

0304
(9457)

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STRAIGHT TALK by Cheddi Jagan.

JOE SLOVO - A GREAT PATRIOT

The Times headlined: "Slovo, ANC veteran communist strategist, dies of cancer".

The Morning Star headline was somewhat different: "Outstanding" communist Joe Slovo dies.

And tribute came from all quarters. President Nelson Mandela, who had been joined by Joe Slovo and other activists in 1961 to form the ANC's armed wing Umkhonto we Sizwe, said: "The nation mourns the passing of a great patriot. Joe Slovo dedicated his life to the struggle for justice, democracy and freedom in our country."

The Times correspondent in Johannesburg, Michael Hamlyn, described Slovo as "the African National Congress' finest political strategist, and once the man most hated by the apartheid regime."

And, former head the apartheid regime and now Vice-President of the Government of National Unity, F.W. de Klerk, noted the role of the "most hated" man as follows: "He played a crucial role in the negotiation process, which led to our new constitution, the April election and the establishment of the Government of National Unity."

ENEMY NO. 1

Joe Slovo was deemed enemy number one because he was both white and communist. The hated doctrine of apartheid, like Hitler's nazism, was based on race and class -- racial superiority and savage capitalist exploitation. In fascist Hitlerite Germany, the Jews were the scapegoats and victims under the racist Nordic/supremacist theory, and white communist Georgi Dimitrov became enemy number one -- the class enemy of the Junker landed and capitalist oligarchy, whose instrument Hitler was.

In post-World War II South Africa, the blacks were the scapegoats, and white communists like Joe Slovo and Bram Fischer, as Dimitrov in Germany, were put in the category of enemy number one.

The fascist apartheid structure was built on three pillars -- Group Areas Act, Suppression of Communist Act and Mixed Marriages Act. The Blacks, deemed inferior, were herded into overcrowded localities, shanty towns and so-called "African homelands". Racial/ethnic inter-marriages were deemed illegal. And anyone critical of the apartheid doctrine was deemed a communist and, like white trade unionist Solly Sacks, punished under the Suppression of Communism Act. Mandela became the most famous victim of the racist/fascist apartheid doctrine.

An almost parallel situation developed in the USA in the early 1950's under racist/anti-communist MacCarthyism: Black leaders like Paul Robeson and Dr W.E.B. Dubois, fighting for civil rights against "Jim Crow" racism and many prominent white personalities were persecuted by Senator MacCarthy's red witch-hunting, anti-communist Un-American Activities Committee.

TWO-STAGE STRUGGLE

The communist strategists saw liberation as a two-stage struggle -- the struggle against colonialism and for socialism.

South Africa was deemed a special type of colony -- the Black people exploited, oppressed and suppressed under "internal colonialism". The communists like Joe Slovo worked both inside the national liberation movement, the ANC, and the social liberation movement, the Communist Party of South Africa. On numerous occasions, I met many ANC and CP leaders at the same table at the hotel in Moscow run by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Joe Slovo was behind the "Sunset Clause" which led to a peaceful transition and to the Government of National Unity, under which the black majority has to share power with the white minority for five years: a difficult period of adjustment, perhaps more difficult than that facing the PPP/CIVIC Government.

In this period, the communists do not see their role as just an opposition, awaiting their time in some distant future. They see themselves, in and out of government, as a force for practical construction -- the national democratic revolution. They are struggling for a coherent alternative, an alternative vision and effective challenge to the neo-liberal "new world-order". They want unity of the left and democratic forces, and a programmatic direction to the broad mass movement -- a programme posing a concrete, specific and implementable alternative.

According to Hamlyn, "Slovo was latterly respected on all sides as the most effective minister in President Mandela's Cabinet." He blueprinted a national plan to build a million houses in the next five years for the working people.

SOCIALISM

The "great patriot" Slovo was not only a committed fighter and strategist, but also a thinker and prolific writer. He was a one-time editor of the African Communist and had written numerous articles, countless pamphlets and several books, including No Middle Road. In his 1989 pamphlet, Has Socialism Failed, he acknowledged weaknesses of "real existing socialism", and was self-critical of the failure of communist parties to deal openly with those shortcomings.

That, however, did not dim his vision as an uncompromising critic of capitalism and a militant advocate of socialism. "The way forward", he wrote, "for the whole of humanity lies within a socialist framework guided by genuine socialist humanitarianism and not within a capitalist system which entrenches economic and social inequalities as a way of life"

DEMOCRACY

As a dedicated Marxist-Leninist, Joe Slovo saw the Unity of theory and practice and the necessity to correctly translate theory into practice. Like Lenin, he demonstrated throughout his life that socialism and democracy were inseparable.

I recall his position on socialist orientation, differing with Soviet scholars: unlike the soviet theoreticians on the way forward for third world development, Slovo insisted that political democracy was a basic pre-requisite for a socialist-oriented way.

We agreed with Slovo, based on our own experience of the PNC trying to lay the foundations of socialism -- as put in the 1980 Constitution that "Guyana was in transition from capitalism to socialism" -- under authoritarian rule.

DEDICATION

Joe Slovo was a dedicated Marxist-Leninist, with a total commitment to the struggle for national and social liberation: a struggle with many sacrifices. His communist activist wife, Ruth First, was murdered by apartheid agents in a letter-bomb attack in Maputo.

What is life all about, and what does one get out of a life of commitment and sacrifice?

In a recent TV interview, Slovo said that he would die "with the satisfaction that I've had a real experience."

"I've been involved in every phase of our struggle in the passive resistance campaign, the armed struggle, negotiations process and now government."

"What more do you want out of life?"

Yes, what more do you want of live. Slovo's life span was a remarkable contribution to human advancement. While we mourn his loss, let us emulate him."

Georgetown
January 25, 1995.

Published in Sunday Chronicle and Sunday Mirror on 29 January 1995 under International Committee, Freedom House