

The "Other" 9-11

Americans regard September 11, 2001 as one of history's darkest days. The people of Chile commemorate a genocidal attack on September 11 as well, one that shook their country to its core. But most of us remain ignorant about who supported that act of terrorism: the "defender of liberty, justice and democracy", the United States.

"I don't think that [the left] will achieve its objective, because the organized public forces and Carabineros [military police] of Chile will not allow the criminal doctrines to win. Moved by patriotism, they will save us [even] at the cost of sacrificing the liberty that we all enjoy."

--former Chilean president Jorge Alessandri on the Allende candidacy, early 1970

History was made on September 4, 1970. **Salvador Allende Gossens**, a respected physician, became the first socialist politician in the western hemisphere to ascend to the presidency of his country by popular vote. (Some writers say he was the world's first democratically-elected socialist president, but **Patrice Lumumba** had accomplished that feat in the Congo in 1959, only to be toppled and assassinated by a CIA-sponsored military strongman less than two years later.) After unsuccessful attempts to win the presidency in 1958 and 1964, Allende had

finally triumphed at the ballot box. His **POPULAR UNITY (UP) COALITION**, with its progressive-socialist political platform of workers' rights, agrarian reform, the nationalization of several key industries and national independence from foreign interests, had outdistanced the slightly-left-of-center **CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (CDP)** with its candidate **Radomiro Tomic**, and

the right-wing **NATIONAL PARTY** and its chosen candidate, former president **Jorge Alessandri**.



Chilean President Salvador Allende, assassinated by a CIA-supported military coup on September 11, 1973.

By the morning of September 5 the final tabulations were made public. Allende had taken 1,076,616 votes; Alessandri had garnered 1,036,278, and Tomic 824,849. Allende, in his victory speech, foretold of the difficulties to come: "Victory has not been easy, but it will be more difficult to consolidate this triumph and to build the new fatherland, the new coexistence, the new morality." Clearly, Allende knew that the resistance to his administration and its policies had only just begun.

First, however, a run-off

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POLITICAL PRISONER UPDATE: REMEMBERING SAFIYA BUKHARI

Most of you have never heard of **Safiya Asya Bukhari**, whose strong, tireless voice was stilled in late August. I myself had no idea who she was until I attended an October 1997 forum on political prisoners at **MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY** in Tubman City (Baltimore, MD). It was there that I learned about the close to



200 people being held in US prisons for political reasons. The **BLACK PANTHER PARTY**, the **AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT (AIM)**, various socialist and communist organizations, the **PUERTO RICAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT**, the **MOVE ORGANIZATION**, even some right-wing groups, all had members and

sympathizers who had been captured and imprisoned not because of any crime they had committed, but because of their political beliefs and their efforts to educate, organize and mobilize their respective communities toward political goals.

At that conference, I also learned about plans for a major march on the White House set for late March 1998. "Jericho 98" would send a loud and clear message to then-President **Bill Clinton** about the need to address the plight of America's political prisoners. Clinton himself had chosen this time to make an unprecedented visit and tour to Afrika, thereby person-

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was needed. Since Allende had not won an absolute majority of the votes (Did you catch that, Florida?), it was necessary for him to face his next closest competitor, Alessandri, in one final electoral showdown. While Alessandri remained confident of defeating Allende in the final election, the UP Coalition had negotiated the endorsement of Tomic's CDP by guaranteeing a number of individual and social rights. With the backing of the CDP delegates, Allende and the UP Coalition would easily win the run-off.

"I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people."

--National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, 1970

The government of the United States had long dreaded this day. "The Communists take over Chile," wrote US Ambassador **Edward Korry** in a September 11, 1970 cable. "Another Soviet ally in the western hemisphere" along with Cuba, and the "good example" of a socialist government that was achieved through the practice of democracy, was totally unacceptable and had to be prevented. Covert operations by the CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA) and other provocateurs had managed to keep Allende out of **La Moneda**, the presidential palace, during the elections in 1958 and 1964. Now, facing the near-inevitability of a popularly-elected Marxist government in South America, the White House under president **Richard M. Nixon** began to pull out the long knives. The first order of business was to prevent the October 24 congressional vote. If the military could be induced to take control of the government before the election was finalized, Allende and the UP could be prevented from ascending to power.

"One in 10 chance, perhaps, but save Chile! ... worth spending ... not concerned with risks involved ... no involvement of embassy ... \$10,000,000 available, more if necessary ... full-time job--best men we have ... game plan ... make the economy scream ... 48 hours for plan of action."

