

1. — years ago, Mandela wrote: No easy walk. Perhaps at that time, even he did not foresee how hard the walk would be. It was not then as hard as it would become soon thereafter. In 1960, illegality; bans, house arrest. Soon after, Sabotage Act; News blackout, detention without trial, torture. Organisations collapse, dissolve, people disappearing into prisons, exile, death.

It was as though our walk to freedom, hard as it was, had suddenly run into a roadblock - a great armoured tank which blocked our path. And gradually that tank had begun to move slowly downhill towards us, driving us back, rolling over us and our organisations, crushing the bodies and the spirits of our people. For a while it seemed untoppable; push as we would against it, it rolled steadily down on us, over us.

2. Twenty six years ago, Mandela and his colleagues - Sisulu, Mbeke, Mhlabi, Kathrada, Motsaedi, Mhlaba, Goldberg and Bernstein stood together in the Court at Rivonia.

They decided that - come what may - that armoured juggernaut must be stopped! They would form a line across the road, dig in their heels, and strain their muscles, stretch the last drops of their strength to push against the tank, and stop its advance. No easy walk! ^{IF LEFT ALONE!} It was a gesture. a heroic gesture if you like. But a gesture. They would dig in and say - thus far and no further. They would hold the line. They would break the silence and ~~to~~ tell the country that the fight back against the armed terror had begun - that an armed force Umkhonto had been founded; that the people could stop the tank and force it back up the hill. They would place their lives on the line, ~~and~~ in order to block the road!

3. Rivonia was the turning point - and the men whose release we celebrate signalled the turn when they dug in their heels. ~~Slowly~~ They were not alone. Given the example of self-sacrifice, of nerve, of courage, - at first slowly, later in greater and greater numbers, people came out of their hiding places, recovered their courage, & joined the ranks of those pushing against the armoured tank. Gradually, as the army of resistors grew - 100s, 1000s, gradually the tank began to be pushed back, into reverse, up the hill. This too was No easy walk!

People slipped and were injured, crushed, killed beneath the wheels. But still the army of pushers grew & grew. Not only from inside the country but from outside.

2.

All over the world, supporters began to gather, to pass on assistance, cheers of encouragement, aid, support - no one perhaps more than people of Tanzania!!

Together, over the years, while Rwanda men remained dignified, resistant, refusing to yield in jail - the tank has been pushed back, & back and back - up the hill. The resistance by its armed occupants has been fierce - firearms, murder, shooting without respite. But still the people stood. And pushed. And rolled the armed monster back, up the hill.

4. And now, at last, these Rwanda men have come to the crowning point of that - hard and rocky walk to freedom. They have fought their way through the SA prison system, breaking its worst brutalities by united struggle, winning new & better conditions not just for themselves but for 1000's of political prisoners and ordinary, non-political victims of SA laws. They have educated a generation of young activists and people's leaders, who have graduated from the University of struggle, on Robben Island. They have remained an inspiration for all our people down the years as a symbol of resistance - refused to yield, to the bitter end.

FIRST BREAKTHROUGH TO FREEDOM / NOW TO FREE SPEECH!

5. And now, at last - 26 years ~~down~~^{up} as hard a road as anyone can walk they are free. Free at last! And today, throughout the world, and above all in SA, people rejoice - with them and for them!

They are back amongst us - and law or no law, the ANC is unbanned. Soon they will speak of freedom - in a speech interrupted by 26 years - but the message unchanged -

Free South Africa. Mayibuye i Afrika. Unite. Struggle.

6. Free at last. And yet not yet at the top of the hill. The tank has been pushed back and back. But not yet over

the crest of the hill - after which it will roll down faster and faster, down the other side to crash in ruins at the bottom.

We are near - the top of the hill. Near enough today, that our eyes have risen above the crest and we look over the crest to the great prospect of freedom that lies ahead. As long as we keep up the march!

But we are not there yet! We can see the great vistas opening up ahead. But we still have to push the last remaining yards, so that not only our eyes but ~~also~~ our whole bodies can pass to the other side.

We can see now, in our sights the free South Africa we will reach tomorrow. We are not there. There will still be no easy walk to freedom. There will still be need for courage, for unity, for struggle. There will still be victims and people who will fall in the battle. But we are near the top.

And if we now look over to tomorrow's free SA, it is because these Rwandan men led the ~~way~~ ^{up} the blackest, darkest hour of our history. We rejoice today not only in their freedom from prison, ^{but because it is the basis of freedom for all SA people} not only in the triumph of their determination and their courage, but in the certainty of the future they have made possible by lives devoted to a cause - a future they have lived to see over the horizon, a future free South Africa which all of us will ~~the~~ harvest from their example, in our own lifetime!

Only their will their walk - and ours - be ended.