

STATE ESPIONAGE AND THE ANC LONDON OFFICE

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Enemy Agents

In *Searchlight South Africa* No 10, published in April 1993, I discussed infiltration of the ANC in exile by South African Military Intelligence (MI) and noted that a 'major scandal involving the top ANC leadership . . . has still to break' (p 30, fn 10).

In May the ANC admitted that its chief representative in London in the 1980s had, before his death in April, confessed to being a spy for MI. On receiving the man's confession following his return to Odendaalsrus, South Africa, in 1991, the ANC had suppressed the information and allowed him to continue as chairman of the ANC's northern Free State region from 1991 to 1992. His constituency members had no knowledge of the affair, nor were they informed by the ANC after his death.

This real 'enemy agent' in the leadership of the ANC was known abroad under his exile pseudonym, Solly Smith. (In London he was 'Uncle Solly'). His real name was Samuel Khanyile. Shortly after his death in Odendaalsrus in early April, a German magazine, *Top Secret*, published a facsimile from the Companies Registration Office in London indicating Smith's 10 per cent stake in a South African state funded media service in London, Newscope Limited, which published a now defunct magazine, *African Preview*. The company was run by a Ghanaian exile in London, Major Kojo Boakye-Djan. After his secret had thus posthumously been exposed, an ANC spokesman, Ronnie Mamoepa, stated that Smith had approached the ANC voluntarily after his return from exile and 'admitted he had been compromised and coerced into working for the regime' (*Sunday Times*, Johannesburg, 30 May).

At the same time, the South African press published information linking Smith's espionage operation on behalf of MI to a second leader of the ANC and the South African Communist Party, Dr Francis Meli who died shortly after his return from exile in a Johannesburg hotel room in October 1990. Born in East London in 1942, and a former student at Fort Hare University College in the early sixties, he was in his late 40s at the time of his death. Meli wrote a history of the ANC,¹ was editor in London of *Sechaba*, the official exile journal of the ANC. He was a member of the ANCs National Executive Committee and had been a member also of the SACP Central Committee, and possibly also its Politburo. As the first political commissar at Nova Katenga camp in Angola from the end of 1976, he held prime responsibility for ideologi-

cal indoctrination of young recruits from the generation of the 1976 Soweto school students' revolt. He had earlier acquired his doctorate (in history) at the University of Leipzig in the German Democratic Republic, and was a classic product of the stalinist Party School system of political training. His exile pseudonym, Meli, was derived from the initials of the Marx-Engels-Lenin-Institute.

In their account of the ANC and the SACP in exile, Steven Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba charitably describe Meli's history of the ANC as 'highly sanitised'.² It is indeed a shabby piece of non-research. They go on to state that Meli had written his thesis on the history of the Comintern and had 'impeccably orthodox Marxist credentials'. At the time of his appointment as commissar in Angola, where he was responsible for 'licking the new recruits into political shape', Meli was already regarded as an expert on the national question . . . In this, as in many other things, Meli was a fervent disciple of Stalin. The SACP has traditionally considered that if there was one sphere in which Joseph Stalin may be said to have had a correct approach in the Soviet Union, it was in successfully incorporating all the diverse nationalities of the USSR into a socialist state (p 88).

No amount of evidence of the repressive nature of the Soviet state, its Great Russian chauvinism and the forced removal of whole peoples as a result of Stalin's politics of 'ethnic cleansing' could shake the faith of the SACP in the USSR as a model for South African conditions, or in Stalin as their philosophical guide. This stubborn faith remained impervious to the facts until the whole edifice came crashing down, revealing a snakepit of ethnic hatreds. As editor of *Sechaba* (one of the few journals available to ANC members in the camps) and as one of the SACP's leading 'theoreticians', writing under the names Phineas Malinga and Nyawuza, Meli was influential in elaborating ANC/SACP ideas on the 'national question' relating to South Africa. He fed into the central area of ideological debate in the country.

Like Smith, Meli had a very serious alcohol problem. Ellis and Sechaba state that he was removed from the SACP central committee 'on account of his alcoholism' and was put under investigation by a party committee 'because of his lapses in preserving Party security'. At Engineering Camp at Nova Katenga (shared by Cubans and Angolans as well as the ANC), he was very sarcastic and rude to the recruits, who frequently dozed off in his lectures (personal communication). The boredom induced by his lectures was no disqualification to his eminence.

