



OR Tambo

Happy Birthday OR Tambo

Biography

Born five years after the birth of the ANC, Oliver Reginald Tambo, 'O R', as he was popularly known by his peers was born on 27 October 1917 in the village of Nkantolo in Bizana, Eastern Pondoland what is now Eastern Cape. His father was Mzimeni and his mother was called Julia. He attended primary education at Holy Cross Mission School, and then transferred to St. Peters College in Rossettenville, Johannesburg. After matriculation, he earned a scholarship to attend tertiary education at University of Fort Harare near Alice, the only university open to black citizens in the country where he studied education and science. This is where he cut his political teeth and became involved in the politics of the national liberation movement. He led a student class boycott in support of a demand to form a democratically elected Student's Representative Council. In 1940 he, along with

several others including Nelson Mandela was expelled from the University for participating in a student strike. He received his Bachelor's degree in 1941. As a consequence he was thus unable to complete his Bachelor of Science Honours degree. In 1942 Tambo returned to his former high school in Johannesburg to teach science and mathematics.

Tambo, along with Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Anton Lembede, Ashby Mda, Dr William Nkomo, Dr C.M. Majombozi and others, was a founding member of the ANC Youth League in 1943 which was launched in 1944, becoming its first National Secretary and later a member of the National Executive in 1948. The ANCYL proposed a change in tactics in the anti-apartheid movement. At that time, the ANC sought to further its cause by actions such as petitions and demonstrations, the

ANCYL felt those actions were insufficient to liberate the South Africans majority and proposed their own 'Programme of Action'. This programme advocated tactics such as boycotts, civil disobedience, strikes and non-collaboration.

In 1952 he joined with Mandela, a partner, colleague and comrade to open the Johannesburg-based Mandela and Tambo, the first black South African law firm. The former ANC President Nelson Mandela was the ANC National volunteer in chief. Tambo was increasingly at the forefront of ANC political activity, further agitating against apartheid, the caste system enforced upon the native black population by the white-controlled government.



Tambo being greeted on arrival in East Germany (1978)

In 1955, Tambo became Secretary General of the ANC after Walter Sisulu was banned by the South African government under the Suppression of Communism Act. He and other party members were arrested in 1956 for treason, though later cleared. During this period, OR married Adelaide Tshukudu, a nurse and member of the ANCYL, the couple would go on to have three children.

In 1958 OR became Deputy President of the ANC and in 1959 he was served with a five-year banning order by the government. He was sent abroad by the ANC to mobilise the opposition to apartheid. He settled with his family in Muswell Hill North of London, where he lived until 1990. He also established residences in Zambia, among other locales in the African continent and received party aid from some European countries, Holland, East Germany and the Soviet Union amongst oth-

ers. Tanzania and Zambia gave the ANC camp facilities to house trained Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) combatants.

From abroad Tambo coordinated resistance and guerrilla movements, and despite internal organisational struggles, he was able to keep the multiracial ANC intact. He worked alongside with the likes of Joe Slovo, Mac Maharaj and others. In 1967, Tambo became Acting President of the ANC, until his appointment was approved by Morogoro Conference in 1969 following the death of Chief Albert Luthuli.

When the Portuguese colonialism collapsed in 1975 the ANC stood poised to take maximum advantage of the geopolitical changes. Angola offered camp and training facilities for MK and the long-standing relationship with FRELIMO enabled the ANC to acquire diplomatic facilities close to South Africa.

In 1985 Tambo was re-elected ANC President at the Kabwe Conference. In that capacity he served also as the Head of the Politico-Military Council (PMC) of the ANC, and as Commander in Chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe. During the 1980s, with the unrest in South Africa reaching chaotic heights under the P.W. Botha regime, Tambo was increasingly able to find Western support for the plight of the people, including economic boycotts.



