

# HEROES OF OUR REVOLUTION

Bram Fischer (1908-1975)

• NOLUTHANDO NKOSI

The glorious pages of our proud history of struggle are inscribed with the names of great men whose commitment and bottomless courage uncompromisingly rip across colour barriers and quickly expose racism and solely racialistic conceptions of the South African revolution for what they are; unpardonable absurdities.

When the people of South Africa declared in their majority, vowing to pursue the freedom demands enshrined in the Freedom Charter that: "... we, the people of South Africa, black and white together - equals, countrymen and brothers - ... pledge ourselves to strive together sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes set out here have been won," they were not only acknowledging the immense role played by patriotic whites - communists and non-communists alike - for decades in the struggle for the democratisation of social life in our country, but were also closing the door to all forms of



racialist prejudice and to would-be patriots who hide behind narrow-nationalist phrases. When it come to a revolutionary appraisal of our history of struggle, names of great revolutionary giants of the calibre of Bram Fischer come to the fore.

Who is Fischer?

A great patriot and revolutionary, Comrade Bram Fischer, "... expressed his indignation (against Apartheid - Ed) in passionate identification with the millions of Black South Africans. He refused to accept the tenets of a society which

claims that one human being is of lesser value than another. He accepted no half truths nor half measures. In his judgement, Apartheid is totally evil and his life a total rejection of all that it stands for" - Sechaba Vol. 9 No. 2 of 1975 wrote of him in this highly emulative manner, hardly suspecting that within three months later this patriot was to die a brutal death - a victim of 'Hitlerite' bestiality reincarnated in Pretoria.

Bram, as he was popularly known, was born into an Afrikaans family of high standing. He was the son of a judge President of the Orange Free State. An Oxford graduate and one of South Africa's most excellent barristers, Bram was called to the Bar Council in Johannesburg where he practised. As Queen's Counsel, he led defence in a number of political trials including the Treason Trial of 1956-1960 and the famous Rivonia Trial of 1964 - a year during which he was also to be charged under the Suppression of Communism Act. In January 1965 he went underground to continue with the struggle in accordance with the political ideals that he cherished. To quote him:

"I am on trial for my political beliefs and for the conduct to which those beliefs drove me. Whatever labels may be attached... I engaged upon those activities because I believed that, in the dangerous circumstances which have been created in South Africa, it was my duty to do so."

### **STAUNCH COMMUNIST**

At the time of his trial that opened on March 28, 1966, Bram Fischer had been a staunch communist for many years, having joined the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in the 30s. He was motivated by his sincerity and genuine desire to see South Africans of all races living together in harmony, each having a stake in a democratically constructed order. The path he had chosen was not an easy one. Many excited liberals before him, moved by the want to impress and gain a name, tried and failed and naturally were to decline into the myopia of racist prejudice. Comrade Fischer was no such man. Nay, he was made of different stuff.

He had a proud record as a fighter in the ranks of the communist movement. Following the great African mine workers' strike of 1946 he was put on trial together with other Party stalwarts from the Central Committee, charged with having 'incited' the workers to strike. In the fifties, after the

CPSA had been declared illegal both Bram and his wife Molly were included in the pernicious list under the Suppression of Communism Act. They were immediately barred from attending political gatherings and taking part in political activity of any sort.

For many years the Fischer couple were to remain very popular among the black people who came to know Bram as a barrister and a man of great modesty and good will. Scores upon scores of Blacks consulted him to assist in disentangling them from the problems imposed upon their shoulders by the evil practices of apartheid. The Fischers were not slogan chanters. They even adopted an African child in defiance of the racist laws and brought her up in their home.

At no stage did Bram Fischer make his membership of the Communist Party a secret. At the time of his arrest in 1964 he was Deputy Chairman of the underground South African Communist Party (SACP). About his attraction into the Communist Party Comrade Fischer during the trial had this to say:

"... the willingness to sacrifice, was a matter of personal observation... The Communist Party had already for two decades stood avowedly and unconditionally for political rights for non-whites ... it was always the communists of all races who were at all times prepared to give of their time and their energy and such means as they had, to help those in need and those most deeply affected by discrimination; ... who helped with night schools and feeding schemes, who assisted trade unions."

### **HEROIC EXAMPLE**

Bram Fischer was a man of unbreakable spirit. The fascists had dragged him to prison with the hope that he would be drained of his convictions. But he was not one to be broken easily and relinquish his principles. He did not submit to the tortures of prison and clamour for mercy. "Were I to ask for forgiveness today I would betray my cause." Such firmness during a moment of ordeal attests to his moral strength characteristic of committed revolutionaries such as himself. Young South African revolutionaries will be inspired by his heroic example.

At the end of what the Verwoerd government staged as a trial, Comrade Fischer was condemned to life imprisonment at

Pretoria Central Jail. The racists were bitter with him. An Afrikaner and a man of letters. He could easily have become South Africa's Premier or Chief Justice. But his high sense of fairness and love for his country and people led him to choose the noblest of paths - that of a revolutionary transformation of the social system in South Africa.

In prison he was to develop an incurable cancerous ailment. All the time the fascists knew that his condition was extremely bad but they did absolutely nothing to assist. They loathed him even more when he was their helpless prisoner. To them, he was not one to be saved, but one to be left to die in the grip of the killer disease. In this way the Pretoria sadists murdered one of the greatest of South African patriots, a true son of the people.

Today, in the year of the 6th Anniversary of his mourned passing away, we remember him with great agitation, vengeance on our lips. We'll remember him in our work and in struggle. Let those who murdered him shiver at the approaching hour of reckoning when all shall be avenged.

**LONG LIVE THE MEMORY OF ABRAM FISCHER!**

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## **DAWN politiXword No. 5 - Answers**

**ACROSS:** 1. Salvo 3. Four 6. Kotane 8. Bad  
10. Ultra 12. NATO 13. Harassing  
17. National 18. AB

**D O W N:** 1. Sekhukhuni 2. Via 4. USA 5. Jet  
7. Tutor 8. Brain 9. Doom 11. Ass  
14. Amin 15. Song 16. KGB

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## **APOLOGY**

DUE TO UNFORSEEN INCONVENIENCES THE EDITORIAL STAFF APOLOGISES FOR TEMPORARILY SUSPENDING PART TWO OF THE INTERVIEW WITH COMRADE THABO MBEKI.