

JOE SLOVO

Magagula

frequency in our operations. Draconian legislation, which allowed for indefinite detention in their torture chambers, had to be introduced to crack the pioneering combatants. They were tough, and the new skills they had acquired inside the country under the nose of the enemy inspired them throughout their operational life. Some died under torture, refusing to part with any information that could compromise the revolutionary movement they so dearly loved. Others had to leave the country for more advanced training whilst a few broke down and sold out.

There were no pitched battles against the enemy personnel. But demolition work by means of explosives at hand was the major thrust and this was quite successful in the major regions such as Natal, the Transvaal, the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape. There were very few cases in which comrades were caught in the act. This can be attributed to the high sense of secrecy, vigilance and discipline. These attributes themselves were historically acquired because most of the cadres who manned the underground command structures were drawn, in the main, from the ranks of people who were members of the movement before and after the ban. So that underground unit work was not something strange to them.

Combat readiness was also yet another tenet that was uncompromisingly taught to all members. When you go to bed you must not think that the day has ended. You could be called to duty any time of the day, which meant that you had to remain sober all the time. Drunkenness was never to be countenanced.

At the same time, if you had to be away from home at a particular point in time, then your immediate command had to know where you could be found.

Besides discipline, vigilance and secrecy, organisation had thus become one other important factor in the early days of this invincible people's army. Even personal organisation. Your own family programme had to be made to fit the movement one and not vice versa.

It is on the basis of all these points that one can safely conclude that the 1961-63 operational period was quite good and with more propitious time at its disposal the young MK would have messed up the Boer regime.

How does one begin to write a profile on Joe Slovo? He has been operating in underground conditions for the last thirty-six years. These have not been ordinary years in the history of our struggle. They have been and continue to be pregnant with the hazards of torture, detentions, assassinations, massacres and executions. Yet this has been a period which has witnessed the gathering of revolutionary storms and hurricanes in our country. In this heroic period, Joe Slovo has found himself in perfect relation with both great men and events. It is said that great people fly best and easiest in the hurricane.

Of course, Joe Slovo is not marching alone in this great journey. He is together with the best sons and daughters of our motherland. No single important event in South Africa can be attributed to him alone but one can be sure to always find his well defined footprints in the thorny path that has been and continues to be walked by so many of our oppressed people.

For obvious reasons one cannot write a complete profile on a man who has played a leading role in the formulation, planning and execution of almost all the telling blows against our common enemy. There will come a day when we shall be able to do this.

SMEAR CAMPAIGN

If there is any leader of the African National Congress and indeed the South African National Liberation Movement as a whole who has been singled out and targetted for a smear campaign by the enemy in all its shades, it is Joe Slovo. These have varied from the South African racist regime and their international allies, the Pan Africanist Congress, the Group of Eight and the backward elements within the black consciousness movement on the one hand and the ultra leftists on the other. He has been called by various names; "a KGB Colonel who has infiltrated the ANC on behalf of Moscow, public enemy number one, an assassin, a hard core terrorist, a hooligan etc."

If the enemy believed that

by applying these slanderous techniques it would be able to distance and isolate Joe Slovo from our people, history has proved it fatally wrong. Joe Slovo has become a household name among our people. Schools and parks in the black ghettos have been defiantly named after him. Songs like 'USlovo noTambo amakhomando' have become a permanent feature among the revolutionary ranks. Among his fellow comrades in Umkhonto We Sizwe he is simply and affectionately known as OUR ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF.

Sometimes when people are showered with these praises they begin to develop a cancer of personality cult. But Joe Slovo's political clarity and his sincere belief in the might of our people as the true makers of history has made him to rise above this fatal disease. Perhaps this is a unique feature of the ANC.

He has remained as modest as ever though he can be very persistent and vigorous in pushing across his point when he believes he is correct. Anyway modesty can be a sign of immodesty. Over the years he has developed an extraordinary quality of listening to the views of others no matter what rank one holds. He is truly an independent person. Of course, he does not swallow everything. In fact his interventions can be as sharp and penetrating as a fish bone.

In Dar-es-Salaam I once asked Comrade Violet Weinberg when she first knew Joe Slovo. She replied me with these simple words: "I knew him as a young boy selling newspapers. Did you think he has never been a young boy?" Then I knew why he is so humble and humane. He rose from the ranks and he understands the problems of the rank and file. When you come to him even with a personal problem he tries his best to help solve it. He will never say 'I do not have time for it.' He is extremely approachable and sensitive to problems that concern the revolution. This is one of the qualities of a real leader.

Let us briefly look at his humble growth and development. Joe Slovo was born sixty years ago in Lithuania in the Soviet Union. He immigrated to South Africa with his parents at the

age of nine. He has never been officially naturalised for when he applied for this it was rejected on political grounds. Of course, Joe Slovo was not applying to be part of the racist clique but part of the patriotic forces of our country. He has been duly naturalised by the fighting forces of South Africa.

