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## Dzinashe Machingura (Wilfred Mhanda): Our Own Che Guevara

By Tinashe L. Chimedza [Former ZINASU Secretary General]



Three days after Africa Day I got one of those messages in my inbox that calls for clear-headed reflection. It was a message that Wilfred Mhanda, whose *Chimurenga* name was Dzinashe Machingura, had passed on. His life was that of a rigorous theoretician and a soldier. Dzinashe Machingura belongs to a generation which decided to give up studying in universities and sacrifice their lives for an *idea* called *Zimbabwe*. It was an idea which one could get killed for by a vicious white-settler establishment which relied on the force of arms to exploit, dominate and subjugate black people. Dzinashe was stubbornly independent minded and a steadfast revolutionary. Comrade Dzino did not wish that his name be engraved on hollow monuments, to be buried on defiled shrines and have idolatrous effigies sculptured for him, his wish was very modest – a better life for all. We, the post-liberation generation, are contented calling him a comrade with the full meaning of that word because his life, humility and self-sacrifice remained that of a relentless revolutionary. When comrade Dzino talked you could hear the deep contemplations of a man who had made the conscious decision of giving up his life so that my generation and the generations to come could live a life of freedom, dignity, opportunity and a life in which our full potential is realised. Thirty four years later that dream has been twisted into a horrendous nightmare by a morbid cabal bent on taking us back to the pre-stone age era, it is a parasitic political-military elite that corrodes everything it touches. It has become an embodiment of what Professor Ndlovu-Gatsheni has called ‘grotesque nationalism’ which is perpetually feeding itself obese and only interested in re-producing its grip on power mainly by coercion and minimal consent from those they govern. Broadly however this grip on power is intended as a class project of what Dr Showers Mawowa summed as a party-state ‘tapping into the chaos’ to entrench itself state-power wise but importantly to protect and expand the ‘bounty’ being looted and stashed.

### **Guerrilla Commander & theoretician: the Zimbabwe People’s Army (ZIPA) Moment**

When the liberation war seemed stalled and was weakening Dzinashe was part of a militant vanguard of

radical soldiers who revived the war effort and attempted to forge unity between ZIPRA and ZANLA to form the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA). In an interview, in September 1976, in Mozambique, Dzino pointed out that the formation of ZIPA was aimed at '...resuming the armed struggle, intensifying this armed struggle and carrying it to its logical conclusion and finally establishing a just and popular socio-political order serving the interests of the people of Zimbabwe'. He went further stating that the liberation struggle was framed as a 'National Democratic Revolution (NDR)' aimed at overthrowing 'national oppression' through 'mass participation and mass support'. Although this experiment stuttered Dzino and his comrades spurred the revolution once more and went on to become part of what is now called the 'vashandi' (workers) because of their inclination to Marxist-Leninism (with a tinge of Maoism). As Fay Chung in her book *'Re-living the Second Chimurenga: Memories from the Liberation Struggle in Zimbabwe'* acknowledges the vashandi were a different group of people. Chung states that under their influence 'abuse of women ceased abruptly' in the camps and the Wampoa Academy pushed a 'decidedly left wing flavour' in the liberation movement. As for Dzinashe Machingura this is how Chung summed him up:

*Wilfred Mhanda arrived in Geneva dressed in Che Guevara style with a black beret and blue jeans. He habitually shaved his head completely. Short and stocky bristling with intelligence and ideological righteousness, he exhibited a high level of puritanical restraint as compared to others who had just emerged from the jails or from the battlefield.*

It is worthy to note that the Geneva Summit of 1976 was an 'international' (meaning US-Kissinger inspired at that time) manoeuvre to weaken and check the rapidly growing radicalisation of the liberation movement. The effect would have been to force through a neo-colonial 'one man one vote' solution with political power passing to the black majority and economic power remaining under the clutches of a parasitic white-monopoly capital minority class structure. Dzinashe and the young militants were suspicious of the summit because they viewed it as a sell-out compromise aimed at checking the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). It is this experimenting with progressive ideas which were anti-tribal and very revolutionary that these young radicals stirred the pot by refusing to join what Dzinashe derided as 'nationalist personality politics'. In his perspective ZIPA was:

*... fighting for clearly defined political objectives. Our political goal is to overthrow national oppression in Zimbabwe, to put an end to the system of exploitation of man by man within Zimbabwe and to create a system that will serve the people of Zimbabwe. When we say that ZIPA is fighting for freedom we mean that ZIPA is fighting for political freedom. By political freedom we mean that ZIPA is fighting for the political rights, the economic rights, and the cultural rights of the Zimbabwean people; to put the Zimbabwean people in a position of authority and in a position of dominance in these spheres. Through realizing the people's democratic freedom we release and set in motion the innovative and creative potential of the masses of Zimbabwe.*

