

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS LECTURE BY L N SISULU, MP, MINISTER
OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AT THE ANC WESTERN CAPE
CHRIS HANI / OR TAMBO MEMORIAL LECTURE
CAPE TOWN, 9 APRIL 2017**

The struggles of Oliver Tambo and Chris Hani. Lessons for our time.

I accepted this invitation to speak on Chris Hani and only when I got down to putting my thoughts on paper – then I realised that this might not have been the cleverest idea to try to capture this giant of a man in one lecture. His life needs to be serialised over a period, so that we can have the time to digest and understand what we had, what we lost and why history calls on us to remember and emulate and respect. Perhaps in future we could put aside the month of April to dissect the man and give him the respect he deserves. I use the word respect for a particular reason.

There is a very important distinction between honour – as in “to honour someone”, and to respect. We honour our leaders periodically. This year we have put aside time for honouring OR Tambo, a tower of our struggle. This month of April we honour Chris Hani and Solomon Mahlangu, this being the month of their dastardly murders.

This is a gesture, a mere token after which we continue our lives as though these great men never meant anything to us. To honour has become a symbolic gesture that leaves us with a “feel good” feeling.

Respect, on the other hand, would mean that we live our lives - out of respect for them - in a way that would daily reflect that we dare not do anything that would discredit them, their teachings and their sacrifice. Of late,

it would not be an exaggeration to say we live our lives as though we don't owe anybody anything, and our lives often represent a complete disdain for what these men who we honour have given and have taught us.

For now, let me briefly sketch out this great life and pick up what I think are valuable lessons for us and our time.

As you might all know, Chris was born in Cofimvaba, Eastern Cape on 28 June 1942 of religious parents. His name was Martin Thembisile Hani. The name "Chris" was his combat name - "Chris Nkosana" - and it later became so part of his identity that he kept it. He was very conservative in his younger days and his goal was to become a priest, until he got to Fort Hare and experienced life outside of the religious comfort zone of his upbringing.

Having been politicised by his activism at Fort Hare, Chris soon left the country as one of the first batch of young MK combatants to go for military training in the then Tanganyika in 1964. They travelled through Botswana and drove in an open truck from Francistown in Botswana, 500 kilometres on rough rugged terrain¹. He was soon despatched to the Soviet Union for training.

By 1967 Chris was an Army Commissar of the Luthuli Detachment. He distinguished himself by his selfless heroic exploits. It is reported of him that one of the first things he did to make him stand out was an ability to conquer his fear and subordinate it to what had to be done. This is an important attribute for a soldier to subordinate the natural instinct of fear. So out of this art he developed a reputation of being fearless and perhaps a little reckless for those who did not know him well.

¹ Macmillan, Hugh, *The Lusaka Years*, 2013

He goes down in history as part of the leadership of the Wankie campaign – a joint military venture between ZAPU and the ANC. In a clash with the Rhodesian forces (in 1967) the ZAPU/ ANC alliance acquitted itself well, leaving behind, what Chris remembers as between 12 and 15 dead Rhodesian soldiers.

He was proud of the courage of the men he led, especially as most of the wounded Rhodesians were airlifted and treated in hospitals while the Alliance's wounded unfortunately had to be abandoned on the way. We suffered our first casualties over a period of two months from August to September. Throughout this pitched battle with the Rhodesian forces, Chris began to feel that the ANC HQ was not sufficiently responsive to their plight. Very much like yourselves today about us in the leadership. It is said that history repeats itself – but listen on and learn.

Most of the MK soldiers who survived the war were arrested when they escaped into Botswana at the end of the battle. They were subsequently released after an intervention by President Kaunda of Zambia after more than a year of imprisonment.