--notes of CIA Director Richard Helms, taken during meeting with US President Nixon, 9/15/1970

High-level meetings were quickly held between Nixon, **Henry Kissinger** (now the new Secretary of State), Attorney General **John Mitchell** and CIA Director **Richard Helms**. A two-track plan would be developed. On the one hand, Chile would be subjected to economic sanctions and embargoes designed

to strangle its infrastructure. On the other hand, direct efforts would be made to prevent Allende's confirmation by sparking a military coup. (Tim Weiner, "How the CIA Took Aim at Allende", *NY Times*, Sept, 12, 1998)

To accomplish the latter objective, right-wing elements would kidnap the Commander in Chief of the Chilean Army, **General Rene Schneider**. Schneider had always held the Chilean Constitution in high regard, and believed the Allende government to be Chile's best chance to avoid a popular rebellion from its citizenry.

The kidnapers botched the October 23rd attempt, however, and Schneider was mortally wounded. **General Carlos Prats**, second in command of the military, took control of the armed forces and immediately condemned the attempt to sabotage the democratic process in Chile. Allende would be confirmed on October 24, winning 153 congressional votes to Alessandri's 35; Schneider died from his injuries two days later.

"Not a nut or bolt [will] be allowed to reach Chile under Allende. ... We will do all in our power to condemn Chileans to utmost poverty."

--US Ambassador to Chile Edward Korry, 1970

The Chilean economy had been suffering from a severe depression since 1967. In response to Allende's inauguration and his plans to reorganize the economy, the capitalists in

Chile began withdrawing bank deposits, stopping private investments and pulling capital out of the country. National production began to fall further and unemployment rose. Allende responded by implementing the "Chilean path to socialism": raising wages and freezing prices, which initially sparked popular support for his government and increased consumer spending. He also provided benefits to Chile's lower economic classes and members of the armed forces. A free milk program was instituted to help remedy the malnutrition that had afflicted close to 600,000 children in poor communities. The congress unanimously voted to nationalize the foreign copper firms, which drew the ire of the two main US copper companies, KENNECOTT and ANACONDA.

This only strengthened US resolve to destabilize the Allende government. INTERNATIONAL TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH (ITT), Kennecott, Anaconda, the INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK and the WORLD BANK were all brought to bear against the Chilean economy. Loans and financial assistance were blocked. Meanwhile, business owners

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within Chile began to organize strikes and production slowdowns. This led to shortages, inflation, the devaluation of Chile's copper, and the erosion of many of the previous economic gains. (Federation of American Scientists, "Salvador Allende's Leftist Regime", www.fas.org)

This pressure, along with the political divisions already present in Chile, helped bring about the fracturing of the coalition of the Popular Unity. Many of Chile's moderates began to form alliances with the right-wing. Allende responded by holding a number of high-level conferences, like one at **Lo Curro** in June 1972, with the members of the Popular Unity Coalition, which was becoming increasingly difficult to hold together.

The March 1973 congressional elections were expected to provide the right-wing with a two-thirds majority of legislative seats, which was important because at that point impeachment proceedings against Allende could be started. However, Popular Unity won 43 percent of the congressional seats, an actual increase over the previous numbers. More drastic measures were needed.

Tensions escalated as the far left became impatient with Allende's moderate compromises and the far right took over the military. In June of 1973, a number of tank commanders attempted a military coup that was put down when the regular armed forces, under General Carlos Prats' leadership, came to the aid of their president. However, by now the die was cast. Business leaders and members of the professional classes, or *petit bourgeoisie*, launched more workplace slowdowns, truckers' strikes, shutdowns and lockouts. The moderate and right-wing political parties, spurred by blind self-interest, strengthened their coalition. And the military purged itself of officers sympathetic to the president and the Constitution, increasingly becoming influenced by the CIA. Thus did the influential members of the Chilean population pave the way for the conquest of their own country. Just as Allende was preparing to call for a national vote to resolve the political situation, the military launched their third, and final, attack on the civilian government. The date was September 11, 1973.

"Considering ... The grave economic, social, and moral crisis that the country is experiencing ... The incapacity of the government to control the chaos ... That will lead the people of

Chile to an inevitable civil war, the Armed Forces and Carabineros decide ... The President of the Republic of Chile must give up his office immediately."