Feeling the pressure from these young radicals the nationalist old guard reacted harshly, ambushed them, rounded them up and threw them into Mozambican prisons. Whilst imprisoned, in Gramscian *Prison*

*Notebooks* style, Dzinashe went further to deal with 'theoretical' issues that were afflicting the Zimbabwean liberation movement in an unpublished monograph titled '*A Treatise on Zimbabwe's National Liberation Struggle: Some Theoretical Problems*' (thanks to Professor David Moore the monograph will soon be published). Although unpublished the treatise was written in the critical tradition of liberation theoreticians like Amilcar Cabral, Fidel Castro and most importantly Frantz Fanon. The treatise is also important in another way because as Zimbabweans we have been told that the ZANU/ZAPU split was because of 'strategy and tactics' differences with ZANU presented as more radical and ZAPU being less so. Dzinashe rubbishes this claim and argues that both organisations continued to have the same 'ideological outlook'. In a way Dzinashe attempted to develop a more advanced theoretically and historically placed analysis of the emergence, evolution, contradictions and trajectory of the liberation movement in Zimbabwe. His theorising about the liberation process and its ongoing challenges was a spirited attempt to conceptualise the liberation process within the more interesting frame of the liberation struggle as a National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Professor David Moore at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) has done a painstaking 'labour of love' to critically record and analyse this 'vashandi' moment for what it presented and he called it '...that idealist flicker of a moment when a 'revolution' seems poised to achieve substantial meaning and transformation before being snuffed out by other anti-progressive forces' or alternatively a 'fusion' which '...appeared to make a new historical project possible'. And snuffed they were, with Mugabe claiming that the *vashandi* were a 'destructive force' aimed at 'negating the struggle' by defying the 'party line' and they had to be 'negated in turn' by the 'ZANU PF axe'. To deal with any opposition and dissent Rugare Gumbo said there were 'kangaroo courts' and 'Mugabe was prosecutor, judge, everything'. That ZANU axe has ceaselessly continued to fall, cold blood style (*Gukurahundi* and Operation *Mavhoterapi* is enough evidence), on the necks of those accused of being 'sell outs, puppets, rebels and dissidents'. Perhaps herein, within the evolution of the liberation movement can be located what Dr Booker Magure, analysing the 2000s would call 'deepening state barbarism'. Yet as Rugare Gumbo admitted the ZIPA guys had an 'advanced political orientation' because 'They could see one point of view, and form a revolutionary point of view say that such was not the right thing to do' – that is the stuff revolutionaries are made of.

### **Re-Imagining the 'post-colony'**

In the post-independent period Dzinashe Machingura could have just chosen to renounce his views and be 're-habilitated' by ZANU PF like what his peers Rugare Gumbo, Augustine Chihuri, Happison Muchecheterere and Alexander Kanengoni did. Dzinashe could have then joined the party-state facilitated looting frenzy, grab a farm or even five of them, commandeer a gold or diamond mine or get busy asset stripping a number of parastatals but the revolutionary he was he walked away from all of it. Dzinashe

rejected this lifestyle because in his eyes it was 'opportunism for survival' but he seemed to understand those who did. Later on when ZANU PF re-militarised and started buying off the Zimbabwe National War Veterans Association (ZNLWA) in order to support its weakening hegemony he stubbornly formed the Zimbabwe Liberators Platform (ZLP) as an alternative voice for the *Second Chimurenga* fighters. For him being a revolutionary was a lifestyle choice. In his own words he argued that '[war veterans] should strive to be successful farmers and entrepreneurs through hard work and not through expropriation, entitlement and preferential handouts ahead of the common people'. He was also active in other civil society networks and organisations. People like Professor Brian Raftopoulos and Brian Kagoro at the Crisis Coalition in Zimbabwe provided a platform for Dzinashe to help us, the post-liberation generation, understand the post-liberation contestations for a better Zimbabwe within a historical continuum rooted and related to the national liberation project. Remarkably poor Tendai Biti has attempted a 'return to history' post the 2013 MDC-T routing and he instantaneously torched a flurry of 'softened' negations. Though without the force of the 'ZANU axe' the responses to Tendai Biti have been a lurch into a sordid re-enactment of the move from '*Pamberi neChimurenga*' (Forward with the Liberation Struggle) to '*Pameberi naCde Robert Mugabe*' (Forward with comrade Robert Mugabe). When student activists were being hunted, tortured and kicked out of universities he gave office space to an organisation called the Students Solidarity Trust (SST) founded by the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) when I was Secretary General – many of the student activists from that program have gone on to pursue PhDs. This is the comrade Dzinashe that I will remember always very thoughtful, ready with advice and importantly availed practical solidarity.