At party schools such as Meli attended in the Soviet bloc, among other subjects cadres were taught 'MCW', (Military and Combat Work). This concerned underground work and intelligence, and normally involved connections with the Stasi and the KGB. People attending these courses were closely monitored by the intelligence organs of the eastern

bloc states, which kept files on them. Meli would have been held in high esteem by the east German authorities and was a big fish for the anglers of South African MI.

He was placed under scrutiny by the ANC in 1988 following revelations in a London newspaper, the *Independent*, that Major Kojo Boakye-Djan had received ANC documents from Meli.³

In May 1993, Boakye-Djan was revealed to be the crucial link also between Solly Smith and MI. He was placed under scrutiny by the ANC in 1988 following revelations in a London newspaper, the *Independent*, that Major Kojo Boakye-Djan had received ANC documents from Meli.³ In fresh revelations in *Top Secret* both Smith and Meli were said to be involved in a disinformation campaign headed by Boakye-Djan and funded by MI.

In the London Centre

Like most ANC chief representatives in important station posts during the exile, Smith belonged to the higher ranks of the ANC security department, Imbokodo ('the boulder that crushes'), now known as the Department of Intelligence and Security (DIS). London was the crucial coordinating centre for ANC activities internationally. As chief representative, Smith was like an ambassador of a Soviet bloc state. He was in charge of everything in the mission, including security. He was chief of Imbokodo in the London office, and coordinator of all ANC security in Britain.

All black ANC members (but apparently not white members) in Britain were required to surrender their passports to the chief representative's office in London, in other words to Smith. These passports were then kept locked up and their owners were deprived of their use until authorised by Imbokodo — that is Smith — who had access to and control over the passport records of ANC members in Britain, whether they arrived to study or were passing through en route to conferences. All private mail arriving in Britain for ANC members and addressed to the ANC office was vetted by Imbokodo staff, and was available first of all to Smith.

At ANC headquarters in Lusaka in 1980, Smith had been a member of an Imbokodo directorate that discussed current dissension among young security personnel. Their dissatisfaction was directed at corruption among top officials, stagnation of the military struggle and repressive conduct by the security department.⁴ Through Boakye-Djan in London, Smith was thus in a position to provide MI with copious ongoing information about the whole of the ANC in exile, including its central nervous system, Imbokodo. In the battle for security, the ANC was disastrously out-gunned. The 'turning' of a high level political and security official like Smith made nonsense of the arrogance of Imbokodo, as

self-asserted guardian of the struggle. ANC members in exile had cause to fear Imbokodo not only because of its brutality but for the scope it gave to penetration by the South African state. The nature of its control over ANC members made it doubly dangerous to them.

This was indeed what very many rank and file ANC members — especially in Umkhonto — did fear and suspect. The revelations about Smith and Meli bear out the charges and suspicions of ANC mutineers in Umkhonto in Angola in 1984 that the organisation had been infiltrated from the top by South African intelligence. The mutineers first demand was for suspension of the suspect security department and for a comprehensive investigation into its activities.⁵ These suspicions were forcefully articulated by a group of loyal and dedicated former members of the security department — also members of Oliver Tambo's personal bodyguard — who had resigned from Imbokodo at ANC headquarters in Lusaka in 1980 in protest both against its failure to protect the movement and at corruption among ANC leaders, including Tambo. After resigning their posts as security officials and resuming duties within the ranks of Umkhonto, some of these men continued to protest at the abuse of power by Imbokodo.

The fate of these former members of the security department — all from the generation of the 1976 Soweto school students' revolt — illuminates the real relations of power within the ANC in exile, its ideology and methods of rule, and its incapacity to even listen to its most serious-minded younger members.