*--Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, Commander in Chief of the Army
Sept. 11, 1973*

After seizing the city of Valparaiso, the military made its move on La Moneda, the presidential palace. Allende and several aides made their way to the palace in an effort to marshal those forces still loyal to the government, but the small group they assembled proved not to be enough. The Ministry of Defense had been taken, and the country's primary radio station, which had been under CIA influence for many months, broadcast the ultimatum by **General Augusto Pinochet** at 8:40 AM. Allende was ordered to resign the presidency, and he was offered safe passage out of the country. Allende refused. Knowing now that an attack by the military was imminent, Allende used a telephone link to broadcast his final words to his people over **Magallanes Radio**, the only pro-government radio station that had not yet been silenced. The time was 9:00 AM.

"This will surely be the last time I speak to you. Magallanes Radio will be silenced, and the reassuring tone of my voice will not reach you. It doesn't matter. You will continue hearing it. I will always be with you. At the least, your memory of me will be that of a man who was loyal to the country. ... I have faith in Chile and its destiny. Other people will be able to transcend this sad and bitter moment, when treason tries to force itself upon us. ... I'm sure that my sacrifice will not be in vain ... It will be a moral lesson that will punish the felony, cowardice, and treason [of the Armed Forces]."

--the last broadcast of President Salvador Allende, Sept. 11, 1973

With that, tanks and other armored vehicles began to surround La Moneda, and soon the rooftop snipers loyal to Allende were defeated. Tank shells began to bom-

bard the presidential palace, blowing open the main entrance. Soon the treasonous Chilean military had taken control of the first floor, and only Allende and a number of loyalists remained, holding off the advancing army from the second floor. Allende ordered his aides to leave La Moneda and seek safety. He remained behind, armed only with a shotgun, a gift from Cuban



Chile, located along the southern tip of South America.

President **Fidel Castro**, who had admired the fact that Allende had ascended to the presidency without resorting to violent revolution by the bullet, opting for non-violent revolution by the ballot instead. Now, however, a violent counter-revolution would spell the Chilean president's downfall.

Two shots under the chin ended it all. Some say it was a suicide, though it seems just as likely that President Salvador Allende, the first popularly elected socialist president in the western hemisphere, had been summarily executed. What is known is the brief message delivered to the generals assembled at the Ministry of Defense.

"Mission accomplished. Moneda taken. President dead."

--General Palacios of the Chilean Armed Forces

Ultimately, the inability of Chile's various political groups to work together would help bring about the destruction of a true People's Government. From the far left to the far right, the various political organizations seemed too entrenched in their positions, too stubborn and uncompromising in their ideology, to work toward the consensus which would have been necessary for any true government of the people to survive. It seems that, in many ways, the only prominent individual who truly sought such a consensus was Allende himself, reorganizing his cabinet and bringing the Popular Unity Coalition in for conferences on several occasions. His commitment to a socialist path, including the nationalizations of copper and other natural resources, frightened the far-right and the capitalists, but the pace of his socialist reforms proved too slow for many on the far left, making him appear weak in their eyes. The press, which Allende had allowed to function without government intervention (a truly "free press"), was ultimately used by the military and the CIA against him. Meanwhile, the CDP and other so-called moderate democrats, those in the "political center", began to fold under pressure from outside the country, started looking to their personal self-interest, and locked arms with the right-wing, making former president Alessandri's words prophetic: "... they will save us [even] at the cost of sacrificing the liberty that we all enjoy." Thus, a democratically-elected government is destroyed in service to the multinational corporations and the power elites of the "champion of democracy and freedom", the United States. Call it the inexorable march of capitalism, call it the sheer might of US world hegemony, call it one more expression of Global White Supremacy, call it imperialism and right-wing repression at its worst, if you will. The long and short of it is that The Will Of The People had been brutally beaten down

once again. And, to some degree, it took traitors from among the people, blinded by greed, ignorance and fear, to pull it off.

"Who were these thousands and thousands of men who throughout the country have become our killers, our jailers and our torturers? What did they do? What did they look like? How is it possible that we never noticed them, that we did not suspect their resentment, or their future ferocity? Did they live in a world apart?"

"It is easy to understand now--unfortunately too late--that they lived among us. That they were fellow citizens, neighbors, sometimes our own relatives, and, on occasion, even our friends. We would come across them each day in stores, in public buses, at the movies and never did we associate them with the terrorist vanguard of the ultra-right, and if they spoke against the government or if they sounded their pots and pans or organized their rallies "to save democracy," we responded with good-humored insults. Perhaps they are not the same ones who have fired upon us or beaten us, but the military would not have gone as far as they did without them. They

were the military's masses ... they cowardly expressed their ferocity by denouncing their leftist neighbors, washing the city walls clean of graffiti calling for revolution, gave away their wedding rings to fund the Junta.

