

DOCUMENTS

Speeches prepared for the funeral of Neil Aggett on 13 Feb 1982

**General Workers Union's speech made on behalf of
a number of independent unions**

Comrades, I have got a lot that I want to say today because Neil was a trade union leader and I think the trade union movement must have a lot to say today and in the future about Neil's death. In the last three months the democratic trade unions and other democratic organisations have been leading a strong fight against the system of detention without trial. And now one of those leaders who was detained without trial is dead. And maybe there's a lesson in that - maybe the lesson we must learn is that whenever we are protesting against detention without trial we are protesting against the government killing our leaders. Because when people are detained without a reason and the government wants there to be a trial, then the government must make the evidence for this trial. And to make the statements for the trial it must get confessions and it must get comrades to give evidence against comrades. And when the kind of person they choose to make these statements or to give evidence against his or her comrades is somebody like Neil, then either they will lose their case or Neil will die and we must

remember that. And now Neil is dead they must get their statements and their evidence out of somebody else - who are they going to turn to now? Maybe they'll turn to Thozamile Gqweta now, or maybe Emma Mashinini or maybe Samson Ndou. And if they turn to these people to give evidence against their comrades or to convict themselves then either they will lose their case or these people will die also.

We must look at why Neil was in jail in the first place. We must look at what Neil's crime was. We must see whether Neil was a criminal or not. I think that Neil was a criminal. You can see the evidence against him was very strong. Neil was a man who believed that the workers of South Africa are oppressed and exploited and he believed the only way they could end their oppression was by organising together. So he joined the trade union movement and in a country where the police don't allow the workers to belong to the trade unions they want to, then Neil was a criminal for wanting that. And Neil didn't only believe that workers must join unions Neil believed those unions must be democratic unions. They must be controlled by the workers, and in a country where workers are not allowed to have control over anything, even over their own unions, then Neil was a criminal there as well. And Neil saw that the workers lives didn't end at the factory gate at 5 o'clock - he saw that there was no democracy anywhere in South Africa. And he saw that for democratic unions there must be a democratic country. So Neil fought for democracy in South Africa. And in a country that is ruled by a minority, anyone that fights for majority rule is a criminal in this country. So if Neil was a criminal so is everybody else in the democratic trade unions, criminals. And we are proud to be criminals like Neil.

Comrades, what crimes has the state said Neil has been guilty of? They've said through their newspapers that Neil infiltrated the unions. We say that's nonsense, because firstly, Neil was a democrat not an infiltrator. And we say that the unions don't work that way either, because the unions aren't controlled. The democratic unions aren't controlled by one man at the top. They're

controlled by the workers and there's no place for infiltrators in the unions. Comrades, the workers have said what they have thought about Neil's death; on Thursday more than 100 000 workers sat down for half an hour to say what they thought about Neil's death. And it's very fitting that the workers of all unions in all places should have sat down for Neil, because Neil wasn't an ordinary trade unionist. Neil's vision wasn't just with the Food and Canning Workers' Union, with the workers that he organised. Neil saw all the workers and one of Neil's main jobs in the trade union movement was to bring all the unions together. And the new unity that is being born in the trade union movement that has been very divided in the past is in large part due to Neil's work. And that was Neil's greatest crime comrades. Neil's work and Neil's death is what is going to bring us together. I think Neil's death is a great price to pay for the unity of the union movement, but I think that the trade unions must see now clearly who the common enemy is. We must take the example that the workers showed on Thursday. And we must take the example of this funeral and I think we must start to think about uniting the trade union movement. And that must be the monument that we must build to Neil Aggett. We don't want a big building on a hill. The Monument that we must build to Neil must be the unity of the trade union movement.

So people, we must protest at Neil's death and we must work and we must organise. We must show the government that while they sit in Parliament passing new laws about the trade union movement, that their hands are full of the blood of our heroes - we must show them that. We must show to the government that we are not an organisation just in South Africa - that the workers' movement is an international movement. We must show that to them. And we must show them that the sanctions that they fear so much in South Africa, they will come one day. And they won't come from the British or American governments, they will come when the British and American workers don't want to deal with blood-stained South African goods. That's when they will come. And they must know

