



The Russian connection

As the remains of struggle veterans Moses Kotane and John Beaver Marks are returned to SA, it is appropriate to remember the country that stood by us

Nathi Mthethwa

COMMENT

HERE is no better time to take stock of where the anti-colonial struggle comes from and reflect upon relations with Russia than at this joyous, yet sad occasion of the repatriation and reburial of struggle veterans.

Moses Kotane and John Beaver Marks represent a special relationship that the anti-apartheid struggle had with the people of the former Soviet Union.

In fact, Kotane and Marks exemplify the common histories and aspirations shared by the people of Russia and South Africa.

As we move towards the maturation of our democracy and freedom that turns 21 this year, it is appropriate to consider and acknowledge the pivotal role the international community played in support of our struggle for liberation.

The Soviet Union, as it was called at the time, was always a reliable companion of the South African liberation movement.

When we look at our common histories and how the Russians helped shape our political destiny, Kotane and Marks emerge as prominent figures in the relations between Russia and South Africa.

There is no doubt it was through the inspiration they derived from the Russian Revolution of 1917 that they became active agents of the struggle for justice and equality.

When the ANC was listed as a "terrorist" group by many countries – including the US – it was the Soviet Union that supported our struggle unequivocally.

The Russian people offered unconditional support through educational opportunities to political activists, providing military training to ANC cadres and financial support to the liberation movement.

The ANC's representatives even held a diplomatic status in Russia while many countries were turning their backs on its struggles, especially because of its close relations with Russia and her people.

The early pioneers of the South African liberation struggle initiated contact with Moscow as far back as 1927, when one of the founding



Arts and Culture Minister Nathi Mthethwa behind a statue of Moses Kotane during a media briefing on the exhumation, repatriation and reburial of stalwarts, Moses Kotane and John Beaver Marks, from Russia, in Newtown, Joburg, last week. INSET: President Jacob Zuma pays his respects at the grave of Moses Kotane who is buried at the Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow, last year.

PICTURES: ANTOINE DE RAS AND ELMOND JIVANE

fathers of the ANC, Josiah Gumede, visited the USSR with a view to establishing relations.

The ANC had only been in existence for about 15 years and was overly optimistic that through political persuasion, the colonial government would ease the yoke of oppression on the indigenous people of South Africa.

The USSR was known for producing some of the most renowned scholars, academics, intellectuals and philosophers in the world. It was against this backdrop that, in

the 1930s, Kotane and Marks – who were then leading figures in the national liberation movement – were identified as future leaders and sent to the Lenin School in Moscow. They were diehard members of the Communist Party of South Africa.

Another pioneering member of this key group of cadres who was to play a prominent role in the national liberation movement was the little known Albert Nzula.

But it was Kotane and Marks who rose to prominence, perhaps because of their larger-than-life

stature and the fact that their ranks were elevated in the ANC through their selfless involvement in the Defiance Campaign of the 1950s.

Both were later to be buried in Russia.

Kotane was the treasurer-general of the ANC, the longest-serving general secretary of the Communist Party and a central figure who initiated the formation of the progressive trade union movement in South Africa. He was a key political adviser of the president general of the ANC, Albert Luthuli.

He was sent to Russia for medical attention after having a stroke in 1968, and died in 1978.

Similarly, Marks was the president of the African Mine Workers Union, later to be African Union of Mineworkers. He then became president of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions, the chairman of the SACP and the president of the ANC in its Transvaal branch.

He also led the Defiance Campaign and in 1952 was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act. And he, too, went to Russia for

medical attention in 1971, and suffered a fatal heart attack in 1972.

These two stalwarts played a paramount role in solidifying relations between the ANC and SACP and, above all, the consolidation of relations between the people of the two countries, especially those involved in the anti-colonial struggle.

It is noteworthy that the liberation movement in South Africa began in a peaceful and non-violent manner.

The apartheid government had turned a deaf ear to negotiations and the passive resistance campaign proved ineffective, while the brutal killing of unarmed protesters continued as exemplified by the 1946 miners strike and the Sharpeville massacre of March 21, 1960, among others.

After the introduction of apartheid as a government system in 1948, followed by more vicious laws and continued carnage of innocent victims, the national liberation movement was left with no option after it was banned and was forced to take up armed struggle.

When the time came for the national liberation movement to seek support from the international community, Moscow was one of the first allies to be identified.

A delegation comprising Kotane, Yusuf Dadoo and other representatives of the SACP went to Moscow to discuss support for the liberation struggle in South Africa.

The Soviet Union offered more than just monetary support and military training. It provided substantial humanitarian support, which included food supplies, clothes, music instruments and vehicles.

The Soviet Union was also one of the first partners the movement looked to for the training of the ANC cadres.

Subsequent to the unwavering support of the Soviet Union and other parties, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the ANC, was formed in 1961. Between 1963 and 1965, 328 ANC cadres received military training in Russia.

