

# Harry Gwala honoured for his life of struggle

## What was your first encounter with political organisations?

I was exposed to Party Literature and the Guardian Newspaper while I was teaching. A friend invited me to a local Party meeting in town. After that meeting I joined the Party. In 1942 I joined the ANC.

*I left teaching in 1944 to join the Distributive Workers Union and later the Chemical Workers Union. I was the organising secretary for the two unions.*

## What was it like being a member of the Communist Party before it was banned?

To be a member of the Party, one had to be a worker, accept the constitution and program of the party, pay party dues and play an active role in the activities of the party.

The Party was not dominated by educated people. There were people like Nkosi - a peasant from Newcastle countryside.

*He worked in Johannesburg as a domestic servant. From that humble rank of farmboy emerged a Communist Party leader.*

## Tell us about the Party school and its syllabus?

The main school - the Mayibuye school - was in Fox Street, Johannesburg. In Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria, Party centres there organised their own night schools.

These schools produced party leaders such as Kotane, Nkosi, Mabhida and others. People were taught political education and general literacy skills.

In English lessons for instance, people would be taught such words as pass and police, how the pass was related to the police, and the arrests and raids conducted by police.

## What was the aftermath of the banning of the Party?

After the banning of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1950, it regrouped after a year or two and called itself the SACP, which was underground. I was recruited into the underground SACP until my arrest for MK activities.

## What was the relationship between the party and trade unions?

The Party encouraged its members to join the trade unions.

Harry Gwala, recently released from Robben Island after serving various jail terms totalling 18 years for his anti-apartheid activities has been awarded the ANC's highest honour, Isithwalandwe/Seaparankoe.

The award was made to him by ANC president, Oliver Tambo, on the 77th anniversary of the movement.

Harry Gwala joins other recipients like Nelson Mandela, Chief Albert Luthuli, Yusuf Dadoo, Govan Mbeki and all the Rivonia trialists still in prison.

NUM News presents some of the views of a remarkable man.



HARRY GWALA: 'The working class must unite oppressed'

Most trade union organisers were in those days, party members. Trade Unions however, were independent.

The Party organised members of trade unions by distributing party literature and by calling mass meetings in some open places.

## How would you describe the role of the working class in the struggle?

The working class must develop and preserve unity among the oppressed people. The working class must project the national struggle as the first stage in their own class struggle.

This class is the main force of any liberation movement. In South Africa the majority of the people are working masses - you hardly find the bourgeoisie among black people.

## How do you understand the relationship between national and class struggle?

In a country like South Africa you find that, first and foremost, although we have tribes and a lot of disunity, these tribes were already defending their land from the white people who came to South Africa.

The nature of the battles with the white settlers had a class character. Later on, when the country developed industrially, people moved into towns and got employed as factory and commercial workers.

Pass laws followed them into the urban areas and living conditions were bad for them as well. Passes were for the purpose of exploitation of the workers because they were meant to tie them to their industrial master and regulate their movement in favour of the bosses. This brings us close to the relationship between the class struggle and the National Democratic Struggle.

The most burning issue facing the people of South Africa is the eradication of racism and creation of a National Democratic State.

In South Africa it is difficult to draw a line between class exploitation and national oppression. The workers will always fight this struggle as one and not dividing them into entities.

## How is the term "people" related to the working class?

In S.A when we talk about "people" we mean all those who are actively involved in the struggle against apartheid. They may be business people or workers without any property at all. The totality of these people engaged in the struggle to overthrow apartheid constitutes "the people". They belong to different classes not one class.

## How the Freedom Charter is related to the national democratic struggle?

When the Charter says the "people shall govern", this reminds us that they can only govern if they have real power, and this happens when the means of production have been transferred to the ownership of the people.

The Charter further says "the people shall share in the country's wealth". The achievement of the national democratic struggle is not an end, but a step leading to a government where exploitation of man by man will be a thing of the past.

## Will the release of Nelson Mandela bring freedom?

The highly politicised people of S.A can never expect that the release of Comrade Mandela will mean Freedom. Comrade Mandela, like Chief Luthuli, is a symbol of the intensification and unity of our people.

## Kidnapped ANC man gets 20 years jail

VETERAN ANC member, Ismail Ebrahim was early this month sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.

Ebrahim, who served 15 years on Robben Island after conviction for sabotage in 1964 became the victim of abduction, torture and trumped up charges before being sent to Robben Island for the second time.

Agents of apartheid followed him and forcefully brought him back from Swaziland to South Africa and ultimately Robben Island Prison.

"My abduction was followed by police torture to the point where I nearly lost my mind, he said addressing the court before he was sentenced. My two co-accused were also brutally tortured.

He and fellow co-trialists Mandla Maseko and Simon Madlala refused to testify during the 16 month trial due to alleged collusion between the judiciary and the security police.

The banning of the ANC was a "direct assault to all freedom-loving people in the country because the ANC expressed the hope and aspirations, not only of the African majority, but of all the democratic forces in the country".

The use of revolutionary violence was "a painful necessity, not something I welcome for its own sake". I know it would lead to suffering of the enemy as well as the oppressed people."

"But there was no way out. One hated the racist system and knew it was violent and found oneself forced to use force, sedition and criminal murder.

Apartheid was a crime, he said We sit in this court because we dared to rise against this crime. For black people, life under apartheid is that of humiliation, degradation and abject poverty."

"In the courts of the people of the world, the apartheid system of national oppression, racial tyranny, injustice, repression and war have already been judged guilty, having solemnly and by formal international convention, been categorised as a crime against humanity.

"This experience obliges us to conclude that the regime which have ruled our country for over 40 years now, have, as a matter of policy, based themselves outside the parameters of such human thought and activity as can be considered moral, humane and just."

"To throw off such governments, as we must surely try, is to stand on the side of morality, human decency and justice."