that. But mostly comrades, we must do what Mr. Pendlane said - We must show the government that for every Neil they kill there will be a thousand to take his place. That's what we must show them. So comrades, I think let's say to Neil's parents and let's say to Liz, that they won't mourn Neil alone. Let them know that the workers of South Africa will mourn Neil also, but we won't mourn him by closing our doors. We will mourn Neil by taking forward his work. And let's tell Neil's family and Liz that they will not remember Neil on their own. That we will also remember Neil and that we will remember Neil as a kind, gentle person - that is what we will remember. Neil as a democrat who never wanted personal glory. That's how we'll remember Neil and I think that we should remember Neil in the words that a great comrade of Neil's used to describe him as: Comrade Oscar Mpetha who is one of the great leaders of the South African people, and who is in jail now, maybe dying in jail now. Comrade Mpetha said of Neil, he said a very short and simple thing about Neil, he said that Neil was a 'man of the people', and there's no greater thing that can be said about anybody, and there's no better person to say it about than Neil, and I think that if we remember Neil that way, then victory really will be ours.

A M A N D L A!

Federation of South African Trade Unions' speech

On behalf of the 95 000 members of FOSATU we extend our deepest sympathy to the family of our departed comrade Neil. On Thursday more than 75 000 of our members stopped work in mourning, protest and solidarity. We mourn the untimely death of a fellow trade unionist. We protest against the inhuman and oppressive security laws of the Nationalist Government. We show solidarity as a warning to the system that we, the oppressed workers of this country, we are toiling and suffering to enrich our oppressors, we the people whose labour has been divided and exploited, we who have been mercilessly uprooted and forced into

compounds, overcrowded townships and barren homelands, we the people of South Africa shall not tolerate this injustice for much longer.

Comrades, our members outside the Transvaal did not know much about Neil Aggett. What we did know was this. We knew he was a trade unionist. We knew he was the Secretary of the African Food and Canning Workers Union in the Transvaal. We knew that under his guidance that Union branch had grown and we conclude that he therefore was organising and representing the general wishes of workers. This is no small task. Organising a Union in such a way that it is truly democratic and represents the wishes of workers, developing worker leadership from the factory floor, doing these things in the hostile environment of South Africa requires time, energy, patience and courage. For the South African situation is actively hostile to democratic worker organisations. They have been hounded by police, victimised by management and actively opposed by minority trade unions. Even in a tragedy like this we see how the largest of the co-ordinating bodies of the minority unions has remained silent. Their silence speaks volumes for the kind of unions that they are.

Then he disappeared, detained incommunicado in November last year. This is where our knowledge of him ends - tragically with his death hanging in a lonely cell. No one knows what horrors caused his death. We wonder if any ever will know.

We will remember Neil Aggett from our knowledge of him. We will not accept insinuations about his activities or his character. We will not accept half baked statements claimed to be in the process of having been made by the police. And we do not accept that there can be any justification for his death.

All we know is that once there was a trade unionist called Neil Aggett, and that after being held by the Security police under solitary confinement, he was no more. Nothing more damning can be said about solitary confinement and the system it represents.

HAMBA KAHLE MFOWETU AGGETT

The Union movement stands in Tribute to one of its lost sons.

Extracts from General and Allied Workers Union's speech

Comrades and compatriots, I greet you all in the name of the popular upsurge of worker militancy which is currently wafting through the corridors of this country. Perhaps it is imperative for me to state here and now that the people's struggle against racism, oppression and exploitation is so weighty that the enemy has seen cause to resort to measures which reflect nothing but desperation on its part. In this context it is clear that one will refuse to see the deaths in detention of Mkhuthuzi Joseph Mdluli, Ahmed Timol, Lawrence Ndzanga, Neil Aggett and many more others, as accidents. In terms of this, every day is "Heroes Day" for everyday this unjust socio-economic system sifts through the ranks of its population to choose its victims. It is in the light of this observation that I wish to strongly warn the Botha-Malan regime to stop selling us dummies when in truth we know why comrade Neil Aggett was removed from us.

Comrades, I shall once more confine myself to the essential of our coming together today by paying special tribute to Comrade Doctor Neil Aggett. He rightly deserves that. At times we tend to perceive poverty as "certain people who unfortunately are poor", and not as a reflection of injustice. Comrade Neil saw many diseases as evidence of poverty. Lapa Munnik, the so-called Minister of Health will tell you that diseases are "natural". Comrade Neil was far sighted enough to see that treatment in the hospital does not affect the causative factors of diseases. It is for this reason that his commitment in the workers' struggle must be seen as an act aimed at creating a healthy home for all South Africans. I therefore submit that those who are responsible for his death have committed a crime against mankind. In the same breath I would make a recommendation to all freedom loving people in South Africa: "Petty differences within the ranks of the people must be submerged to the cause of true humanity. Let us stand and strive together to dislodge the enemies of peace and prosperity".