One, Mlamli Namba (MK name James Nkabinde), was shot by firing squad on the orders of a tribunal staffed by members of Imbokodo after the third and final phase of the mutiny, at Pango camp, in May 1984. Head of the tribunal was Sizakele Sigxashe, who like Meli had studied at Fort Hare in the early 1960s. (Sigxashe got his doctorate in Moscow).⁶

A second, Sidwell Moroka, or Mhlongo, was elected spokesperson by the June 16 detachment of MK and was delegated to call on the leadership to convene a conference of the whole organisation to discuss its problems. (No such conference was called until five years later, after the critics had been crushed and silenced). By 1984 Mhlongo was MK district commander in the Angolan capital, Luanda. He was elected a member of the Committee of Ten that was chosen to lead the mutineers in Viana camp in February 1984, helped negotiate the surrender of the mutineers, was arrested, and spent nearly five years under continuous tortures in Quatro penal camp. On his release he was elected chairman of all ANC exiles in Tanzania in September 1989, before being forced out of office by Chris Hani and Stanley Mabizela, representing the NEC.

A third former member of Tambo's bodyguard, known as Earl (or McCann) fled to Kenya from Zambia with his wife in the early months of 1990, after being approached by senior members of Imbokodo to participate in a drug smuggling ring. He had been a camp commander

in Angola, and had participated in arrests of his colleagues during the mutiny.

The warnings and insights of these former security officials were systematically ignored by the leadership of the ANC in particular by Tambo, but above all by the security department. Instead these young men were themselves hounded by Imbokodo as 'enemy agents'. It was the concerns of these men, and others, that Smith had rejected as a member of the Imbokodo directorate in Lusaka in 1980. Now he and Meli are found to have been deeply compromised.⁷

Smith's family has said he died of natural causes and that he had been very ill for some time. He had been admitted to hospital in Johannesburg and Bloemfontein several times in 1993. A Bloemfontein state pathologist, Dr Jan Olivier, found that his death was caused by cardio-respiratory failure. He said he had checked for traces of poison but had found nothing suspicious. A Bloemfontein doctor who treated Smith earlier in 1993 said he was not surprised to hear that he had died of heart failure. Smith, he said, had 'an enlarged heart, high blood-pressure, poor kidneys, degenerative arthritis, diabetes and Parkinson's disease' (*Sunday Times*, 30 May). His appalling state of health could only have been aggravated by his alcohol abuse.

Many ANC members, however, are suspicious. According to an ANC 'intelligence source', Smith had been warned by state intelligence agents not to reveal his past role on behalf of MI, and was in fear of his life. 'He had reached a point where he did not know whether they or his health were going to get him first', according to this ANC source (*Sunday Times*, Johannesburg). Smith had approached the ANC after important documents had been stolen from his home in June or July 1992. His son-in-law stated that Smith had been 'extremely worried' about the missing documents, because only he and ANC headquarters knew about them. (The ANC appears to have left these documents in Smith's keeping even after he had told the organisation about his work for MI)

Poisons in the Bloodstream

The unnamed source in ANC intelligence said it was '80 percent convinced' that Meli had been poisoned by a drink at the Carlton Hotel, even though he 'ostensibly died of heart failure' (*Sunday Times*). Major Boakye-Djan, the Ghanaian agent of MI, is believed by ANC members to have been with Meli in Johannesburg shortly before his death. [He was seen in a drunken stupor with a suspicious friend in the eastern Cape, by members of the ANC, according to *Top Secret*, and was to appear for questioning when he was found dead.]

No conclusive evidence exists at present to show that either man died by poisoning. It is obvious, however, that both could have been susceptible to blackmail by MI) in exile, because of their alcoholism. Anything

could have been planted on these men, or extracted from them, in their habitually drunken state. They were wide open to exploitation by MI), and with them a huge swathe of the ANC membership.

This appears not to have been perceived as a critical problem by ANC security in exile, nor by the NEC and the SACP central committee. [The matter was ignored by the SACP because that is the way the party functioned]. Neither man appears to have been able to get adequate counselling for his addiction problem, to their own cost, and that of their closest relatives, and also of the organisations in which they held senior rank, with access to top-grade confidential information involving life and death for many people (including, ultimately, perhaps also themselves). Meli was regularly 'dried out' in East Germany, but it is questionable whether this even began to help him in confronting his addiction problem. Addiction is notoriously intractable. It is doubtful whether much sensitivity or understanding was shown in the closed world of the ANC/SACP hierarchy. Chances for recovery would have been problematic, even had this been so.

