

# **Joe Slovo:**

**THE GUNS AND THE EXPLOSIONS  
WILL SPEAK EVEN IF THE MASS  
MEDIA IS SILENT – AND WILL BE  
HEARD BY THE PEOPLE**

**Excerpts from a Radio Freedom Interview.**

**Q: Comrade Joe, in the past few months we have been witnesses to intensified enemy brutality on trade union leaders which has culminated in the murder of Dr Neil Aggett and the subsequent arrest of other leading figures like Thozamile Gqweta, Sam Kikine and others. Well, in your opinion, why does the enemy perpetrate this brutal suppression on trade unions in South Africa?**



**Thousands defiantly march in tribute to comrade Neil Aggett.**

**A:** The reasons are clear. We know — and the enemy knows — that there is one force that can spell the destruction of the racist regime, it is the organized power of our doubly-exploited working class. This working class is the key revolutionary force because it is clear that whatever aspect of racism you examine, it is the exploitation of black labour which is at its foundation. What is behind the bantustans it is clear that they are labour reserves to be used to keep a reserve of black labour for the white-controlled industries. What lies behind the pass laws it is clear that it is nothing but black labour control. What is behind Bantu education, again it is clear that it is to prepare black labour for its role in white industry. What is behind the land policy, it is to prevent access to the means of production by blacks so that the black oppressed has only one thing to sell, and that is his labour power.

So, in General it is crystal clear that of all classes amongst the black oppressed it is the working class which has nothing to lose but its chains in the struggle for revolutionary transformation... It is they who create all the country's wealth, working together in large concentrations at the point of production. And this experience of working together teaches them organisation. It teaches them to understand the system and the collective strength which they can bring to play against it. And when the workers realize their strength and withdraw their labour, they strike at the very heart of the racist ruling class.

### **MASS STRUGGLES**

This was shown in the mass struggles of the fifties and in the last decade we have seen further dramatic evidence of this threat. The impressive strikes of the early seventies helped set the scene for the great Soweto rebellion which gained inestimable reinforcement from the national solidarity strikes which followed. Since then the black labour force has kept up and increased its militant activity on the factory floor.

And these growing actions have won for our working class really major historic gains. There is no doubt that the enemy has lost a



... Sam Kikine tortured





Oscar Mpatha on trial.

*emergence of real, independent, free and democratic trade unions amongst the black oppressed. And that is the reason for his brutal suppression.*

major round in its battles with the black working class. It has been forced to pass legislation granting-in-law-recognition to black trade unions and rights to strike in terms of the industrial legislation. This reform is not the consequence of a so-called liberal policy by Botha or anyone else. It is the fruit of achievement — it is the fruit of bitter struggles by the oppressed and it demonstrates once again that it is in struggle and struggle alone that we will win our demands...

Why this brutal suppression, then, you ask? In short the answer is clear: We can expect the enemy to use every device of state terror, to prevent the

**Q: Recently, Comrade Joe, the so-called Minister of Law and Order, Le Grange, has indicated that there has been a spate of guerilla activities this year — he said this immediately after the explosion in Durban. But the mass media inside the country has been very quiet about Umkhonto We Sizwe activities. What do you think is the objective of this silence? And how can we, as the ANC, overcome it?**

**A: Well, the objective has actually been spelled out by the enemy. It is trying, by this conspiracy of silence which it is attempting to impose: it is trying to neutralize the inspirational impact which MK actions have made in our people and indeed on the whole international community. I think it is true to say that today as never before the ANC and its allies stand completely unchallenged at the head of the liberation struggle. And there's no doubt that heroic actions like SASOL, like the attacks on police stations, on the power stations, the shelling of Voortrekkershoogte, the attacks on refineries, and so on: these have all played a most vital role in raising the militancy of our people and providing them with even greater confidence in carrying on their own mass struggles. And of course the enemy is aware of this and the mass media — or much of it — does represent the enemy thinking. But we can say that in the past sixty-nine months in**



particular the air has been filled with talk of commissions, statements which amount to press intimidation, and attempts by the authorities to deliberately keep back information on the MK strikes inside the country.

The press and other mass media have indeed been quiet about MK activity. But I believe that we can say with confidence that whatever they do, the exploits of our cadres cannot – and will not – be hidden from the people. Our underground voice will more and more spread the message of actions and news of the struggle to the mass of our people. The guns and the explosions will, I believe, speak even if the mass media is silent – and it will be heard by the people.

### CONSPIRACY

So, despite the conspiracy of silence, in any case their politicians and generals are daily exposing the impact of our armed activity. Only recently Viljoen warned the country against the growing threat of Umkhonto We Sizwe in what he called its "Strategy of Area War." And he also added that the ANC is responsible for keeping busy bigger forces in the country than are engaged in the war on the Namibian borders. Recently again, Malan's panic measures to mobilise even the old, white pensioners in defence of racism also tells our people. They understand. It tells our people about the growing effectiveness of our armed strikes.

In short, really, there is only one way of the enemy-imposed silence on the mass media. And that is to strike harder, to strike more often and to strike with even greater sophistication. And, whatever the enemy and his media does, the activities of our movement will become known to the people in every corner of our land.

