

Johannesburg, 3,000 delegates assembled from all over the world. This was a turning point in the struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa. The regime's answer to the Freedom Charter, issued by the congress, was increased oppression and the arrest of 156 leaders, amongst them Nelson Mandela who was accused of high treason.

South Africa 85. Graphic by Jurg Wehren, political prisoner in Switzerland, in solidarity with the struggle



After the 21st of March 1960, when 60 people were killed and 200 others wounded in the horrible massacre of Sharpeville, Nelson Mandela decided that peaceful means were not enough to continue the struggle. In July of 1961, the leaders of the ANC decided to form a military wing. In November of the same year, the first operations in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Durban were being planned. Nelson Mandela went underground and led the military wing. Together with Alfred Nzo, the leader of the ANC, Mandela contributed to reorganizing affairs on both the theoretical and practical level. He also worked hard to support the alliance between the ANC and the Communist Party of South Africa.

In 1963, the South African intelligence service discovered the documents of the ANC, including the transitional plan of armed struggle, and linked Mandela and others to the preparation of the revolution. The attorney general requested that Mandela be hanged, but the regime did not hang him; on the 11th of June 1964, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. His last words in the court were: «Our struggle is the struggle of the African people. It is a struggle for the right to live and, if needed, I am willing to die for my principles.»

In 1969, the chief of the office of security demanded Mandela's execution for an attempted escape, but the demand was not met. In the spring of 1982, Mandela was secretly moved to Pollsmoor prison, to isolate him even more, and the government promised to release him if he denounced violence. Mandela, however, refused. The government kept repeating its offer and Mandela kept rejecting it. He demanded that the government quit violence, cancel its racist policy, lift the ban on the ANC and guarantee free political activities, so the people could decide their future.

This is the heroic story of Nelson Mandela whose pictures are not permitted to be circulated and whose teachings are banned. Yet Mandela is known by all; his pictures are everywhere; they appear in demonstrations and on the walls. He is one of the most popular leaders of the national liberation movement of South Africa. He deserves to hold a prominent position among well-known revolutionaries, not only in the African liberation movement, but in the international liberation movement as a whole.