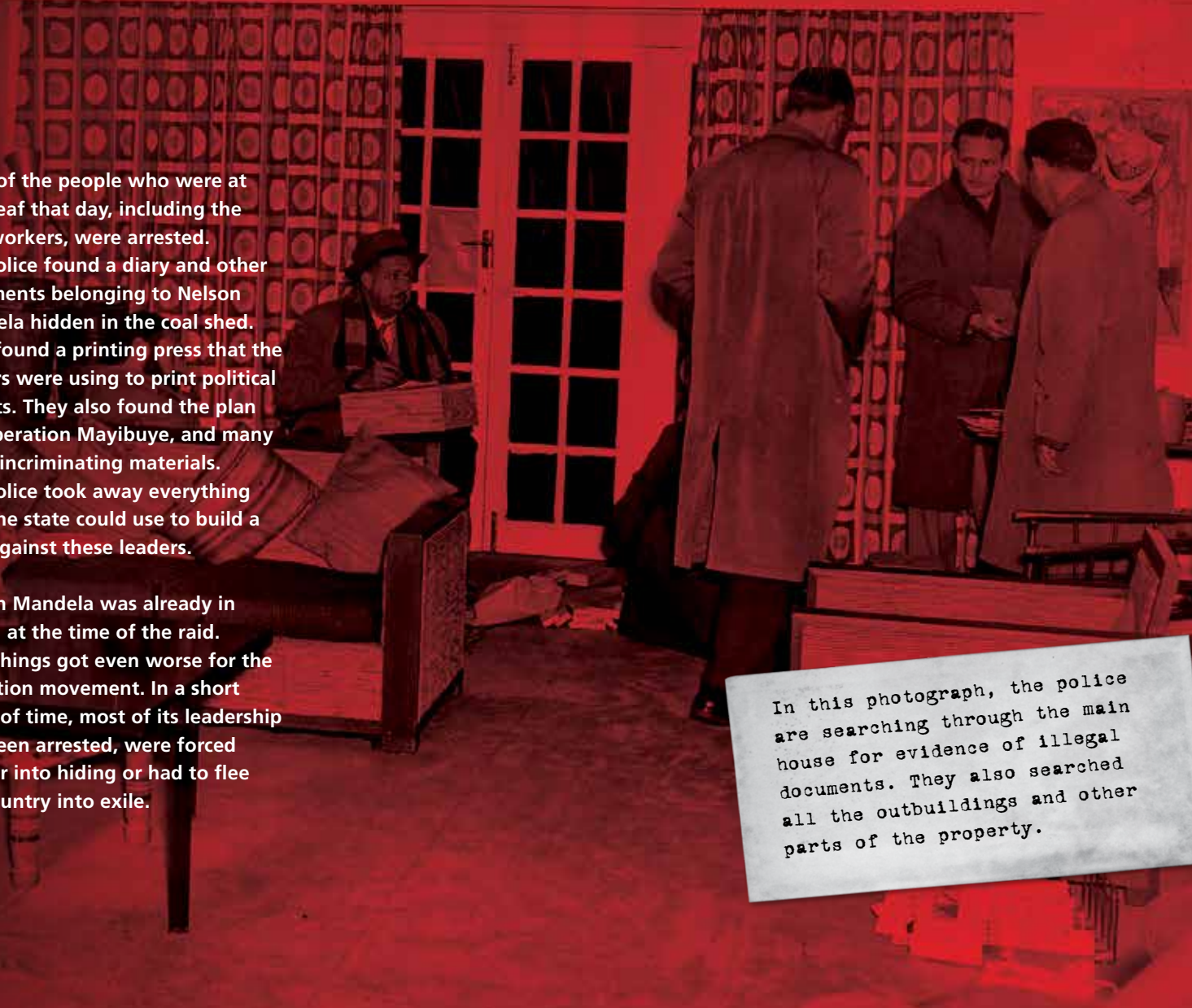


THE RAID

On the afternoon of 11 July 1963, a laundry delivery van entered Liliesleaf and drove along the driveway to the main house. The van doors swung open and policemen jumped out. Before the raid, the liberation leaders had been planning to move to another safe house. But they had agreed to meet at Liliesleaf one final time. On that day in July, they were caught totally off guard.

Most of the people who were at Liliesleaf that day, including the farmworkers, were arrested. The police found a diary and other documents belonging to Nelson Mandela hidden in the coal shed. They found a printing press that the leaders were using to print political leaflets. They also found the plan for Operation Mayibuye, and many other incriminating materials. The police took away everything that the state could use to build a case against these leaders.

Nelson Mandela was already in prison at the time of the raid. Now things got even worse for the liberation movement. In a short space of time, most of its leadership had been arrested, were forced deeper into hiding or had to flee the country into exile.