Comrades, I would like to dispel the myths which hold that the

problem in this country is one of Blacks against Whites. The stark realities of our situation prove beyond any shadow of doubt that the system which all men and women of honour and integrity abhor, transcends race and colour. When I look at puppet Kaizer Matanzima and his hoodlums who terrorise people day in and day out, I see in them a group of individuals who have given themselves body and soul to the service of capital and oppression. When I look at traitor Patrick Mphephu, the man who is still to account for the death of Tshifhiwe Muofhe, I see in him a man who would rather die than settle for a South Africa which belongs to all live in it. Gatsha Buthelezi would not agree with Sammy Adelman on the demand that the doors of learning and culture be open to all. Therefore, I want to make it abundantly clear that to see the struggle in this country as a situation where blacks are fighting against whites is tantamount to assuming that black people have reached a consensus about the situation. I for one, would be legitimately hesitant about making such a baseless, unscientific and cock eyed assumption. If colour was really an issue, Comrade Neil Aggett would still be alive today.

In conclusion dear Comrades, I would again make a call to all those who, like Neil Aggett, uphold the principles of a genuine democracy, to rally to the defence to the interests of the working class movement in this country.

I feel there is a dire need for us to unite and march towards a South Africa which will banish famine and land hunger, a South Africa which will banish slums, a South Africa which will ban detentions and banning orders. The way towards that South Africa - the South Africa which we shall all cherish and love, is guided by the "FREEDOM CHARTER".

"AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!"

Extracts from TUCSA statement published in the Garment Worker in response to protests over Neil Aggett's death in detention

TUCSA is perturbed about the recent death in detention of a

young detainee (as it would be about the unnatural death of any person in detention), and it therefore calls for the legal enquiry into the circumstances concerning this event to be dealt with as efficiently and speedily as humanly possible.

TUCSA cannot however, comment on the background, occupation, trade union activity, or any other matter concerning this late detainee, since TUCSA has no knowledge whatsoever in relation to these factors.

TUCSA unhesitatingly distances itself from any calls for industrial action in connection with this specific tragic event, because it cannot subscribe to strikes, work stoppages and other forms of industrial activity not connected to the employer/employee relationship, and also because it does not believe in any hasty and emotional reaction to events which have not been completely clarified.

Equally, TUCSA does not believe in supporting negative actions which do not find favour with the workforce in general, and which will only have the effect of discrediting all sections and elements of the labour force. Its view is that engaging in actions which result in the destruction of labour's credibility, is far from positive activity.

TUCSA is always conscious of the fact that the interests of the workers concerned are of primary importance, and TUCSA does not lightly call for actions which could result in hardship and suffering for the workers involved. TUCSA therefore distances itself completely from the various worker organisations who have recently committed themselves to have no contact whatsoever with any Government Department, since TUCSA (as the major element in the organised trade union movement) is deeply committed to the welfare and socio-economic progress of all its affiliated unions' members, and the workers in general.

TUCSA also cannot be identified, in particular, with statements that have been made by some organisations that the Department of Manpower is condoning the vendetta being waged against the trade unions by the Security Police, since it has seen no evidence to

support these extravagant allegations.

TUCSA also deplures statements to the effect that persons should not be brought to trial if they have committed an offence, since what is evidently being sought as an alternative is "the abolition of all detention laws". As already stated on numerous occasions, TUCSA believes in the rule of law, since to subscribe to anything less, and to strive for the introduction of something else, can only lead to chaos and anarchy.

TUCSA must also express its deep-felt concern at recent hasty and ill-considered statements by some individuals, certain political interests, and some employers. Many of the statements that have been made have done nothing to assist in calming our present volatile labour relations climate. South Africa's rapidly developing labour and industrial relations systems, which are experiencing all the expected stresses resulting from a dramatically changed dispensation, needs the inputs of calmness, moderation, understanding and goodwill (if the systems are going to succeed) rather than contributions of an emotional and irresponsible nature.

TUCSA repeats its conviction that the interests of its membership, the workers in general, and all of South Africa's manifold peoples, can best be achieved through orderly and progressive socio-economic advancement, by subscribing to utilising, and participating in sound and practical labour and industrial relations systems. Any activities which seek to sabotage these socio-economic goals will be vigorously resisted by TUCSA, and its rapidly growing non-racial and non-sectional membership.