

London Recruits



London Recruits



In 1909, Britain's Parliament passed the South Africa Act, which brought together four British colonies to create the Union of South Africa as a new dominion within the British Empire and required it to have a whites-only parliament. Hence it was Britain that established South Africa on a basis of institutional racism.

In 1948 the National Party came to power in whites-only elections and began to legislate for the totally racist, oppressive system they called *apartheid* ('separateness' in Afrikaans). This divided all people into four legal categories ('groups') which determined whether they could vote, which jobs they could hold, how much the state would spend on their education, where they were allowed to live etc. Marriage or sexual relations between different groups was banned.

In 1964, after Nelson Mandela and other leaders of the African National Congress were jailed for life, almost all ANC members who were not in prison had to go into exile, to avoid arrest and torture. They then had a problem: how could they continue their struggle from outside? How could they show the people that the ANC was not defeated? Their solution was to recruit young, white, non-South African



people, unknown to the regime, who could enter South Africa without arousing suspicion. Much later, they became known as the London Recruits. A meeting was held between Joe Slovo and Ronnie Kasrils of the SACP and John Gollan and Jack Woddis (International Secretary) of the CPGB, at which a plan was agreed: the London District Secretary of the YCL would select suitable members for sending into South Africa. None of those who were asked refused. Most of the London Recruits were recruited by this method. Most were young workers. Two thirds of the London Recruits were members of the YCL, CPGB or both. There were about 62 in all.

Some of the Recruits planted leaflet bombs (non-lethal leaflet distribution devices, invented in Britain) and street broadcasts (using amplified cassette players) often hitting five cities simultaneously. No-one was injured by these devices. Other Recruits smuggled huge amounts of weapons into South Africa from 1986 onwards (as told in the



London Recruits



film *Secret Safari*). Some posted thousands of smuggled letters and packages or carried messages to individuals. Some gathered information. Two kept a safe house in Botswana, close to the South African border, helping fighters to cross over. Some helped MK fighters to enter the country. Some were Liverpool seamen who made a failed attempt to land MK fighters on the South African coast. Some received training in the Soviet Union or Cuba. Three of the Recruits (all communists) were arrested, tortured and jailed. The London Recruits did some kind of agitational work inside South Africa at least once a year every year from 1967 to 1973, proving that the ANC was alive and

rallying support to MK, the armed wing of the ANC and SACP.

In 2017, the South African Communist Party, at its national congress, honoured the London Recruits with its Special Recognition Award. Their contribution is also acknowledged by a special section in the Museum of the Armed Struggle at Liliesleaf Farm, Rivonia.

