

Inspiring story of Sobukwe the pacifist

SOBUKWE AND APARTHEID by Benjamin Pogrund. (Jonathan Hall Publishers).

HEARTWARMING is the word I've been searching for.

Robert Sobukwe, a founder member and first president of the Pan Africanist Congress, (Pac) was a man of many parts. A man of integrity, an intellectual and above all, a committed pacifist.

Benjamin Pogrund, a journalist at the old Daily Mail and later its deputy editor, formed a close, almost brotherly relationship with Sobukwe and this book reflects that relationship perfectly.

Throughout Sobukwe's years of imprisonment on Robben Island, the two men were in constant touch via a series of letters which are reproduced in the book.

They provide a startling

insight into the mind of the man, incarcerated but still capable of the capacity to forgive his jailers and even at times joke about his predicament.

But Sobukwe was only human. His health, both physically and above all, psychologically began to suffer. In one revealing and frightening excerpt, he writes: "I fear I am beginning to lose the ability to speak."

The years of loneliness and isolation were beginning to tell and inadequate medical facilities failed to detect the early, ominous signs of the cancer that was eventually to take his life.

Sobukwe was released from Robben Island after nine years and immediately banished to Kimberley where he was placed under the iniquitous house arrest system. But the man's lust for life was undiminished and at 51 he

changed careers and studied successfully for a law degree — to add to the two he had obtained while imprisoned.

Pogrund writes with a rare, compassionate insight into the plight of the Black activist, never more so when he details his eyewitness account of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre.

Sobukwe finally succumbed to the cancer which had been eating at him for years. He would not have appreciated the young militants who took over his funeral and refused to let, among others, Helen Suzman, Pogrund and Chief Buthelezi speak.

If it were anywhere else but South Africa, this book would probably be filed under "F" — for fiction.

An inspiring read.

Martin McGhee

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