In this photograph, the police are searching through the main house for evidence of illegal documents. They also searched all the outbuildings and other parts of the property.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

This is the Marshall Square police station in Johannesburg where Arthur Goldreich and Harold Wolpe were taken after being arrested. They found themselves in custody with two other activists, Mosie Moolla and Abdulhay Jassat. Together, the four of them plotted an escape. They befriended a young guard, Johannes Greeff, and promised him money in exchange for letting them go.

After the raid on Liliesleaf, a number of activists with links to the property were arrested, among them Harold Wolpe. It was a time of widespread police action against the liberation movement and its leaders. Apartheid laws gave police the power to hold people in detention for 90 days without having to charge them with a crime.

After their escape, it was essential to stay out of reach of the police. A network of sympathisers and supporters helped to keep these struggle leaders hidden. The liberation movement relied on people all over the country to provide safe homes, food and transport for activists hiding from the police. They often risked their own safety to do so.

Wolpe and Goldreich managed to flee the country disguised as priests. All four men eventually made it to Tanzania, where they were welcomed by the ANC in exile. Their escape came as a shock and embarrassment to the apartheid government. It made the government look foolish and incompetent. At a time of many setbacks for the liberation movement, this was a welcome victory.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

How far would you go to help a friend in need?



THE RIVONIA TRIAL

With the raid on Liliesleaf, the apartheid government ended up with damning evidence against the leaders of the liberation movement. There was clear proof that the people gathering at Liliesleaf were planning actions of sabotage against the state.

Die Staat
The State

VERSES

Nelson Mandela & others

Sabotage

October 1963



The apartheid government charged ten people on 193 counts of sabotage against the state. Sabotage means planning to damage something on purpose, usually for political or military reasons. Nelson Mandela, who was already in custody at the time of the raid, became Accused Number 1. With him in the dock were Walter Sisulu, Denis Goldberg, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi, Andrew Mlangeni, Lionel Bernstein and James Kantor.

The Rivonia Trial lasted from October 1963 until June 1964. The liberation leaders had an excellent legal team to defend them, but the case against them was strong. James Kantor was acquitted before the end of the trial. When the trial drew to a close, thousands of supporters gathered outside the court to hear the verdict. Lionel Bernstein was acquitted and the eight remaining trialists were found guilty and sentenced to life in prison.

These men became known as the Rivonia Trialists.

Together, the Rivonia Trialists spent more than 250 years in prison. They sacrificed their freedom for the struggle against apartheid. By the time South Africa became a democracy in 1994, two of them had already died. Others then became members of parliament. Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected president of South Africa.

CAN ONE PERSON'S COURAGE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

During the Rivonia Trial, a legal team was hired to defend the leaders of the liberation movement in court. This team was headed by a lawyer called Bram Fischer.

Bram Fischer came from an Afrikaner family. Like others of his background, he was expected to play his role in upholding the apartheid system. But he made a choice to rather work alongside black South Africans for a free and democratic South Africa. He said:

"It was to keep faith with all those dispossessed by apartheid that I separated myself from my family, pretended that I was someone else, and accepted the life of a fugitive. I owed it to the political prisoners not to remain a spectator, but to act."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What would you be willing to sacrifice for something you believe in?

Nelson Mandela described Bram Fischer in this way:

"BRAM WAS A COURAGEOUS MAN WHO FOLLOWED THE MOST DIFFICULT COURSE ANY PERSON COULD CHOOSE TO FOLLOW."

Two years after the Rivonia Trial, Bram Fischer was himself charged with conspiring with the ANC and MK to commit sabotage. He was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. The state treated him very harshly because he was seen to have betrayed the Afrikaner people. He died in 1974 from cancer while imprisoned at his brother's house.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

This is an example of a suitcase used to smuggle anti-apartheid leaflets into South Africa. The suitcase has a false bottom that hides a secret compartment. Young British activists took great risks to travel with such material hidden in their suitcases. If discovered, they may have ended up in prison.

The Rivonia Trial drew great international attention. The names of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and other liberation leaders became known around the globe. Over the next thirty years, millions of people all over the world took a stand against apartheid.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Which struggles in other parts of the world do you feel solidarity with?

Anti-apartheid activists in other countries raised funds to help the ANC and other banned organisations. They organised protests and boycotts of South African products, spread awareness about the brutality of apartheid and challenged their own governments to put pressure on the apartheid state. Some countries offered military training to members of Umkhonto we Sizwe. Some individuals helped to smuggle weapons and other supplies into South Africa. Many people in many countries welcomed and helped South Africans who were forced into exile. In 1973, the United Nations declared apartheid a crime against humanity.



We are all makers of history. How you shape your world is up to you – and up to others of your generation. As with the Freedom Charter, it is important to be clear about your ideals. Like the leaders of the struggle, you too will need courage and commitment to turn your ideals into reality. But you can do it. Be a new generation freedom fighter.

Thuma Mina

HOW THE PAST SHAPES THE FUTURE

“The further backward you can look the further forward you can see.”

Sir Winston Churchill



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Liliesleaf®
A PLACE OF LIBERATION