

TRIBUTE TO MAPETLA MOHAPI: "THERE IS AN UPROAR HERE"



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By Cde Zithulele Cindi

Twenty-eight years ago thousands of Black students responded to the call by the South African Students Organisation (**SASO**) to vote with their feet rather than accept poor conditions that made a learning environment difficult to achieve. Students from universities, bush colleges and theological seminaries walked out en masse and in large numbers from their campuses vowing not to accept an inherently racist system of education.

A high level of community spirit and political leadership of the highest acumen was displayed by the student leaders then as they moved from city to city, township to township, to village to village, to communities and churches explaining the reasons behind their actions. Parents, community leaders and students formed committees that engaged the power that be about how the political situation impacted on the education system and conditions in campuses generally. Authorities were intransigent and did not want to move. Every Black community, every city, village and Black township felt as if it was in mourning as it had to ponder the bleak future of their sons and daughters. The undue attention on student leaders of the day by the special branch of the security police intensified. One of such leaders came from this village and he made one telling phone call that summed it all: "THERE IS AN UPROAR HERE!". Mapetla Mohapi made that call to the **SASO** head-office in Beatrice Street, Durban to brief them about the education situation in the Eastern Cape. He was to become the leading light within the Black Consciousness movement and the beacon of hope for communities around here, the youth and students alike.

Today when we still hear of shortages of books in school and children having to receive their education under trees - especially Black children, then we have to agree that there is an uproar here! When we hear of Black old age pensioners dying in queues

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while waiting for pension pay-outs under their own government then we can conclude that there is an uproar here!

The spirit of consulting with communities by the student movement of the seventies evinced a level of high discipline and moral rectitude. It was during such consultations that frank discussion and the analysis of the situation took place. Yes, parents and communities were puzzled by the actions and campaigns of the day but through this dialogue a better understanding of the struggle was achieved. A clearer meaning and purpose of the struggle emerged through their frank discussions. This village should take courage and comfort in the knowledge that it was your son, Frank Mapetla Mohapi who led these frank discussions.

We believe there are many of you who can bear witness to those frank exchanges and discussions - all done with that characteristic humbleness and humility that Frank often displayed in the presence of his elders. We urge the youth of today to take a leaf from such experiences and find ways of co-operating and working together with communities even though at times we may hold divergent views on a particular point. That is what revolutionary theory, among other things, teaches us to do. Whenever we see strife, conflict and tension among the youth and their parents, we are duty-bound to intervene so that there is no uproar here.

This concern and respect for their parents gave rise to the mass student walk-outs of 1972. Earlier on the late **Onkgopotse Tiro** challenged the university authorities and the apartheid laws that excluded Black parents from participating in the graduation ceremonies of their children. **Frank Mapetla Mohapi** was among thousands of Black students who walked out of Turfloop in solidarity with the late Cde Tiro who had been expelled.

Many of them would have liked to pay their last respect to Mapetla at the time of his untimely death but the system then prevented them. Many more would have loved to be present today at this remembrance and rededication to our fallen hero. We convey their greetings and message of support to the Mohapi family and the community of Sterkspruit.

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When we once again hear that many Black students are being excluded from receiving education at university for financial reasons we should remember that there will be an uproar here. The dignity of our people is being eroded daily through the provision of inferior dwellings in the name of "RDP housing". We only see the so-called developers benefiting by the cheques for huge amounts that they receive while the homeless continue to be made to feel landless in the land of their birth.

When health services collapse all around us with clinics and hospitals being unable to provide pain killers it raises questions about how we value the contributions to the struggle of people like Mapetla Mohapi who gave selflessly and with their heart and soul to the upliftment of social conditions of Black people and their collective dignity through community development programmes and projects.

Cde Mapetla Frank Mohapi worked tirelessly for the **Zimele Trust** where he was its able administrator. In honour of his work and commitment to the Black nation we should continue to strive and uplift Black people by constantly reminding them - *Black man you are on your own!*.

We are here to commit and rededicate ourselves to the life and memory of one of our country's illustrious sons who truly deserves to be honoured for his gallant efforts by being included in the roll of honour and hall of fame in the heroes acre. The village of Jozanah deserves to be included within the national heritage scheme of things.

We salute our fallen hero **Mapetla Frank Mohapi** who was identified for his efforts and commitment and was elected the Permanent Organiser for **SASO** in 1974. His harassment and persecution by Boss and the special branch continued up to his untimely and yet pre-meditated killing in detention. A quarter of a century - a life-time, has passed and yet his killers, like those of another gallants hero of our struggle - Steve Biko - have not been brought to account.

A mother lost a son, a wife lost a husband and daughters lost a father and yet perpetrators of this murderous deeds get honoured through the TRC and pardoned.
