

KEEP ALIVE THE MEMORY OF LEADERS OF LIBERATION¹

The main current in the flow of history in the twentieth century has been the struggle of the great majority of humanity not only for its freedom but for a new world order of justice and peace.

The warning and prophecy of the Pan African Conference in 1900 - when it declared that the "problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line" - has been more than confirmed. National movements against colonial and racist oppression became part of a larger international movement, each supporting and benefiting from the other, and espousing common aspirations for a new world.

The victory of the long struggle for freedom by India shook the British empire and facilitated independence of other nations. The defeat of French colonialism in Indo-China and Algeria, at the cost of four million lives, enabled other nations in the French empire to gain independence with fewer casualties. Nasser's Egypt suffered and resisted a triple invasion in 1956 for Algeria's freedom, and since then many other nations have emulated that example. The black movement in the United States helped the movement to end the Vietnam war.

This historic struggle has given rise to great leaders with courage and determination, with faith and vision, who could move masses of men, women and children in resistance against brutal and desperate forces armed to the teeth which showed no hesitation to massacre millions of people. Many men and women in the metropolitan countries shared the vision of a world without oppression, power politics and war, and have courageously stood by the oppressed people.

Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., Patrice Lumumba and Jean Paul Sartre, symbolise the spirit of the twentieth century - not their jailers, nor the Generals and Admirals who have carried on unending wars against the people.

For these leaders national independence was not an end in itself nor even merely a means to overcome poverty, illiteracy and disease in their countries. They sought to restructure the world order. They played a significant role, as their nations attained independence, in pressing for action on global concerns such as disarmament, banning of nuclear weapons, equitable economic relations, and international cooperation for economic and social progress. As they began to succeed in uniting not only the peoples of the Third World but large segments of opinion in the privileged nations, they came under attack by forces which were wedded to power politics and sought to replace one form of domination by another. Many of them were assassinated, exiled and paralysed.

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Homage to these great leaders and martyrs is not only a duty of our generation. It is an essential means to educate and inspire the people, especially the young, in the Third World as well as in Europe and North America, to complete the unfinished struggle. For the vision of a community of humankind remains unfulfilled; the newly-independent nations remain victims of distant and unseen forces and of a vicious international economic order; popular governments have been overthrown by neo-colonial mercenaries; and corruption has become endemic in several countries.

Ten years ago, as head of the Centre against Apartheid in the United Nations, I had the privilege, in association with Ambassador Leslie Harriman of Nigeria, of organising, though in the limited context of solidarity with the South African people, a series of international tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson and Martin Luther King, Jr., Marcus Garvey and George Padmore, Jawaharlal Nehru and Gamal Abdel Nasser, Franz Fanon and Jose Marti, and many others. Great leaders who were persecuted and vilified by the imperialists, and who could not even petition the United Nations in its early years, were honoured in the United Nations Headquarters and at special sessions and events in Atlanta, Kingston, Accra and New Delhi.

We were able to secure a resolution by the United Nations General Assembly on January 24, 1979 - resolution 33/183 C - calling on the United Nations and UNESCO to honour the memory of leaders of the oppressed peoples in their struggles against apartheid, racial discrimination and colonialism and for peace and international cooperation, as well as those who have made significant contributions in solidarity with the struggles of oppressed peoples. Governments and organisations were invited to cooperate in making the contributions of these leaders widely known for the education of world public opinion, especially of youth.

We hoped to organise world-wide tributes to the leaders, as a continuing programme through TV and radio features, books, pamphlets, postage stamps, naming of institutions etc. We hoped to break the walls of separation created by colonial rule and facilitate a concert of people toward a new world as envisaged by the leaders of liberation and renaissance.

If African nations issue postage stamps of Pandit Nehru and if India does the same for Eduardo Mondlane, if Latin American nations honour Ho Chi Minh and Japan honours Marcus Garvey, and so on, a meaningful first step would have been taken toward human solidarity.

Though our plans received warm welcome from many organisations, I was unable to see to the effective implementation of the resolution before my retirement from the United Nations.

Meanwhile, I am distressed that many great leaders of people who have inspired us are now being treated even in the Third World as "non-persons" because of coups and neo-colonial settlements.

That is particularly true of Africa where a false sense of protocol prevails among the Heads of State. In the observance of the 25th anniversary of OAU this year, not only is there little references to the great Pan African leaders who laid the groundwork for the OAU, but many of the leaders of the African struggle are deliberately and totally ignored. The name of Diallo Telli, the first Secretary-General of OAU and a great African patriot, is not even mentioned. Fighters and martyrs like Patrice Lumumba of the Congo (now Zaire), Sylvano Olympio of Togo, Felix Moumie of the Cameroon, Prince Louis Rwagasore of Burundi are virtually banned. Others are treated as merely national, rather than African and international, leaders. It appears that only Gamal Abdel Nasser and Kwame Nkrumah could not be confined to oblivion or to national boundaries.

Somewhat of a similar situation has developed in Asia. Sukarno and Mohamed Hatta of Indonesia, U Aung San of Burma, Mossadegh of Iran and Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh have been sentenced to become non-persons. Mere lip service is paid to Mohamed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, hailed by Mahatma Gandhi as "incorruptible", while corruption seems to have engulfed the country.

Another tragedy has been the tendency of some to form sects around their favourite saints and defame others. The followers of Marcus Garvey who attack Dr. DuBois, and the admirers of Martin Luther King, Jr., who denounce Malcolm X, do no service except to the enemies of emancipation.

We must find ways to reclaim the spirit of the great struggle of this century and publicise the lives and aspirations of the true leaders of humanity in the light of the United Nations resolution. With the present crisis in the United Nations and UNESCO, the initiative will need to be taken by public organisations, educators and the media. The observance of the centenary of Marcus Garvey in 1987 can, I hope, be the beginning of the movement and the forthcoming centenaries of Jawaharlal Nehru and Fenner Brockway may provide a fillip.