

# HEROES OF OUR REVOLUTION

- PIET KHOZA

The great German revolutionary-poet and playwright, Bertold Brecht, made the most accurate observation when he said:

"There are those who struggle for a day and that is good; there are those who struggle for a year and that is better; there are those who struggle for twenty years and that is better still; and there are those who struggle all their lives and these are the ones we cannot do without."

The name of W.H. Andrews has its rightful place among those who fought for freedom all their lives.

Affectionately known as Comrade Bill, W.H. Andrews is a legendary figure in the history of the South African liberation movement. He was born in England in 1870. "He was a very handsome, imposing personality, highly principled and modest. All who knew him were impressed immediately by his iron-will, self-discipline and unrelenting championship of the working-class." That is how the Secretariat of SACTU described W.H. Andrews in a preface to his pamphlet "Class Struggles in South Africa." Here was a man who lived through all the stages of the development of the South African labour movement right from its infancy up to a time when it truly became a vital force of the liberation movement in South Africa.

## TIRELESS ORGANISER

At an early age in his life he was hardly twenty years old when he joined the ranks of the working-class and became a fitter. During the days of the historic "gold rush" which followed the discovery of fabulously rich diamonds in Kimberley and later gold in the Witwatersrand, he came to work in the gold mines. From that time until his death, he dedicated his life to the struggle for a new social order in his new homeland, South Africa.

When trade unions were for the first time established in

South Africa, initially as branches of British unions, Comrade Bill personally participated in the opening of the Johannesburg branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1893. He had his first experience of a strike in South Africa in 1897 when the entire white working-class in the Randfontein mines downed tools in protest against wage reduction. On the request from one J.B. Robinson the mine-owner, Paul Kruger dispatched a strong force of his mounted police with orders to clear every miner and his family out of his house and off the mining property within twenty-four hours. Bill Andrews and his wife were among the victims. This experience and many more bitter ones that were to follow made Bill Andrews a hardened fighter.

His outstanding revolutionary qualities earned him the confidence of his fellow workers and was consequently charged with highly demanding responsibilities. As a national organiser of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers he led many a successful strike action.

## **RAND REVOLT**

One of the most exciting experiences in his life was the 1922 Rand Revolt in which he was actively involved. Describing some of the turbulent moments during this event W.H. Andrews wrote: "I was in my office with George Mason, Ernest Shaw and a few others on the Friday morning, when suddenly the police surrounded it, and plain clothes men rushed into every office in the Trade Hall and arrested everyone...

"Two lorry loads of trade union officials, red, pink and yellow were rushed off under armed guard to the Fort and handed over to the jailer. The Internationale (official organ of the CPSA - ed) was suppressed, the printing office of the Communist Party dismantled and its office raided by police.

"Police stations were stormed and police disarmed and made prisoners and Fordsburg police station burned down. A three days battle raged, particularly in Benoni, Boksburg, Booysens, Vrededorp, Newclare and Newlands and other suburbs of Johannesburg...

W.H. Andrews' staunchness in defending the interests of his fellow-workers earned him the hatred of the bosses and the government and was arrested and imprisoned on numerous occasions as was the case after the 1922 Rand Revolt and when he and other prominent working-class leaders like Comrades Moses Kotane and J.B. Marks faced charges of sedition after the

great 1946 African miners' strike. The workers loved and admired him and looked up to him for advice, encouragement and leadership. For some years he was chairman of the Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council ( a co-ordinating body with both industrial and political functions). In 1924 he was elected the secretary of the Association of the Employees organisation. He also represented his class on a number of important commissions and conferences of the International Labour conferences of the International Labour Organisation.

## ORATOR AND JOURNALIST

Class struggle was the best school for Comrade Bill Andrews. It taught him how to employ various weapons thus further enriching his contribution to the cause of the exploited and oppressed. He was both a talented orator and a master of the pen.

His moving words were fuel to the exploited, spurring them on to more resolute action. On his excellent performance as an orator E.S. Sachs who was once General-Secretary of the Garment Workers' Union and one of the outstanding working-class leaders who learnt much from W.H. Andrews wrote:

"A superb orator, Bill Andrews is able to combine simple language with eloquence, dignity and humility. His speech was a call to action for the workers, a real inspiration."

That was during the 1922 Rand Revolt when he addressed 5,000 workers in the City Hall, Johannesburg. His speech greatly influenced the proclamation of a general strike after two months of indecision. A few days later W.H. Andrews was arrested.

In 1927 with other speakers Bill Andrews addressed large meetings of African workers organised by ICU. At one of the meetings he advised the workers to learn a lesson from the Chinese workers who had reached a peak of their revolutionary movement. The speech was reported and was the subject of a heated debate in Parliament. Various Members of Parliament suggested that Andrews should be "laid by the heels", "put up against the wall" and subjected to various unpleasant experiences.

All this could not deter a man who had long chosen the thorny path of struggle rather than the easy path of capitulation.