The turning point and cementing of relations between Russia and the South African liberation struggle

came soon after the killing of young people during the student uprisings in 1976 in Soweto.

This was followed by the killing of Steve Biko in police custody a year later.

This saw the ANC intensifying its armed struggle. In fact, in 1978, its president, Oliver Tambo, led a delegation to the USSR where he requested assistance in the training and organisation of MK cadres in Angola.

The enduring cordial relationship between the liberation movement, especially the ANC, and Russia continues in the post-apartheid stage.

During a state visit in 1999, Nelson Mandela expressed his gratitude for the "solidarity of the Russian people in the South African fight against apartheid for freedom".

After two decades of the democratic dispensation in South Africa, it is important that we acknowledge and cherish the role of these selfless revolutionaries in the attainment of the freedom and democracy we enjoy today.

Thus as part of telling our story to celebrate the unfolding culture of democracy in our country, it is the most appropriate time to reclaim fragments of our heritage that have been scattered in different parts of the world.

It is in this context that we own our heritage by returning the remains of Marks and Kotane to their ancestral land.

Throughout our struggle history, Kotane and Marks continued to shine brightly as symbols of unity of purpose between the two countries.

However, the repatriation of their remains does not, in any way, mark the end of the bond that exists between the people of South Africa and Russia.

Instead, it will serve as the reminder of the common histories shared between the two countries.

Marks's and Kotane's lives were sacrificed to create a better South Africa. We dare not fail them.

Mthethwa is the minister of arts and culture.

Africa in great position to feed the world and prosper

WE LIVE in a time of extraordinary opportunity. Progress in plant sciences is opening up the promise of a new agricultural revolution, one that can not only feed the 9 billion to 10 billion people that will inhabit our planet in 2050, but feed them well. No place on Earth is better placed to take advantage of this opportunity than Africa.

With its vast and underutilised resources of land, soil, water and sun, Africa is wonderfully situated to match or exceed the success of Brazil – a nation that agricultural development helped catapult into the front ranks of world trade. This revolution will only occur, however, if African countries embrace farming systems that include the use of modern biotechnology.

Biotech continues to be the most rapidly adopted agricultural tech-

Owen Paterson

COMMENT

nology in history. Genetically modified (GMO) plants and seeds are transforming agriculture: increasing yields, boosting incomes and reducing the need for toxic pesticides.

Last year, 18 million farmers, of whom 90% were smallholders and resource poor, planted 181 million hectares of biotech crops in 28 countries. During the 19 years GMO crops have been commercialised, we have seen a more than one-hundred-fold increase in the area planted, which today covers a land mass one and a half times the area of China.

South Africa is the leader on this continent, with 2.7 million biotech hectares planted. But other nations are catching up. In Burkina Faso, 70% of all cotton in the country is now insect-resistant Bt cotton, a GMO. Farmers who plant Bt cotton have seen a 20% increase in yield, at least an \$87 (R995) per hectare increase in their profits, while they have used 66% less pesticide. Field trials are under way in Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda on a broad range of new crops, from biotech bananas to maize.

This time of great opportunity, however, is also one of great mischief, with environmentalists and bureaucrats in the rich world waging an anti-science propaganda war against agricultural biotechnology. Not since the Luddites smashed cot-

ton mill machinery in early 19th century England have we seen such an organised, fanatical antagonism to progress and science. These enemies of the Green Revolution call themselves "progressive", but their agenda could hardly be more backward-looking and regressive.

They call themselves humanitarians and environmentalists. But their policies would condemn billions to hunger, poverty and underdevelopment. And their insistence on mandating primitive, inefficient farming techniques would decimate remaining wild spaces, devastate species and biodiversity and leave our natural ecology poorer.

There are many impediments standing between the vision of agricultural progress and Africa, of course, but none is more pernicious than these anti-progress groups.

They are supported by massive funding from the EU, as well as numerous misguided church and humanitarian agencies. They have undue influence in the media, government and international institutions.

They have put forward many myths, the most glaring of which is insistence that biotech crops are unsafe to eat. It is a claim they continue to make in the face of many studies testifying to GMO safety.

Since their introduction almost two decades ago, biotech crops have, on average, increased crop yield overall by 22%, increased farmer profits by 68% and reduced chemical pesticide use by 37%.

The anti-GMO groups like Greenpeace, with its combined war chest estimated to exceed \$500m, not only conduct sophisticated scare-

mongering, but also violently attack and destroy agricultural research they oppose. Anti-biotech groups in 2013 destroyed a field trial of Golden Rice, a GMO crop that could save millions of lives of young children affected by vitamin A deficiency.

The question that must be asked is: When did so many of our "humanitarian" organisations become so disdainful about the lives of the desperately poor, whom they are supposed to be helping? The greatest offender is the EU which, in a twisted version of neo-colonialism, has imposed its affluent organic affectations and anti-scientific policies on Africa. When I was secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs with the UK government, I saw this at first hand.

