

## **Archie Sibeko** aka Zola Zembe; ZZ; Zola Ntambo

3 March 1928 – 27 March 2018

Comrade Archie Sibeko, who has died aged 90 in the North East of England, was a remarkable man; a South African trade union leader, and a major figure in the struggle against apartheid. Since 2002 he had lived in Tynemouth, with his second wife Dr Joyce Leeson, and, in November 2017, he was recognised with an honorary degree by Newcastle University, as part of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Martin Luther King's degree award, under the Freedom City banner.

In South Africa Archie was an active trade unionist in the SA railway union (SARHWU). He was a key figure in the creation of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and the leader of the Western Cape delegation at the founding conference of SACTU.

He was arrested with Mandela and many others as part of the Defiance Campaign, part of the Treason Trial in 1956, and briefly imprisoned with Nelson Mandela.

When the ANC established a military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), Archie was an early volunteer, and, together with Chris Hani, he was sent abroad for military training. He was among those who set up one of the first training camps in Tanzania. He was a committed fighter against apartheid all his life and, when the ANC required, he was deployed to London as the head of SACTU to co-ordinate the liberation struggle in Western Europe in the 1960/70s. He travelled widely to raise funds and support for the ANC campaign, and used his other names to protect his family back in South Africa.

When the ANC and liberation organisations were unbanned, he eventually returned and, after 27 years in exile, resumed his union duties with the Railway Union and the ANC in Western Cape. The railway union merged with the transport workers to form SATAWU and he was elected as Honorary President, a position he held until his death. The work load in leading this uneasy merger, and trying to resolve internal factional disputes, took its toll on Archie's health and, in 1991, he suffered a minor stroke. The doctor treating him made it clear if he continued at the same pace he would be dead in a couple of years; and he made the wise decision to retire under the care of his wife Joyce.

Archie became a notable and respected figure in Tynemouth and the North East for his work on equal rights, and was asked to be a keynote speaker at the launch of Journey to Justice in Newcastle in 2015, where he gave a memorable speech.

UNISON assisted Archie and Joyce in reprinting their book "Freedom In Our Lifetime" and, in return, he spoke at many Trade Union Young Members meetings, where he continued to inspire and educate young people on the importance of the struggle for human rights and freedom.

He was a principled and dedicated man who continued to work and inspire until the end of his life and it was a privilege to have known him. RIP Archie Sibeko.

Keith Hodgson

March 2018