The real question here, however, is political. Duma Nokwe was removed from his post as ANC hierarchy secretary-general in 1969, following the Morogoro conference in Tanzania, because his alcoholism rendered him unsuitable for the post. (According to Ellis and Sechaba, Nokwe's alcoholism was 'eventually to kill him', p 60). Smith and Meli retained senior posts, however, with access to confidential information.

The ANC has yet to make a full public account of the relations of Smith and Meli to Boakye-Djan, of the problems posed by their alcoholism, of the measures taken by the organisation to limit damage to its members and itself, and of the extent of damage done. Once again, if nothing else, the shoddy quality of the ANC/SACP exile operation comes to light. It appears through the characteristic form of personal tragedy, masked by rhetoric from an organisation that is more symbol than substance. Nationalist and stalinist phrases blunted sensitivity to real needs, real patriots were hunted down as 'enemy agents' while real enemy agents urged on the hunt. The deaths of these two senior figures of the exile show that the ANC operation in exile, to which so much blood and life was sacrificed, was in large part a tragedy in the form of *opera bouffe* — a clowning with real needs. It was this perception, and its truth, that produced the mutiny of almost the entire ANC trained forces in Angola, a perception punished by the high-ups with torture and executions. The prison camp was the expression of an ideology of suppression and denial.

That mutiny, the gravest crisis of the exile, was the moment of truth for the ANC, the moment at which fictions took absolute hold. For penetration by the skilled, ruthless, well-resourced security managers of the South African state, there could not have been a more suitable culture than that of Imbokodo through which the ANC was seized by an

ideologically-driven security mania. As in Goya's painting of Chronos devouring his children, Imbokodo devoured the best, most able and most dedicated of the generation of 1976. This was a coup for MI). The ANC provided it with this prize.

The ANC security department was MI's most viable route of penetration into the ANC in exile. Mouching of vehement rhetoric was the appropriate way to get into Imbokodo, and to advance in rank. Nothing was easier for a trained agent to mimic. In a bureaucratic, hierarchical organisation in which real opinions and feelings were driven underground, the advantage lay with the individual who could most successfully lead a double life. In this sense, little was learnt by the ANC/SACP from the experience of penetration by state intelligence of the underground inside South Africa in the early 1960s.

In this nest of sadism and special privilege, individuals took leave of their senses, as well as ordinary human feeling. An example: during training by the Stasi in the former German Democratic Republic, teenage Imbokodo recruits were taken on tours of Nazi extermination camps where they were shown lampshades made of Jews' skins and other delights. They returned to Angola, Zambia and Tanzania, psyched up by their Stasi controllers to believe that this would be their own fate if critics of the ANC/SACP line gained authority (personal communication). This was an appalling perversion of the death camps by their then supervisors. The result was naturally a further perversion. These young people, who had been abused in this fashion, told the victims they tortured: 'We are not sadists; we are doing this in defence of the struggle.' Or, in words they learnt from the former ANC commissar and SACP leader, Andrew Masondo: 'We are waging war, not playing war.'

These were the semiotics of torture. The specific ideological milieu of the ANC, and especially of Imbokodo, provided cover to the spies of MI.

The Kitson Affair

One of the shameful episodes of the exile was the hounding in London by Smith, Meli and others of the former Umkhonto leader, David Kitson, who was a member of the Communist Party of South Africa since 1940. Like others in the CPSA he fought in the South African army during World War Two. This prior military experience by white members of the Communist Party played a crucial part in the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe. It gave the ANC a decided edge in military organisation over the rival efforts of the Pan Africanist Congress, which had minimal military experience or scientific technology to draw on when it embarked on violence in the early 1960s.

Having qualified as an engineer at Natal University after the war, Kitson had worked as a draughtsman in an aeronautical engineering

firm in Britain. An ardent stalinist, he joined the technical workers' trade union in Britain, the Draughtsmen's and Allied Technicians' Association, later the Technical and Ancillary Staffs Association (TASS), which was controlled by members of the Communist Party of Great Britain. He won a scholarship to Ruskin College, Oxford, funded by his union.

In 1959, Dave Kitson and his wife Norma returned separately to South Africa, where both worked in the SACP underground. After the arrest of the first High Command of Umkhonto in Rivonia (a Johannesburg suburb) in 1963, Kitson became one of four members of the second High Command. Arrested, interrogated and tried in 1964 along with Wilton Mkwayi, Mac Maharaj, Lalloo Chiba and John Matthews, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison, most of which he served. Kitson's union, TASS, played a major part in the campaign for his release, prominently placing his name and South African racist conditions before its members.