**Q: Today we're beginning to see a considerable number of whites taking part actively in the struggle which has resulted in police murder of one of them in detention, namely, Dr Neil Aggett. Also, there have been persecutions, prosecutions against whites. Do you see this as something new in the South African revolution...?**

**A: Well, it is not completely true to say that this phenomenon you referred to of whites joining the struggle is new. What is new is that they are joining it in larger numbers. Because if we look at the history of our struggle – the modern struggle – in the last 30, 40, 50 years, we have always witnessed a sprinkling of whites who have made common cause with the liberation struggle. Names like Bram**





Denis Goldberg — Life Imprisonment

Fischer testify to this.

If we look at the inmates of the political section of Pretoria Central Gaol, we will find that there are numbers of white comrades who are serving life and other terms of imprisonment and who, in their activity as part and parcel of our movement, risked their lives in Umkhonto and in the underground.

But as I've said it is true to say what is new is that the number is growing... We saw very significantly during the Soweto Uprising, for the first time perhaps in our history,

where ordinary white students not part of our movement but enraged by what was being done to the black students in Soweto. We saw white students risking their social positions, risking their studies and marching together with black colleagues through the streets of Johannesburg and being spat upon by the racist police. And this augurs well for the future.

## WAR RESISTERS

There is also the growing War Resister's Movement. It is escalating. Of course, numerous of those who do not wish to join the army may do so only for personal reasons. But we believe there are large numbers who are evading the military service because they do not see that there is anything to fight for. Because they are beginning to believe that to fight against the black liberation forces is eventually to fight against their own future, and the future of their children.

Other straws in the wind that we have seen: even in institutions which have previously been regarded as the extreme citadels of reaction like Potchefstroom University. We have seen a number of expressions of opposition to the apartheid regime and activities which could be regarded as the beginning of student thinking about the justness of the cause in liberation struggle. I refer, for example to the way in which a government minister was shouted down not so



long ago by Potchefstroom students — by Stellenbosch students, when he tried to evade a question about the release of Nelson Mandela.

So, although it is still a very small minority, it is a growing force. And it is something which we as a revolutionary movement can only welcome. I believe, and I think we all believe that the situation is ripe for us to win more and more of the thinking whites — the democratic whites — for our broad struggle. And not only that, but it is becoming more and more possible to win some of them to actually show a readiness to join Umkhonto We Sizwe and to participate together with their black brothers in just struggle to overthrow the racist regime. And for all those reasons it is obviously becoming more and more important for our movement to get its policy across to these sections of potential supporters, and to go out of our way to get across to them what we know to be our fundamental programme — and that is a programme for a non-racist South Africa which will have a place in it for all who are prepared to live a life of complete and unconditional equality with their fellow human beings whatever their colour and whatever their creed.

So, I believe that this is the work which we are doing and which we should be intensifying. But in general we should not suffer any illusions. The bulk of the whites, the white trade union movement, the bulk of the whites who are in the army still represent part of the support for the ruling classes of South Africa.

### PARLIAMENT

Our job is to attempt to win away from that group as many as we can. But we must not believe that we will be able to bring about a transformation by engaging in what is known as white politics at the level of the Parliament and so on. Because history has shown in our country — and this cannot be disputed — that it is only when we, as a liberation movement, show our strength in mass struggles, in armed combat. It is only when we achieve more and more along those lines that we will win more and more whites who will in practice, begin to realize that the future does not belong to the racist ruling classes but the future belongs to the overwhelming majority of the people.

**Q: Well, finally, Comrade Joe. At the moment we have six members of Umkhonto We Sizwe awaiting execution at the Pretoria Central**



**Prison. Three of them – their death sentences have already been endorsed by the racist Supreme Court division of the Appellate Court. Now what do you think the people of South Africa can do as a force to save the lives of these six combatants?**

**A:** I believe that in the heart of every oppressed man and woman in South Africa, of every oppressed youth in South Africa, is the feeling for these comrades who are facing the gallows. In their heads there must be the conviction that something must be done to save the lives of these gallant heroes...

### **NO DOUBT**

And, therefore, there can be no doubt that amongst the people generally there is a potential for engaging in activity which will set up an all-round national demand to ensure that these comrades are not hanged by the racist regime. And, therefore, those inside our country and outside our country one of the issues which faces the people, which faces the liberation movement is to mobilize the maximum amount of support for a campaign to ensure that the racists are prevented from carrying out what will amount to the murder of heroic cadres of MK.

### **DUTY**

These comrades must not be allowed to die. And it is the duty of all of us, in the ANC, in MK, amongst the people, to do everything, everything in our power to ensure that the enemy is not permitted to carry out its intentions. We are convinced that if there is sufficient anger expressed by the people, backed by actions in support of our anger, the enemy will think twice before sending these comrades to the gallows.

So, their lives, I say to the people of South Africa, their lives are in the hands of all of us.

**They can - and must be saved!**

**By the time of going to press, three of the six comrades, i.e., Mashigo, Manana and Lubisi have had the death sentences against them commuted. (see page 24)**