

Barayi, Elijah (1930–1994)

Lucien van der Walt

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Born in Lingelihle in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, Barayi joined the Youth League of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1948. The ANC, the country's main African nationalist organization, was adopting an increasingly confrontational position, and developing into a mass-based party. The ANC Youth League, then influenced by Pan-Africanism, and the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), played an important role in the organization's revival and growing militancy. Barayi worked as a government clerk, and joined the Youth League following a racial clash with white youths. He was active in the 1950s civil disobedience campaigns of the Congress Alliance, comprising the ANC, the Colored Peoples Congress, the (White) Congress of Democrats, the Indian National Congress, and, from 1955, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Arrested during the 1952 Defiance Campaign, he was jailed for a month in Cradock, and he was among those arrested in the state of emergency declared in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre of March 21, 1960, and held for four months.

Following his release he moved to the Witwatersrand where he worked as a mine clerk, mainly in the Brakpan and Carletonville areas. He was a founder member of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), formed in 1982, and its vice-president until his death. The NUM was a successor to the African Mineworkers' Union formed in 1930 by S. P. Bunting and T. W. Thibedi; the NUM claimed 110,000 members by 1984 (Baskin 1991), and helped establish the Congress of South African Trades Unions (COSATU) in 1985. Barayi was COSATU president until 1991, and notable for his strong stand against apartheid, and played an important role in aligning the NUM to then-underground ANC. Barayi was involved in the 1987 NUM strike – this was the biggest single industry-wide strike in South Africa to that date, but defeated and in the civil disobedience and union campaigns of the late 1980s. The ANC was legalized in 1990, and Barayi was a candidate on its list of election candidates for the first all-race election in April 1994, but died in January that year.

References and Suggested Readings

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