

DAVID MARTIN

Had the passing of David Martin happened during the years of the anti imperialist, anti apartheid struggle in Eastern and Southern Africa, there would have been two camps with very opposite reactions to the news of his death. There would have been those who would have rejoiced that their archenemy, the indefatigable journalist who exposed their heinous crimes, who unmasked their dark deeds and campaigned tirelessly against them was no more. Then there would be the many thousands, who counted him as one in their ranks; indeed as one who was on the firing line with them as they fought on the political, diplomatic and military fronts for the liberation of the people of the region and beyond. In post liberation Southern Africa, it is difficult to think of anyone who knew David or knew about him and his work, who will not be moved by his passage, after a long battle against cancer, and who in the last four years, when not on the operating table or in bed, still continued to travel and to write despite the agony and discomfort attendant to his illness. He only stopped when he could not physically sit before a computer and move his fingers on the key board.

David Martin was a household name in Tanzania among journalists and politicians in the 10 years he lived in Dar es Salaam, beginning in 1964 when he arrived and started work as a journalist on the Tanganyika Standard newspaper. 1964 was also the year when the two countries, Tanganyika and Zanzibar united to form the United Republic of Tanzania. Not an easy time for David, a British journalist coming to a country which was only in its third year of independence; where nationalism was still so high and leaders so sensitive, that any foreign journalist's criticism, question or doubt about our politics, culture or society in general, was immediately seized upon as interference at best, and at worst as evidence of even more sinister designs by an agent of imperialism.

But David was not easy to intimidate. He gave and took the challenge, traded questions and criticisms with other journalists, myself included, then on rival Party newspapers. He reported on events and leaders as he understood them, initially annoying many, occasionally so seriously that some would have been glad to have him declared prohibited immigrant if they could. But as time went by and his talent and capabilities as a journalist were recognized; and as Mwalimu Nyerere and Tanzania needed a hearing in western media which was anything but friendly, David Martin became an ally. He in turn recognized the importance of his position. He knew he was used by Mwalimu Nyerere in his own words for Mwalimu's "strategic leaks" and knew how to keep the confidence and continue to win Mwalimu's trust.

Through this connection, of a journalist and of a President who was also in many ways his teacher, David embraced the African liberation struggle with his characteristic probing mind and commitment. His memory for names and places, his tireless note taking, his telephone calls all over the world following leads and arguing the case for isolation of the Portuguese, Rhodesian and Apartheid regimes, were unlimited personal assets. He won the trust and friendship of Southern African leaders from when they were liberation fighters to when they became Presidents. In some countries, in Uganda during Iddi Amin's nightmarish days, there was a price on his head. He was a Prohibited Immigrant in another East African country and had to make sure whenever he traveled that his plane would not land in those countries.

David was against injustice not only in white dominated southern Africa as some people might have expected. He was against injustice everywhere.

The rest as they is history; 40 years' history of brave and meritorious service to African liberation.

David who is being laid to his final rest in Zimbabwe, his adopted homeland, was also a great and reliable friend that I, and others like me will greatly miss. David and Phyllis' welcome and hospitality in their homes in Dar es Salaam, Maputo and Harare were memorable and enriching occasions for deep, comradely, and not always polite discussions into late hours of night. There is much that we will remember David for.

May the Good Lord grant David eternal peace and give Phyllis courage and strength to carry on the work that they dedicated themselves to in the service of Africa and humanity in general.

BEN MKAPA