Norma Kitson left for London after Dave Kitson's arrest and campaigned in Britain as a member of the ANC for his release, for his transfer away from the condemned prisoner's block, and for the release of all political prisoners. Norma and her children were central in the formation of the City of London section of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), which advocated a strategy of non-stop picketing of the South African embassy in London.

After his release from prison Kitson rejoined his family in London and participated in the picketing. When City Group refused to abandon its strategy after being instructed by the London leadership of the SACP, the ANC and the, the Kitsons were suspended from the London ANC in November 1984 and City Group was expelled from the AAM the following February.

Leaders of TASS now broke their promise (in 1969) to fund David in a fellowship at Ruskin College for life, after his release from prison. After lecturing in statistics at Ruskin for a year the TASS leadership ordered Kitson to obey the ANC, or lose his Ruskin post. In the same week, Kitson was informed by the ANC London office that his suspension would continue and his of funding by TASS was withdrawn. A major part in this sordid affair was played by Solly Smith. Smith behaved like a hatchet man (*ibid*, pp 286, 312, 317). This squalid conflict was manipulated by MI, working through Smith and Meli, and assisted by the methods of control within the AAM and TASS. Kitson had in fact been required by London leaders of the SACP

and the ANC to denounce his wife, as the price of keeping his job. He indignantly refused.⁸ Such was the treatment — in London — of a prison hero of the SACP and the ANC, utterly uncritical of the Soviet Union and in his own words a 'Mandela man'.

[PS. Because of the centrality of Smith and Meli in having the Kitsons expelled from the ANC, they were 'reinstated' after the exposure of these government informers. Kitson accepted the reinstatement but by this time his position had been made redundant and he did not return to Ruskin College — Ed]

A Person Above Suspicion

The ANC spokesperson who confirmed that Smith had been a spy stated that his death needed investigation. After Smith's fears for his life, he said, his death was 'suspicious' (*Weekly Mail*, 28 May 1993). If the ANC is serious about these suspicions, it should publish a truthful report on the deaths of its operatives in Zambia in 1988 and 1989, in addition to making a complete public inventory of all its information concerning Smith and Meli, in London and elsewhere. At the time of the spy-mania in Zambia, completely innocent former members of the ANC — critics of Imbokodo — were condemned for bombings, drug smuggling and other offenses, in full knowledge that the charges were nonsense, and beaten up and imprisoned by Imbokodo, with the connivance of the Zambian state.⁹ As with its response to the criticism of the young security officials in Lusaka in 1980, with the discontent of the troops in Angola in 1984, in the dispute with the Kitsons in the mid-1980s and in the response of *Sechaba* to the revelations in *Africa Confidential* in 1988, this was the normal response of the ANC to any threat to its central ideological apparatus.

Honest accounting is the least that is owed by the ANC to its members. Without full disclosure, and an end to suppression and denial, it is impossible to know whether a trail of murders of leading officials has spread from Zambia to South Africa.¹⁰ The uncertainty itself constitutes a poisoning of public life.

The revelations about Smith and Meli make it all the more essential that there should be candid and public accounting for murky episodes from the past, including the Kitson affair. The guardians must be held to account.

References

1. Francis Meli, *South Africa Belongs to Us. A History of the ANC*, James Currey, 1989.
2. Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile*, James Currey, 1992, p 7.
3. Meli's book was published in London after these revelations.
4. This climate of unease and dissension in the security department in Lusaka in 1980 is referred to by Bandile Ketelo et al, 'A Miscarriage of Democracy: the ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in Umkhonto we Sizwe', *Searchlight South Africa* No 5, July 1990, pp 39-40.
5. *Ibid*, p 45.
6. Meli's generation at Fort Hare in the early 1960s provided an important nucleus of younger ANC and SACP leaders in the exile, with a deeply stalinist ideological make-up. Others in this cadre, besides Sigxashe, were Chris Hani and Stanley Mabizela. The

leading influence on their development at Fort Hare was Govan Mbeki, then leader (in Port Elizabeth) of the best ANC and SACP branches in the country. A major split took place with one of their former Fort Hare colleagues, Thami Mhlambiso, after the Morogoro conference of the ANC in 1969. Mhlambiso had been a leader of the National Union of South African Students while at Fort Hare, head of the ANC youth in London in the mid-1960s and became ANC representative at the UN. He was expelled from the ANC in 1975 as one of the so-called 'gang of eight' who opposed the increasing influence of the SACP in the leadership of the ANC. Dismissed as ANC representative at the UN, Mhlambiso faced strenuous but unsuccessful efforts by Thabo Mbeki (Govan's son, then a leading international spokesperson for the ANC) to have him dismissed from a UN salaried post.