Europe's retreat from science is one reason why the technologically

advanced EU, which boasts fertile soils and extremely friendly climates for agriculture, cannot feed itself and has been reduced to becoming a net importer of food. European livestock farmers now import millions of tons of GMO feed crops annually. Without these imports Europe's livestock market would collapse.

We stand at the beginning of a second agricultural revolution. We need every possible tool available to meet this challenge. Despite the propaganda of the anti-GMO groups, we must all push forward and ensure that science overcomes superstition. I commend African nations for showing Europe the way.

Paterson, an MP, is a former British secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs.

Strong tobacco at Loftus

WHAT an evening's rugby it was on Saturday – two cliffhangers in the Super Rugby and another ding-dong in the Six Nations.

At the Street Shelter for the Over-Forties, on some screens they were showing Wales versus France – Wales in red, France in blue – and on others they were showing the Lions versus the Stormers – the Lions in red and the Stormers in blue.

It could be a bit confusing. I watched the entire Lions versus Stormers match, only to find out it had been Wales versus France. It's this globalised, digitalised age we live in. Great rugby though.

As for our match against the Bulls – an absolute humdinger, as expected, so much talent on the field you can't stop thinking of the World Cup.

Has Patrick Lambie ever been so sweetly on song with his kicking?

But what were they smoking in the TMO box at Loftus? That "inconclusive" forward pass by the



Bulls that got them their first try – that was gridiron stuff. Our disallowed try – a guy knocked on without touching the ball. And that last Bulls try was as convincing as Mac Maharaj on the Nkandla firepool.

Three TMO bum calls in one match – a probable 21 points adrift. Mama mia! This has to be some sort of record. Yet we almost clawed our way back.

All the same, I felt the Bulls had the better of it overall. We were on the back foot much of the time. We wuz robbed – yet they deserved to rob us. It's a funny old game.

Complaint

A LETTER of complaint comes this way from a lady who calls herself "Mrs Brown".

"I sat up until after midnight to watch this programme on TV. It was a complete waste of time.

"Grand Prix – and it was all about racing cars."

Great spin

INVESTMENT analyst Dr James Greener congratulates Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene in his latest gummy newsletter on his presenting a belt-tightening budget without once using the word "austerity". This is admirable spin.

Yet he notes an immediate contradiction. "In defiance of these calls for parsimony, the Office of the Premier here in KZN has appointed a consultant to run the 'I Do Right – Even When Nobody is Watching' campaign.



A birthday cake celebrating the 91st birthday of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, during birthday celebrations at Victoria Falls, on Saturday.

PICTURE: AP

"Aside from the disturbing grammar, the idea that such a campaign has become necessary, and furthermore is under way, is dreadful. Why not simply fire anyone not doing right?"

Pop names

A FEATURE of our age is the

outlandish names of so many of our pop groups. A reader feels that many of them would sound even better in Afrikaans. Here goes:

Pet Shop Boys – Troeteldierwinkelseuns; Smashing Pumpkins – Platgemoerde Pampoene; The Clash – Die Botsing; Frankie Goes to Hollywood –

Frikkie Gaan Fliek Toe; Bananarama – Piesangmargarien; Iron Maiden – Yster Sussie; Spice Girls – Aromat Slette; Simple Minds – Dofkoppe; Meat Loaf – Vleisrol; Dire Straits – Moer Toef; Def Leppard – Stomdoof Luipeerd; Johnny Rotten and the Sex Pistols – Jannie Vrot en die Pomp Revolwers. Yes, they do have a certain zing in the local taal.

The Agony and the Ecstasy – Eina maar dis lekker.

Inflation

OVERHEARD in the Street Shelter for the Over-Forties: "When I was a boy, my mom would send me down to the corner shop with R1 and I'd come back with five potatoes, two loaves of bread, three bottles of milk, a hunk of cheese, a box of tea and six eggs.

"You can't do that now... too many security cameras."

Buses

IAN Gibson, poet laureate of Hillcrest, pens a few lines on the latest swing of the pendulum in

Durban's bus service. When Mike S was Durban's commissar, Citizens avoided buses and went by car; Now I'm told it's even worse, Like, 20 packed into a hearse, Or bundled together in a ricksha.

Tailpiece

LAWYER (to wealthy art collector): "I've got good news and bad news."

Art collector: "What's the good news? I've had an awful day." Lawyer: "Your wife invested R50 000 in two pictures this week that she figures are worth a minimum of R20 million to R30m."

Art collector: "Well done. Very good news indeed." "You've just made my day. Now what's the bad news?"

Lawyer: "The pictures are of you with your secretary."

Last word

DO YOU realise if it weren't for Edison we'd be watching TV by candlelight? – Al Boliska