Working in conjunction with Dr Yusuf Dadoo he was instrumental in the establishment of the South African United Front (SAUF), which brought together the external missions of the ANC, the PAC, the SA Indian Congress and the South West African National Union (SWANU). As a result of a very successful lobbying campaign SAUF was able to secure the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961. After this initial success the SAUF broke up in July 1961. With the assistance of African governments, O R established ANC missions in Egypt, Ghana and Morocco. From these small beginnings, under his stewardship the ANC acquired missions in 27 countries by 1990. These include all the permanent members of the UN Security Council, with the exception of China, two mis-

sions in Asia and one in Australasia.

During the 1970s Oliver Tambo's international prestige rose immensely as he traversed the world, addressing the UN and other international gatherings on the issue of apartheid. Among black South African leaders, Oliver Tambo was probably the most highly respected on the African continent, in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

He returned to South Africa on 13 December 1990 after over 30 years in exile. In struggling health after having suffered a stroke, Tambo turned over party presidency to Mandela in 1991 and he was elected National Chairperson of the ANC in July of the same year. At the Conference he was also chairperson of the ANC's Emancipation Commission.

Oliver Reginald Tambo spent most of his life serving in the struggle against apartheid. During his stewardship of the ANC he raised its international prestige and status to that of an alternative to the Pretoria Government. He was received with the protocol reserved for Heads of State in many parts of the world.

During his years in the ANC, Oliver Tambo played a major role in the growth and development of the movement and its policies. He was among the generation of African nationalist leaders who emerged after the Second World War who were instrumental in the transformation of the ANC from a liberal-constitutionalist organisation into a radical national liberation movement. He died aged 75 due to complications from a stroke on 24 April 1993.

His grave was declared a National Heritage site when he died but lost the status when his wife, Adelaide Tambo died and was buried alongside him. However, their grave was re-declared as a National Heritage site in October 2012.

There is also a bust of him in Durnsford Park, Muswell Hill outside Alexandra Park School, London. In June 2013, the city of Reggio Emilia (Italy) celebrates OR Tambo with the creation of Park dedicated to the longest serving President of African National Congress. Though he passed on, on the 24th of April 1993, South Africa still celebrates his birthday on the 27th of October, his contribution to the struggle will forever be remembered.



To celebrate his birthday, here are some great quotes from the legendary OR Tambo. These were the quotes that kept the people going and fighting for emancipation. Let's remember him for the good man he was. *"We have a vision of South Africa in which black and white shall live and work together as equals in conditions of peace and prosperity."* - OR Tambo

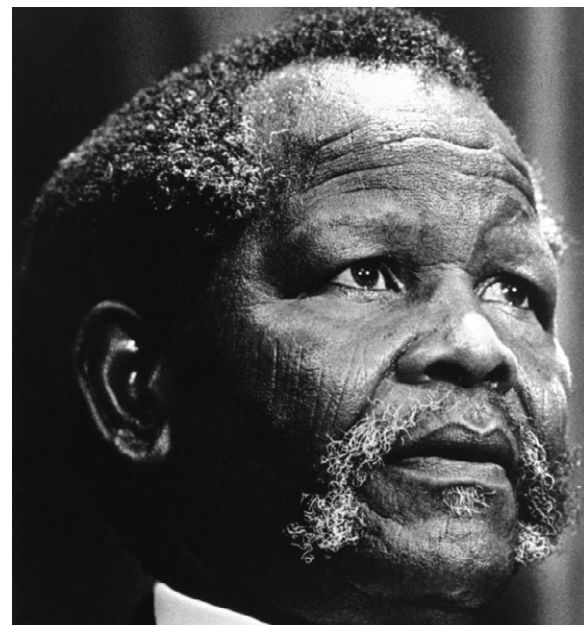
"The fight for freedom must go on until it is won, until our country is free and happy and peaceful as part of the community of man, we cannot rest." - OR Tambo

"It may be that apartheid brings such stupendous economic advantages to countries that they would sooner have apartheid than permit its destruction." - OR Tambo

"We believe that the world, too, can destroy apartheid, firstly by striking at the economy of South Africa." - OR Tambo

"We seek to create a united Democratic and non-racial society." - OR Tambo

"Racial discrimination, South Africa's economic power, its oppression and exploitation of all the black peoples, are part and parcel of the same thing." - OR Tambo



"We are the best in what we do"