Chris' impression on arrival back in Lusaka confirmed what he had gradually been feeling - a lack of appreciation by the leadership of the hardship of MK, its wars and its successes, and, in his own words he described what he found in Lusaka:

“There was a general stalemate position. There was no direction. There was general confusion. Total disillusionment.”²

² Sechaba

And because he was a very determined, passionate man, his anger always simmered just below the surface. He lost no time in expressing his views to the leadership, in a memorandum that he drafted with some colleagues. The memorandum complained about the lack of democratic decision making processes, lack of accountability, factionalism, rampant corruption, and appointments made on the basis of cronyism as opposed to merit. You name it, all the things that people complain about us, he put it in his memorandum in 1968, as bluntly as only he and his disillusioned army could. The important point to note here is they did not stand around in corners, whispering their grievances – they did what they felt committed, loyal cadres would do: express themselves to the leadership directly. And the intention was that the memorandum was not for public comment, but to the leadership to deal with the problems.

This marked a watershed moment for the ANC, as Tambo, the then President of the ANC, felt that the discontent had become a general feeling of despondency and agitation. Upon receiving the memorandum, he took personal responsibility for what was conveyed as the failures of the ANC. He explained that, if the ANC was perceived as rotten, then it meant that he was rotten and took responsibility.

From the perspective of MK and the Code of Conduct, the MK leadership felt that Cde Chris had crossed the line and broken his oath of office by making these allegations against the leadership of the ANC. In line with that view, a tribunal was set up to charge Chris and the men who had broken their oath of office by signing the memorandum. The tribunal pronounced its findings on 25 March 1969 and the signatories were expelled from the ANC.

In all the ensuing deliberations and general discontent, Tambo proposed a Consultative Conference to resolve all the discontent. The conference was held in Morogoro, Tanzania in the same year. It would appear that the conference was an assembly of very angry men and women who had lost confidence in their leaders.³ The only morally correct thing for Tambo to do in the face of such an internal storm, was to resign, and indeed he did. Needless to say, he was persuaded to withdraw his resignation, which he did – and we are all the better for that.

Chris, throughout his life, remained very proud of the stance they had taken. He felt it was the correct and ethical thing to do. He was not one to mince his words.

In later years, OR had the following to say about the Morogoro conference:

“The Apartheid regime has survived 37 years now. Born three years after the destruction of its fascist progenitor, the Nazi. It was because of a number of global offensives that we went to Morogoro in 1969 – a war of liberation was waging in Vietnam, the Arab peoples were rebuilding their force against Zionist Israel. We were engulfed in a world of turmoil, as we met in Morogoro to confer about our own struggle. Those who were there left us a heritage of unwavering commitment to the people’s cause, a spirit of self sacrifice for the victory of our struggle and a revolutionary morality which did not allow personal ambition, factional conspiracies and cowardice. Out of

³ Interview with Joe Slovo

Morogoro came significant results, the most important being the re-orientation of our movement”.

Within the current context, perhaps we have reached our Morogoro moment. This persuades me that in this environment and in honour of all our heroes, our own Morogoro would put us in the right space, where we can re-direct the organisation. It does not matter what we think of what is happening around us. We may want to downplay it as being driven by vested interests. That may be so, but we need to understand that that environment was created by us.

They had precipitated a consultative conference where the grievances of the members were discussed. He saw it as an important turning point. The Strategy and Tactics document was adopted at that conference and we are all the more ideologically rooted because of that. This was a resolution of a new direction: to re-invigorate the party and amnesty was given to the expelled comrades, like Hani.

Like OR, we are responsible and we need to own up and allow for a venting of views, so that we can redirect the movement on the same principles or Morogoro: **selfless dedication, revolutionary morality, no personal ambition, no factionalism!!** That is the ANC we should return to with haste or we are doomed.

As we mature, we need to reflect on our history, ensure that it is properly recorded and commemorated. Because every significant step taken ought to guide us as we navigate difficult terrain as we are right now. History is meant to guide us and to teach us which path will lead us to success. The ANC has agreed to a one-day Consultative Conference before the June Policy

Conference. Let's build up to that and use our energy constructively to ensure we correct our mistakes and to create a better environment for all members of the ANC and to feel truly liberated within their own organisation.

I thank you!!