

WHAT I HAVE KNOWN OF HIM

A 70th birthday tribute to Nelson Mandela
of Umkhonto

The name of this great patriot of the liberation struggle in South Africa has become not only a household word in our country and the world at large, but also a synonym of freedom, peace and social progress. In a very real sense Comrade Nelson Mandela is a physical embodiment of the highest of all ideals — the liberation of mankind.

His gait, the sideway tilt of his head, the smile he wears (he can also be very angry, I'm told), the sparkle in his eyes and the stretch of the finger when he is making a point — all leave you with the impression that you are indeed in the company of a great man. That was my feeling when I shook his warm hand for the first time in Robben Island.

He is not the only giant in the leadership core of our revolutionary movement. We have them by the bucketful. But you will not fail to discern him amongst the indefatigable stalwarts that lead the only vanguard organisation of the oppressed people of our country — the ANC.

ROBBEN ISLAND

The conditions under which we survived on Robben Island were utterly deplorable to say the least. The boers were out to smash us politically and physically. But Nelso — popularly called by his clan name, Madiba, by all the comrades, together with his colleagues in the Rivonia trial, rose above that situation to inspire the entire prison population.

With him there was no question of postponing the struggle for a better moment outside the prison gates. The struggle against the racist authorities was in no way apart from the struggle for the liberation of our country. He

merged the struggle into a single entity.

During the time I was in prison he had written a series of letters to the fascists Pelser, Vorster and Kruger. In all this correspondence he was not raising issues of a personal nature. He had a lot of such issues to raise if he would. Winnie Mandela, for



instance, was being preyed upon by all sorts of thugs that the racist regime was commanding, the driving idea being not so much to harass her as to demoralise a helpless Mandela in his "kulkut" (single cell).

On the contrary Madiba wrote to the boer racist leaders to address the fundamental issues of freedom and peace in our country. He pursued firmly but gently the line that

ON THE ISLAND

by Steve Tshwete, the Army Commissar
to we Sizwe

the only reasonable alternative open to the terrorist clique was the national convention in which all the people of our country would participate in the formulation of a non-racial democracy in one united South Africa.

There is no way in which the racist regime can ever triumph over the victory of the libe-



ration movement. This conviction was beautifully encapsulated in one other letter which he had written to one of the sinister ministers of justice. I cannot remember which one of them was the recipient. But he said words to this effect: *neither you the Afrikaner, nor I the African can estimate the amount of blood that will have to be shed before we inevitably sit down and reso-*

lve the problems of our country."

ABSOLUTE DEDICATION

Such is the grandeur of the vision of the man who celebrated his 70th birthday in the apartheid cells of racist South Africa. His selflessness and absolute dedication to the cause of freedom runs in every vein of his body.

I remember an occasion when Johannes Coetzee who was heading the security police at that time came to him to report that Winnie's political activity was so embarrassing that the police would event-



ually have no option but to take strong action to clip her wings. As a husband, Coetzee told Madiba, he would have to intervene and order the wife out of politics. Madiba told this super-policeman that Winnie's political activities were not reduceable to the family arena. Winnie is a leader of our people, and in that capacity she is free to exercise her leadership role whether that embarrasses the police or not.

Of course Jimmy Kruger took action. He banished Winnie to Brandfort and

gave a press interview the message that press interview the message that he was taking her "from a situation of unrest to a situation of rest" — a message intended for the ears of Madiba. But he saw the regime's move not as a particular accidental action directed at a recalcitrant activist. On the contrary his view was that it was part of the general policy which the fascists have implemented and continue to implement against scores of militants all over our country. Winnie was no exception.

On several occasions Matanzima had written to him saying that his continued incarceration was a matter of serious concern in the circles of the Thembu royal clan. Whilst appreciating the anxieties of his relatives, he stuck to his view that the matter of his release was something completely out of the family ambit. It was and always will be a political question demanding a political solution.

After accepting his independence in 1976 the arch boss boy of Pretoria — the ready grease-boy of the machinery of oppression and exploitation — Kaiser Matanzima did not relent. He wrote to Madiba, obviously at the instance of Pretoria, expressing desires to visit Nelson for the purpose of explaining why he had opted for the fraudulent independence. Nelson flatly rejected the visit and stated that if Matanzima was to go and see him

then such a visit would have to be confined strictly to family issues.

REAL LEADER

A real leader of his people, an ardent lover of humanity, Nelson Mandela should not be left to languish in those apartheid dungeons longer than now. Everything within the reach of the movement he helped to build and strengthen, everything within the power of the army he played an outstanding role to found and lead as its first Commander-in-Chief should be fully exploited to secure his release and the freeing of all political prisoners in our country.

In the prosecution of that task, the ANC and the mass democratic movement of our country will count, as they always do, on the support of the international community. Across the face of our country and throughout the world, his 70th birthday should be observed in the most appropriate and fitting manner: a fighting birthday of one of the greatest patriots of our continent, the leader of the ANC and the oppressed and democratic people of South Africa.

A thousand years, Madiba!! Revolutionary greetings from all detachments and units of our glorious army inside and outside the country!

We who are confined within the grey walls of the Pretoria regime's prison reach out to our people. With you we count those who have perished by means of the gun and the hangman's rope. We salute all of you -- the living, the injured and the dead. For you have dared to rise up against the tyrant's might.

Even as we bow at their graves we remember this: The dead live on as martyrs in our hearts and minds, a reproach to our disunity and the host of shortcomings that accompany divisions among the oppressed, a spur to our efforts to close ranks, and a reminder that the freedom of our people is yet to be won.

We face the future with confidence. For the guns that serve apartheid cannot render it unconquerable. Those who live by the gun shall perish by the gun.

— Nelson Mandela.