### **Critical Historical Narrative: '*Dzino: Memoirs of a Freedom Fighter*'**

Wilfred Mhanda also did an intelligent job of chronicling his life by publishing a monograph called *Dzino: Memoirs of a Freedom Fighter*. The book is important chiefly because it provides a critical perspective of Zimbabwe's torturous history to independence. Lately Zimbabwe's history has become dominated by a perverse officialdom which narrates history as a linear process centred on ZANU PF and Robert Mugabe. The state has become central in re-producing a monolithic-mythical history which is self-serving for the elites in power because it promotes a homogenous 'one voice' story which the historian Professor Ranger has called 'patriotic history'. Charles Mangongera recently warned about this dangerous 'end of history' narrative by ZANU PF where the nation's history starts and ends with ZANU PF and their rule is legitimated on the basis that 'they' alone liberated Zimbabwe. What Jonathan Moyo and his party-state networked intellectuals are interested in is a particularly dangerous exclusive history which edits out any other voices and contributions to our rich struggle for national liberation, self-determination and human dignity. By writing his memoirs Cde Dzino bequeathed to us as a nation an alternative voice which critically engages with our history, clears some mythical distortions and points to the diversity of the voices and actors who contributed immensely to our liberation.

The history we are being fed is very 'un-national' and come to think of it how many of us care to remember ZIPRA and ZAPU beyond Dumiso Dabengwa and Joshua Nkomo - not many would even remember that young revolutionary Lieutenant General 'Mafela' Lookout Khalisabantu Vumindaba Masuku. Importantly then Dzinashwe has attempted that *Cabralian/Fanonisque* bridge of being a 'soldier-scholar' which attracted the wrath of the old guard nationalist and interestingly Dr Philan Zamchiya recently pointed out that even the contemporary MDC is weakened by this 'anti-intellectualism'.

### **The Legacy Will Live On.**

Predictably there were no gun salutes, no serialisation of his life in the Herald, no statement from the Politburo and certainly there was no *kongonya* dancers gyrating at his funeral it is as if the nation is being frog-marched to forget Cde Dzino. How is it that a revolutionary who was a military instructor, a camp commander in Tanzania, a Deputy Political Commissar, a member of the military High Command and present at Geneva to block Smith's manoeuvres can pass on and the government continues like its business as usual? Have we become this petty minded? We have reconciled with people who served in Rhodesian 'anti-terrorist' units, those who served in the Special Branch of the Rhodesian white-state and some who served in the Rhodesian military are even members of the National Assembly. But we cannot reconcile our differences with Dzino? It seems then we have become a nation beholden to petty grudges rather than celebrating diversity and difference. Cde Dzino's legacy will be as stubborn as that of Malcolm X, Robert Sobukwe, Angela Davies, Lumumba, Biko and 'Mafela' Masuku and every time we are told to forget his idealism and revolutionary spirit, even in death, his spirit will continue growing on us – even with no public holidays or official permission. Cde Dzino paid the price of asserting a different type of democratic politics and we will continue in that intelligent stubborn Gramscian streak which he taught us - 'pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will'. Cde Dzino, like Che was a scientist, described by his peers at Goromonzi as a 'math wizard' and like Che he decided to continue struggling for a better life for all even after his peers were drowning in state subsidised largesse, accumulating wealth and had turned to rabid authoritarian nationalism at the expense of the people. Looking at the wreckage wrought by Mugabe Inc. maybe the *vashandi* were right to have derided the old guard type of nationalism which Patrick Bond and Simba Manyanya have pointed out became very 'exhausted' and unable to fulfil the objectives of national liberation. Cde Dzino imparted in some of us a conscious streak of honourable rebellion which makes us refuse to worship and feed fat at the shrines of personality politics. He insisted and taught us to reject being part of fanatical ecumenical 'praise and worship' teams for political leaders - for him principle came first. Maybe Dzino and his group were young 'infantile idealists' – but again so has every other revolutionary who has contributed to the theory and practice of liberation.

His legacy will live on, in our hearts and minds, and not in tombs built for scoundrels.