

# World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners

Sponsor : The Anti-Apartheid Movement

Hon Secretary : Jeremy Thorpe MP

Suite 12 : 123 Pall Mall London SW1

Dr. G. Lukacs,  
Belgrad rakpart 2,  
BUDAPEST V,  
Hungary.

12th November, 1963

Dear Dr. Lukacs,

Over 5,000 political prisoners are held in the jails of South Africa. 997 have been sentenced in the last few months for political offences. Over 300 are being held indefinitely without charge and incommunicado under Section 17 of the General Laws Amendment Act 1963, known as the '90 days No Trial clause'. Some of these, many of them well known popular leaders of the struggle against apartheid, are to be tried for their lives in what is expected to be the biggest conspiracy trial in South African history. Although the indictment against 11 men in the Rivonia trial has been quashed, this is only the beginning of a series of trials of opponents of apartheid.

The Act under which they have been charged, the General Law Amendment Act, 1962 (known as the 'Sabotage' Act) has been condemned as a Nazi measure by the International Commission of Jurists. Thirty-six men have already been sentenced to death under this Act. It seems that only the loudest international protest can save the lives of these political leaders.

This was recognised by the United Nations when it adopted an unprecedented resolution calling for an end to the Pretoria trial, and the release of all political prisoners in South Africa. This resolution indicates the urgency of the situation, as well as universal apprehension that apartheid will increasingly endanger world peace.

We humbly request you to associate yourself with the campaign to free all political prisoners in the Republic by signing the enclosed Declaration. We look forward to your early reply so that the signatories can be publicly announced as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

MTA FIL. INT.  
Lukács Arch.

Jeremy Thorpe, M.P.  
Hon. Secretary.

## Declaration

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Hon. Sec. : *Jeremy Thorpe MP*

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On 11th July this year South African police swooped on a house in Rivonia, a suburb of Johannesburg, and arrested 17 men and women, Africans, Indians and whites. The police and press immediately claimed that the raid had destroyed the underground headquarters of the African National Congress, and subsequent government statements exciting white racial hysteria have amounted to little short of contempt of court. The Rivonia accused—with the exception of two men who escaped—have been held in prison ever since, without charge or access to any legal assistance, and it is now understood that they are to be tried, together with other political prisoners, for sabotage. Among them are to be Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela, former office-holders in the banned African National Congress and both popular symbols of resistance to the cruelties of apartheid.

Sabotage, in terms of the 1962 General Laws Amendment Act, covers a large variety of offences, from slogan-painting to strikes. Several of those accused of it have already been sentenced to death, while others, including juveniles, have been sent to prison for the term of their natural lives. Many political prisoners have not even been brought before the courts, but are being held in solitary confinement, under the General Laws Amendment Act of 1963. Some of these have been tortured, and one at least has recently—it has been claimed by the police—hanged himself in his cell.

Sentencing has become a mere formality, for men like Robert Sobukwe, former President of the Pan-Africanist Congress, have been tried, have duly served their sentences, and have then been further detained indefinitely. In political trials, legal safeguards for the accused have been so carefully eroded that the right to a proper defence no longer exists. Those charged with sabotage are now obliged in law to prove their innocence and are presumed to be guilty if they are unable to satisfy the court otherwise.

The men and women arrested in the Rivonia raid, with those joining them in trial, are at the centre of a government attempt to crush all resistance to white supremacy in South Africa. They would not face trial at all in any rational society; they are leaders of a popular struggle for the defeat of racial rule, for the recognition of rights regarded as natural wherever a common humanity is acknowledged. Their struggle is the struggle of all men for freedom; their trial is the trial of all men who want to be free. In recognition of this, the United Nations General Assembly, on October 11th, just three months after the Rivonia arrests, adopted by 106 votes to one a resolution demanding the immediate abandonment of the trial, and the unconditional release of all political prisoners.

Most of the accused face long, perhaps indefinite, periods in prison. Some—it is understood that the prosecution intends pressing for the penalty—face death by hanging. What happens to them is not their business alone; it is not even merely the business of all South Africans. It is the business of everyone everywhere who believes in the right of human beings to fight for the right to govern themselves. International pressure has before now, as in the treason case of 1956-61, helped men and women put on trial by the South African government for resistance to racial despotism. Without such pressure, it is doubtful if the accused would have been able to defend themselves properly and gain eventual acquittal. Recently, however, the law has been so mutilated as to make of it a parody of justice. International opinion must act again, now, to ensure the release of the accused.

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