

LET THE LIVING REMEMBER

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Two decades ago, on November 6, 1964, the regime executed three patriots of our land: Vuyisile Mini, Zinakile Mkaba and Wilson Khayingo. Despite the many appeals for clemency, the hand of the racist hangman could not be arrested.

Mini, Mkaba and Khayingo, all members of the Eastern Cape High Command of MK, occupy a special place in the hearts of the soldiers of Umkhonto We Sizwe. They were the first cadres of our army to be murdered 'legally'. Besides, their conduct in the hands of the enemy, and their defiant march to the gallows, singing freedom songs, added to the annals a page of an undying example of heroism that remains an inspiration to many soldiers of the people's army.

Vuyisile Mini was a singer, actor, a poet and a revolutionary. He was born in Port Elizabeth in 1920 and joined the African National Congress at the age of seventeen. He actively participated in the struggles against mass removals in Korsten where he lived. As a volunteer during the 1952 Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws he entered railway property reserved for whites. He was

arrested and sentenced to three months imprisonment, an arrest that earned him the loss of his job as a packer in a battery factory.

ORGANISER

In 1952 he became a full-time organiser of the dockworkers. It is largely due to his contribution that the P.E. Stevedoring and Dock Workers Union affiliated to SACTU in 1956.

When the regime sought to behead the ANC and the broad Congress Movement through the infamous Treason Trial, Vuyisile Mini was one of the 156 leaders arrested and charged with treason. The basis of this charge was the formulation and adoption of the Freedom Charter by the people. In one of the longest trials in South Africa's history, the racist state eventually lost its case and all the accused were acquitted in 1960.

During the same year he was instrumental in the formation of the General Workers Union in P.E. When the Bay Transport increased bus fares in 1961, Mini led the resultant bus boycott.

ARREST

On 10 May 1963, while working at the Port Elizabeth Local Committee of SACTU, Vuyisile Mini was arrested with two other prominent ANC and SACTU leaders — Wilson Khayingo and Zinakile Mkaba — for committing acts of sabotage and complicity in the murder of a police informer, Siphon Mange, in January of that year.

Their trial was in Port Alfred, far from home. Legally they couldn't be defended properly because the racists forbade their lawyers to leave Durban. They were sentenced to death in March 1964.

Letters smuggled out of prison from the three patriots reveal abortive attempts by the enemy to break them. "On the 2nd of October"



Mini wrote, 'Captain Geldenhuys and two other policemen came to see me... They said there is still a chance for me to be saved as they knew I was the big boss of the movement in the Eastern Cape. I must just tell them where the detonators and revolvers were, and they would help me. I refused.'

I REFUSED

They asked me about Wilton Mkwazi. They said I saw Mkwazi in January 1963. I said yes. They asked me if I was prepared to give evidence against Mkwazi. I said I was not. They said there was a good chance for them to save me from the gallows if I was prepared to assist them...

They asked if I would make the 'Amandla' salute when I walked the last few paces to the gallows. I said yes. After a few more jokes of that nature they left.'

IF NECESSARY

Mkaba wrote, 'They said they were feeling sorry for me and were prepared to help me if I would tell them where the detonators and revolvers were. When I

I MUST DIE

said I knew nothing about that, they said they would be pleased if I told them anything about sabotage that I knew of, and if I am prepared to help them there was still a chance of being saved. When I denied knowledge of anything, they asked if I was prepared to die for nothing. I told them if necessary I must die.'

I REFUSED TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THEM

Khayingo

Khayingo wrote that they said they came especially to see him because if

he made a statement that was satisfactory then it was not too late to save him. "I refused to have anything to do with them."

VUYISILE MINI'S LAUGH WAS UNFORGETTABLE

Ben Turok, a fellow prisoner and Secretary of the South African Congress of Democrats at the time, wrote in Sechaba: "Vuyusile Mini's laugh was unforgettable. It rolled out in concentric sound-waves riding loud over the lesser noises around him, infecting everyone with his effervescent good humour. His heavy bass was unmistakable. It made one aware of his presence in a crowd when even those deep in conversation smiled involuntarily in unconscious response to such healthy mirth.

It was through his laugh that I became aware that Mini had arrived in the condemned section of Pretoria central prison. Isolated as I was in a tiny cell in the adjacent segregation section of the prison, and finely sensitive to the slightest variation in the murmur of life, Mini's incongruous laughter rolled out and it was apparent that Mini and his companions were situated in the 'last week

cell' of the condemned section in B2 on the second floor. I then remembered that Vuyisile Mini and his two comrades, Zinakile Mkaba and Wilson Khayingo of the Eastern Cape High Command of Umkhonto We Sizwe, had been committed for trial for ordering the death of an informer.

DARING

I marvelled at his daring. No one laughed out loud in central prison. It was absolutely forbidden. Subdued by the grey half light that filtered through the barred mesh, and ground down by the harsh presence of warders, it was understood that a prisoner must remain silent, especially in death row, where even the collective of 60 odd 'condemned' was insufficient to break through the iron rule of deathly stillness.

But Mini dared. And his comrades joined him in defiant mirth, thrusting

aside with unconcealed scorn the atmosphere of crushing gloom that clung to the massive grey walls. And as the three of them settled into their new surroundings, there issued out of the window of the 'last week cell' beautiful melodies of traditional African music rendered in the most perfect unison of long practiced harmony.

It was in the early evenings that they enjoyed their singing most. With the harsh clanging of iron gates reduced to a minimum; with only a skeleton prison staff on duty, and the prisoners at rest on thin mats in their cells, Mini and his comrades sensed the appreciation of their audience and gave forth in the subtlest cadences, telling in song the heroic stories of Xhosa history...

When their fate was finally communicated to Mini and his colleagues their defiant response was sounding through the corridors of the prison. "AMANDLA — NGAWETHU" they roared triumphantly, defiantly challenging with the most deep conviction the hateful oppressor in the very seat of his power.

LAST EVENING

The last evening was devastatingly sad as the heroic occupants of the death cell communicated to the prison in gentle melancholy song that their end was near. Even the heavy brooding stone seemed to respond to their mood by dampening the echoes of clashing gates and jarring keys. It was late at night when the singing ceased, and the prison fell into uneasy silence.

I was already awake when the singing began again in the early morning. Once again the excruciatingly beautiful music floated through the barred windows, echoing round the brick exercise yard, losing itself in the vast prison yards.

And then, unexpectedly, the voice of Vuyisile Mini came roaring down the hushed passages. Evidently standing on a stool, with his face reaching up to a barred vent in his cell, his unmistakable bass voice was enunciating his final message in Xhosa to the world he was leaving. In a voice charged with emotion but stubbornly defiant he spoke of the struggle waged by the African National Congress and of his absolute conviction of the victory to come. And then it was Khayingo's turn, followed by Mkaba, as they too defied all prison rules to shout out their valedictions.

Soon after, I heard the door of their cell being opened. Murmuring voices reached my straining ears, and then the three martyrs broke into a final poignant melody which seemed to fill the whole prison with sound and then gradually faded away into the distant depths of the condemned section."

They gallantly marched to the gallows singing Mini's famous song: "Nants' indod' emnyama Velevutha".

It was this legacy of collective heroism left to us by Mini and his comrades that inspired Mahlangu, Mosololi, Motaung and Mogoerane never to flinch for a moment before the racist hangman. It is also the unending source of inspiration for MK cadres as they continuously engage the enemy in various parts of our country, avenging their death.



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