

South Africa: Remembering Hani

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MP Giyose went to school with Chris Hani in the 1950's. Like Hani, he was from the Cofimvaba district of the Transkei. The two met again in Botswana when Hani was in prison in Lobatsi. They planned to form a youth movement of South African, in Lusaka in 1971. In the last six years before their return to South Africa, Chris would stay at MP's house in Botswana whenever he came to meet his underground operators. Chris and MP were thus close comrades and personal friends. He talks to *Amandla!* about Chris' life.

Chris Hani Joined The ANC Youth League in 1958. He arrived at Lovedale in 1957, where he joined the Society of Young Africa, an organ of the Unity Movement. At the University College of Fort Hare in 1959 he majored in English and Latin. He joined the Communist Party around 1960 and the next year left Fort Hare for Cape Town to work at a law firm.

Chris soon came to the attention of the police. It was their persecution which persuaded him to leave the country and to join Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in Lusaka. By 1965, he had completed military training abroad and went to the ANC military camp of Kongwa in Tanzania, which had Ambrose Makiwane as commander.

Makloane belonged to a militant trend of Umkhonto soldiers that was impatient for military engagement with the South African army. To this end, the ANC concluded an alliance with the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo. A combined force of ZAPU and ANC soldiers entered Zimbabwe near the town of Hwange, the old Wankie. The Smith regime called upon Vorster to send help to Rhodesia to counter them. The combined forces of Rhodesian and South African soldiers attacked the guerilla fighters, killing some of the best ANC soldiers such as Gandhi Hlekani. Hani and 6 others fought valiantly whilst retreating across the Botswana border, beyond the Rhodesian-South African armies.

They were immediately arrested by a group of Botswana soldiers and brought to Lobatse for trial. There they were charged for entering Botswana carrying arms of war and sentenced to three years each. In Lusaka, the ANC negotiated that Hani would stay with Livingstone Mqotsi, a teacher of the Unity Movement. Livingstone gave Hani political education lessons and kept him under custody for these three years. By that time, Hani was already in great trouble with his leaders. He and the 6 others of the Wankie operation had sat down to write an evaluation of the confrontation and had come to the conclusion that the ANC military police was wrong in its doing.

The ANC was guilty of a militarism that was not backed by a sufficient level of political preparation among the masses, effectively denying the guerilla uprising proper political support. The ANC leaders were angered by this conclusion. Some of them wanted to execute Hani and his associates on grounds of treason. However, the group managed to mobilize all of the youth of Lusaka and converted their quarters in Lilande into an armed camp.

When I arrived in Lusaka in 1971, they were prepared to defy the ANC and to form an All South African Youth Movement comprising youth from the ANC, the PAC and the Unity Movement. That

project was stillborn when the ANC leadership offered them scholarships in the Soviet Union, Western Europe and America. This forced Hani to retreat from Lusaka and to transfer his operational headquarters to Maseru in Lesotho.

Hani had many supporters amongst the youth of the ANC but he also had many enemies amongst the older ones. They had not forgiven his Wankie memorandum. It is well known that Hani belonged to the militant section of the leadership, which was intent on using a combination of political and military solutions to stop the situation in South Africa. During the 1970s, he traveled incognito to Botswana to consult and give instructions to MK commanders and operatives who were underground in South Africa.

In Botswana, he stayed with trusted South African families of the exile community, in which he had many old friends and comrades. Chris was a leader who kept his finger on the pulse of the developments in South Africa. He knew the identity of the various groups of activists and the different currents and tendencies that existed. He was always interested in the ANC having a relationship with all of them. Chris was not convinced that the ANC needed to negotiate a constitutional arrangement with the South African government. He feared that this strategy would lead to the cooptation of the ANC leadership, and that they would eventually become agents of imperialism and corporate power. He particularly did not want MK to be disbanded, nor did he want the Communist Party to be part of any new deal.

Upon his return from Cuba in 1991, he vowed that he would not get into an ANC led democratic government. Rather, the Communist Party would go into opposition to fight for the total liberation of the oppressed working masses from capitalism. He had no illusions that he would be part of a civil war in South Africa. He bluntly called the current strategy of Umkhonto a tactic of armed propaganda. He preferred the total deployment of the MK forces abroad to come into full military engagement in South Africa.

He was convinced that if this occurred, the Communist Party and the MK would find allies in the militant working class and the rural masses. In that sense, Chris was a revolutionary and he had a great deal of unfinished work when they killed him in April 1993.

MP Gyose

Note: He bequeathed his Wankie army boots to his mentor, Livingstone Mqotsi. Livingstone kept these boots safely along with the political poetry that Chris Hani wrote when he was in exile. He bequeathed Chris's work to the NAHECS archive at Fort Hare University. The archives show that Hani was a lively student who loved English literature.

P.S.

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