

## Interview with Thenjiwe Mtintso

### What Chris Hani contributed to the ANC's victory

*"For the wretched of the earth, the 90 percent of humanity living in capitalist society, socialism is the only answer, history has not ended . . . we will mold a new, just society."*

*Chris Hani was the chief of staff of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress. He fought for 25 years in southern African liberation struggles, from Zimbabwe to Angola. He also built the ANC underground in South Africa.*

After receiving the highest vote after Nelson Mandela on the ANC executive at its first legal congress in 1991, he stepped down from his ANC responsibilities to become General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, part of the "Tripartite Alliance" in the liberation movement with the ANC and the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

"The armed struggle has brought about the present crisis of apartheid," he wrote when he returned to South Africa in triumph. In 1993, the apartheid system lashed out in defeat to assassinate Hani, one of the principle architects of the victory, in order to stem its losses and sabotage the settlement for ending apartheid. The apartheid system blamed Hani--more than any other single individual--for its demise.

Key Martin and Gloria Rubac interviewed Thenjiwe Mtintso, also an MK commander, about Hani. Mtintso is now the deputy secretary general of the ANC, the highest ranking woman in that organization, and a member of the SACP's central committee. She spoke in Houston during a tour organized by the National Lawyers Guild. This interview is part of a series being conducted by the Peoples Video Network for the upcoming documentary "Hani."

**MTINTSO:** Chris was not, in my view, your local or national leader. I think he had the potential to develop into an international leader of acclaim. And his stature in South Africa was that.

I first met Chris in Lesotho when I went into exile. I was an activist in the Black Consciousness Movement. It was only when I met Chris that I began to understand who I was.

He had a better understanding of "Black Consciousness," which I thought I was a product of, than I had. It was the first time that I was introduced seriously to the notions of socialism and communism. It was not just in the theoretical sense but in giving meaning to my own life as a worker.

In the Black Consciousness Movement we believed "you are Black first, before you are anything," so there wasn't a class content, there wasn't a gender content. After meeting Hani, I began to understand the relationship between class, race and gender.

The MK combatants came to rely on Chris to give the revolution leadership that was unwavering. Much as he was our commander, he was with us, whether it was in your camps, or your forward areas. You found Chris everywhere. He was one leader that you were quite sure you could find if you needed him.

The people of South Africa identified with the Angolan struggle, the struggle in Namibia and the struggle in Zimbabwe. There was an alliance between MPLA, ZIPRA, Umkhonto we Sizwe, and Frelimo. Our own combatants fought side by side with FAPLA forces in Angola.

Chris was in the trenches with his cadres. This is what gave us the momentum to go on.

Cuito Carnavale [in Angola] was the last battle and one of our best moments. And it was with the Cubans. You would have thought it was MK's victory. That's the kind of solidarity we had with these fighting forces. And Chris's own role as MK commander was to pull us together.

You must also remember that some of the cadres in the MK and the ANC were quite young, so the political school was in the camps themselves and our political commissar was Chris himself, giving politics and meaning to what we were doing.

I was reading his work on "why I joined the Communist Party," and he explained it was because he "had no choice, there was no other way." He gave his life story, where he came from, how he used to fetch water, how he used to watch his mother suffer. He said, "I couldn't find any other way except to change the life of my mother, of those around me."

For women comrades generally, the relationship between class, race and gender was articulated clearly, even in his behavior. You find there are comrades who bow to the question of gender equality but in terms of their own behavior are quite different.

On a theoretical level he led us to understand the question of gender oppression, class exploitation, and racial discrimination. The respect of all cadres, men or women, was there, the giving of opportunity to all of us equally. He gave me responsibility. He treated me equally, but recognizing the fact that women were disadvantaged, and acting in a way that would actually show you that he understands that struggle.

He had risen to such stature that his death was not only a blow to the revolutionaries within the ANC, the Alliance, SACP, MK, but hit the whole country. Our own view is that it was a well-planned plot. You had this low-intensity warfare that was going on and this

projection of what Chris stood for, building up these emotions against communism in general, and against Chris Hani in particular.

This buildup didn't only come from the internal forces. The West was projecting Chris as that, whether it was the American press, the British press, or the CIA kind of things that would be said about Chris, it generated this anti-Hani phobia.

[Among] the Nationalist Party [that ran the apartheid regime for decades] and the right wingers there was a concerted effort to project Chris in a particular way, that whoever killed Chris shall have done society "a favor." Whoever killed Chris physically was actually fulfilling a bigger and broader mission set by other forces.

Therefore you cannot look at Clive Derby-Lewis and Janusz Walus and just say they are the killers. There are killers that are still roaming loose who are responsible for Chris Hani's death.

Unfortunately the Truth and Reconciliation Commission didn't expose who exactly were involved in terms of the organizations, groupings, and individuals. This is why we were happy that Lewis and Walus didn't get the amnesty because they didn't tell all. And the Nationalist Party still has to tell us about its own role.

At the same time that Chris Hani was being projected as a "terrorist," he was talking about the need for a negotiated settlement. A few years earlier I was in the camps in Uganda. I was one of the commanders. We were against the negotiations. We were convinced it was a sell-out.

Hani was able to explain, just like he explained the relationship between the political struggle and the armed struggle in years earlier, that the armed struggle was part of the whole, and therefore the negotiations also are part of the whole. That is very Chris Hani.

It didn't matter what Chris was saying, they had to "root out" this Communist. These attacks against some of our leaders are a targeted effort against the Communists and the "danger" they are considered to be to the ANC. Countries like the U.S. would say, "When are you getting rid of these Communists?"

The Alliance is ever questioned because of the fear of the influence of the Communist party on the ANC. The regime, or whoever was behind the assassination, thought they were snuffing out an idea, they were snuffing out an ideology, they were snuffing Communists, by killing Chris.

Chris was very popular in the liberation movement. He was everywhere with us. I don't think that by the time he died there was one corner of the country that he had not touched.

If there ever was one sad moment it was when that announcement came on the radio. Soweto burst. That very day people were in the streets, demonstrating, crying, toytoying. It was a simultaneous, spontaneous coming out. There was anger, there was sadness, there

was fear. There were these feelings that we need to do something here and now to avenge Chris's death. And yet if we were to try to do anything in venting our anger we were playing into the agenda of those trying to undermine our revolution.

We didn't need to organize buses for the funeral. People came. People came a full day before the funeral. By evening of the day before that stadium was full, full, full to capacity. People were so disciplined, expressed their anger, their solidarity, their commitment to continue the struggle.

Chris was very powerful. I still have never gotten over his death. At a personal level, I have never dealt with that. He was not that kind of leader that stood there and said, "I am the leader." You just experienced his leadership. He had a very rare style of leadership, and if more of us could emulate that quality, our liberation movement could go very, very far. Because Chris is a figure that is quite fresh in our young people's minds, we are able to draw a lot of examples from his teachings.

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