At the age of sixteen he threw himself into a new course of life - a course of struggle which has become the essence and meaning of his life. He became a member and a shop steward of the National Union of Distributive Workers. Thus his ideas and actions from the very beginning were forged and fused with those of the working class even though perhaps at that time it was still a class in itself. As a non-racialist he could understand even at that time that no section of the working class can boast of freedom when the other remains oppressed.

Naturally his cherished idea of the power of the working class led him to its highest form of organisation - the Communist Party of South Africa.

WORLD WAR 2

Then the period of the Second World War was ushered in by Hitler's barbarous attacks against most European nations. Joe Slovo as an internationalist saw war in Italy. He was inspired by the fact that the Italians who formed the backbone of the anti-Hitler Mussolini Axis in Italy were organised and led by the underground Communist Party of Italy. He must have known that the burden of the war was being shouldered by the Soviet Union whose citizens lost nine lives every minute of the war. This was to him a lesson of how far a socialist country can sacrifice for world peace. It must have also occurred to him that one day there will come a time when the South African patriots will take up arms against South African fascism whose seeds were already germinating.

Ironically, three years after the defeat of fascism in Europe a fascist party in South Africa - the Nationalist Party - assumed office. Not that before this the patriotic forces had been spared of victimisation, but this event exacerbated repression in South Africa to an unprecedented level.

The first act of the Nationalist Party was to ban the CPSA under the notorious Suppression of Communism Act. This in fact was the beginning of a string of

bannings of all those who opposed apartheid. This situation did not find Joe Slovo wanting. Involvement in the political struggle and experience of the war had prepared him and his colleagues to fight through these obstacles. By this time Joe had risen in the Party ranks to become a member of the Party District Committee of Johannesburg - the industrial heart of South Africa.

In spite of all these problems the National Liberation Movement led by the African National Congress grew in leaps and bounds. Joe Slovo, having practical experience of the importance of the National Liberation Front in fighting fascism, played no lesser part in this endeavour. This was a period of mass campaigns.

Joe Slovo was one of those who did not see the banning of the Party and the suppression of the revolutionary forces as an excuse for passivity. To him this meant further consolidating the ties and links with the masses. He was one of those who played a leading role in organising for the People's Congress in 1955 which adopted the Freedom Charter. He was one of the accused in the 1956 Treason Trial, and used his skills and profession as lawyer to defend his colleagues.

By 1961 the racists had closed all avenues for peaceful struggle by banning the ANC. No leadership worth its salt could abandon the struggle and leave our people in perpetual servitude. The way forward had to be found. On December 16, 1961 Umkhonto We Sizwe was formed. From the very beginning Joe Slovo played a vital role in the building of MK. He worked closely with our first Commander-in-Chief, Nelson Mandela.

On his way to exile he went with that outstanding leader of the South African revolution the late Chairman of the SACP and veteran member of the NEC of the ANC Uncle JB Marks. By coincidence on their way from Francistown to Dar-es-Salaam they met Samora Machel and Peter Nanyemba of FRELIMO and SWAPO respectively. They were stranded and asked if there was no space in the chartered Dakota plane. Two of our comrades remained behind to provide space for them. These two men played leading roles in the liberation of our sub-continent. Unfortunately both of these great giants left us

in different accidents at a time when our region is yearning for their steadfastness and farsightedness. But they have planted the seeds of genuine peace, a lasting peace that can only be a product of stern struggle for the total liberation of our sub-continent.

Under the harsh conditions of exile Joe has played a vital role to once more build bridges for our people. It can be justly said that when you see our people rising up in their multitudes against the enemy and moving from ungovernability to people's power today, Joe Slovo did and continue to play more than his share in this revolutionary task.

It is not surprising why Slovo occupies so many responsible positions in our movement. He was a member of the REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL. Today he has risen in the ranks of MK to become its Chief-of-Staff. He is also a member of the Politico-Military Council and the National Executive Committee of the ANC while at the same time serving as Chairman of the SACP. He finds no contradiction in serving the ANC as loyally as he serves the Party. Over the years he has fully grasped the fact that true patriotism and proletarian internationalism are not mutually exclusive and repulsive but reinforce one another. He is one of the patriots who have built the unconquerable alliance between the ANC and SACP. He always insists that true liberation does not only consist in the hoisting of a new flag and the singing of a new national anthem.

As an army Chief-of-Staff he is playing a vital role in the actions of MK combatants inside the country and the building of our army among our people. He has articulated many politico-military concepts. As an army man he is cut in the model of Marshal Vorishilov, one of the first marshals of the Soviet Union who used to insist on personal inspection on even the finest detail of military preparedness of the army. A great optimist yet an arch-enemy of demagogy and rhetoric.

It is often said a chief-of-staff is a dynamo, an engine of his military unit. Joe Slovo is a well-oiled engine of Umkhonto We Sizwe. This is the man who has helped to forge and build our military organisation upon whose bayonets the fate of the South African Revolution depends.