His election as the 1st Secretary-Editor of the CPSA was

the peak of his journalistic endeavours. Before this he had already started with the challenging task of a series of lectures on the struggles waged by the working-class from the early days. These lectures first published in 1941 under the heading "Class Struggle in South Africa" are an invaluable piece of history, a great and lasting service to the South African labour movement. This is an honest record of the achievements and shortcomings of the earlier generations rich with examples of courage and determination. It is history written by an active participant and partisan. This is a work which should be thoroughly studied and grasped by every young South African revolutionary. In 1977 SACTU decided to republish it so that "the knowledge thus gained will add vital fuel to the effort to bring about the eventual downfall of the hated Apartheid regime in South Africa and usher in a new dawn for all workers in our country."

## **WORKERS' PARLIAMENTARIAN**

Comrade Bill did not confine his activities to the daily struggles of the working class for higher wages and better working conditions. He realised that the proletariat must wage its struggle in the political arena as well. Under his chairmanship the Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council backed the Labour Representative Committee for the 1907 elections. The advances made by the workers during this parliamentary battle encouraged them to form the South African Labour Party (SALP) in 1910 bringing together almost all trade unions and socialist organisations in South Africa. Bill Andrews was one of its founder members. In 1912 he was elected to Parliament to represent the Georgetown section of Germiston and during the four years that he sat in parliament he stood firm in defence of the interests of the working-class.

## **INTERNATIONALIST**

W.H. Andrews was one of those early working-class revolutionaries who always strived to make the labour movement the pace-setter of the struggle for freedom in South Africa. Even during the days when he was enmeshed within the racist policies which plagued the white labour movement as they still do today, Bill Andrews always believed that it is the question of class, and not colour, which is at the base of the conflict in a capitalist society.

The moment of decision in his life came during his days as a member of the SALP when the outbreak of the First World War became the melting-pot for separating real international-

ists from chauvinists, hirelings of imperialism. Reactionaries of the Creswell-type, men whose only concern was to use the labour movement as a step-ladder for reaching positions of power and comfort, were hysterically whipping up war-fever, urging the rank-and-file membership of the Labour Party to support a war that could only benefit the exploiters. Bill Andrews took his position in the trenches alongside other revolutionaries like S.P. Bunting, Ivon Jones and Colin Wade, who had by then formed the War on War League to oppose the war from within the ranks of the Labour Party. When all such efforts had failed in the face of stepped-up support for reactionaries by the Smuts government - arrests, bans on revolutionary propaganda and deportations, the defenders of proletarian internationalism formed the International Socialist League (ISL) in 1915.

The stage was now set for Bill Andrews to play his role in applying the principles of proletarian internationalism on the South African reality. As a candidate to the Transvaal Provincial elections of 1916 W.H. Andrews declared that it was "the imperative of the white workers to recognise their identity of interest with the native worker as against their common masters ... it is time for the white worker to deal with the native as a man and a fellow worker and not as a chattel slave or serf. Only that way lies freedom and justice for all."

His was not a lonely voice lost in the wilderness. It was an expression of the feelings coming straight from the hearts of his comrades in the ISL.

## V E T E R A N

The life of Comrade Bill reached its blossoming stage after the birth of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1921. At a conference held from July 29th to 1st August, the Party was founded. Comrade Bill Andrews was elected Secretary-Editor, while Tyler the Chairman and Bunting the Treasurer. The organ of the new Party was "The International" (inherited from the ISL) under the editorship of W.H. Andrews. At a public meeting preceeding the founding conference it was Bill Andrews himself who addressed over two thousand workers announcing the establishment, aims and character of the new Party.

From then onwards Bill Andrews became deeply involved in the crucial task of applying the revolutionary ideas, worked out by the pioneer leader of the workers of the world, Karl Marx and later Lenin, to the concrete situation in South

Africa. In its endeavours to fulfil this gigantic task the Party has gone through hard times. Under the leadership of seasoned fighters like Bill Andrews, the CPSA grew into a powerful weapon of the proletariat in their ongoing battle against the exploiting class, a vital force in the struggle of the African people and their Indian and Coloured brothers for liberation from colonial domination and exploitation.

The Party's courageous stand against all forms of oppression earned it the hatred of the bosses and racist rulers. The most fascist elements among the colonial oppressors, the Afrikaner autocrats, assumed power in 1948. From the first days of their reign the racist law-makers rushed to table the much-detested Unlawful Organisations Bill (later passed and renamed Suppression of Communism Act). This was the beginning of an all-out campaign to crush all democratic forces in the country, the CPSA being the first victim. The only question now was whether the Party should continue to exist or not.

It was during those testing moments that Comrade Bill Andrews sent a message of encouragement to his comrades on his eightieth birthday. "Remembering the path which has been blazed by our members for over thirty years and inspired by the example of such fighters for freedom as Nkosi and many others who died for their opinions, let us face boldly the renewed and perhaps more ruthless attacks which are threatening", he wrote.

Just before the Suppression of Communism Act was passed in 1950, the Party was dissolved temporarily and tactically. In the same year the veteran of the working-class and champion of the cause of the African people for freedom, Comrade Bill, died. The reappearance of the Party under the new name South African Communist Party (SACP) was, in a way, the fulfilment of W.H. Andrews' last wish in life. The Party emerged a mightier force capable of continuing the struggle underground. Though he lives no more his indispensable revolutionary qualities, honesty, loyalty, courage, tact, logic dignity and determination, continue to inspire the thousands of fighters who remain to continue the fight. Comrade Bill lives in the hearts of the millions of our embattled people. His is a life worthy of emulation.