7. In its issue of October 1988, *Sechaba* responded to revelations published in the London newsheet *Africa Confidential* with an editorial headed: 'Whom does *Africa Confidential* serve?' It denounced recent articles that gave a 'gloomy, if not a horrifying and frightening picture' of conditions in the ANC in exile. Articles which portrayed the ANC as 'a mafia-type organisation' were 'more like distorted intelligence reports than serious journalism'. *Sechaba* made the characteristic response, when the exile conduct of the ANC was brought up for discussion: 'Who is *Africa Confidential* working for?'

This followed two detailed articles in previous issues of *Africa Confidential*, one of which referred to the role of Chris Hani — then army commissar — in 'Putting down the 1984 mutiny in the ANC training camps in Angola' (Vol 29, No 16, 12 August 1988). This was probably the first reference to the dread secret at the heart of the ANC in exile. *Africa Confidential* was not deterred. In December 1988 it provided specific and accurate reference to imprisonment by the security department of the ANC's research director, Pallo Jordan, in June 1983 (Vol 29, No 24).

This was probably the first public reference to the ANC's imprisonment for political dissent since publication of similar information by the British left-wing newspaper *Black Dwarf* in the late 1960s. Details were confirmed by Jordan in 1992 in evidence to the ANC commission of inquiry headed by Advocate Thembile Skweyiya (see SSA, No 10, 'The ANC Camps: An Audit of Three Years, 1990-93', p 16), and again in evidence this year to the commission headed by Dr Sam Motsuenyane (*Star*, Johannesburg, 20 May 1993). While *Sechaba* under Meli's editorship concealed abuses, *Africa Confidential* was for two crucial years the sole reliable source of information about the victims of Imbokodo.

Meli was a major figure in the management of information (and disinformation) by the ANC. His relation to Boakye-Djan suggests the problem of who ultimately was in charge of this system of manipulation of minds, and of the media. One could rephrase the question: Whom did *Sechaba* serve?

8. According to Norma Kitson 'The Anti-Apartheid Movement was controlled by the *chevra*' (ibid, p 262). *Chevra* means Comrades, but as used here was a friend's abbreviation for the *Chevra Kadisha* (the Jewish burial society) when referring to a small group inside the SACP in London. She quotes this friend as saying:

"If anyone starts any activity that is not under their control, they 'bury' them — immobilise them, or manoeuvre them out of the solidarity movement . . .' The *chevra*, she said held sway over the London ANC and influenced the Anti-Apartheid Movement and TASS. "Those who criticise the *chevra* are called 'Trotskyist' or 'ultra-left' — words used as insults that have no relation to their real meanings. Those who wish to expose them are in danger of being accused of siding with the South African state" (p 214-15). Ironically, through Smith and Meli, this squalid conflict was manipulated by MI, working through Smith and Meli, and assisted by the methods of control within the AAM and MI had detailed access to the thinking, decisions and manoeuvres of 'the chevra'.

The Kitson affair illuminates stalinist manipulation of public perceptions in Britain and South Africa. Among the many South African exiles in Britain, there was abysmal support for the right of David Kitson to retain his funding from TASS

9. See Trewhela, 'A Can of Worms in Lusaka: The Imprisonment of Hubert Siphoh Mbeje', SSA, No 9.
10. This might include the murder of Joe Gqabi, the ANC chief representative in Harare, in July 1981. He was one of the very few senior ANC leaders who sympathised with the demands of the troops in Angola for greater openness and accountability (Ketelo et al, p 38). He told a visitor a few weeks before his murder that he feared for his life from within the ANC (personal communication). Participants in the mutiny in Angola considered his murder to have been an 'inside job'.