"How did we fail to understand that they who appeared so inoffensive an enemy ... comprised an ultra-right front that had a plan of war and extermination?"

--Excerpt from "Tejas Verdes: Diario de un Campo de Concentracion" by Hernan Valdes, (from Under The Dictatorship, 20 October 1998, <http://www.derechoschile.com>)



The La Moneda Palace of Chilean President Salvador Allende is shelled during the September 11, 1973 coup.

... they will save us [even] at the cost of sacrificing the liberty that we all enjoy." Thus, a democratically-elected government is destroyed in service to the multinational corporations and the power elites of the "champion of democracy and freedom", the United States. Call it the inexorable march of capitalism, call it the sheer might of US world hegemony, call it one more expression of Global White Supremacy, call it imperialism and right-wing repression at its worst, if you will. The long and short of it is that The Will Of The People had been brutally beaten down

The events of September 11, 1973 not only caused the death of the country's president and the destruction of a civilian government elected by the people. It ushered in a period of brutality under the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet that could not have been imagined by the stubborn, impatient, cowardly and downright evil collaborators, facilitators and perpetrators of this melodrama. The people of Chile would be plunged into more than 17 years of terror. The estimates range from about 4,000 to tens of thousands of people killed, with many thousands more imprisoned or "disappeared", never to be seen or heard from again. Over 42,000 political detentions occurred from 1973 to 1975 (Persona Estado Poder, Vol. II, CODEPU, 1995), possibly up to 250,000 (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL and the UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE). Political parties were banned. The press was censored. Elections were suspended. American freelance writers **Charles Horman** and **Frank Teruggi** were

murdered in 1973, a crime that was dramatized in the movie "Missing", starring Jack Lemon. A car bomb killed former Chilean ambassador and Allende cabinet member **Orlando Letelier** and his aide, **Ronni Karpen Moffitt**, on September 21, 1976. In 1999, thousands of documents were declassified that provided gory details of these and countless other crimes committed by the Pinochet regime, a dictatorship that was put in power in no small way by the CIA and the Nixon White House. (Under the Dictatorship, 10/20/98, www.derechoschile.com)

What's the lesson here? How can we spot the signs of oncoming repression and genocide, so we can prevent it from happening again, and again, and again? It seems that all the essential ingredients were there for murderers and plunderers to move in. A fresh, new idea is embraced by the common folk. Power elites, at home and abroad, see their control of the region threatened, and so the idea must be squashed.

The elites within the society begin to see things through the eyes of the future oppressors, 'Cuz They Got It Like That (or at least they think they do). You see them here all the time: politicians who are more concerned about their campaigns than about Doing The Work; business leaders whose main business is business (i.e., making money) and not service to the people. These and other groups within the society are found who want to continue to live their lives in ignorance and can be persuaded to use their resources to serve the oppressor. It seems that every village has its Sambo. Some more than others.

Meanwhile, the "conscious people," those with some modicum of vision and commitment, allow ideological details and resolvable differences to blind them to the greater danger that looms, so they begin to argue and to cause the disintegration of the alliances that had brought them this far. We see that too, even among the committed activists. "A" has a beef with "B" and "C" wants more control. "D" failed to kiss "E's" backside in the appropriate manner. "F", a devout Christian, can't work with "G", a fundamentalist Muslim. The staunch Afrikan-centered anti-abortionist Brothas are repelled by the pro-choice feminist Sistas because of perceived European female influence. I want immediate, drastic change while you want to go slowly and carefully, and neither one of us wants to sit down and talk in a sincere way to work things out. With all of these issues festering, even the leaders can become fools.

The Future Junta Leaders of America, and their ilk in other countries around the world, watch all of this, and, like Nixon, Kissinger, Mitchell and Helms in 1970, make their plans. Who can we buy off? Who can we get to do our dirty work? Who must we kill? How can we exploit the community's weaknesses so as to destroy the fragile unity that they enjoy? How can we get them to turn on each other? How can we take their riches, their lands, their very bodies and souls, with the least effort possible, and preferably without even firing a shot?

While all of these machinations are being planned, activists and defenders of communities, villages and nations carry on in a state of blissful ignorance, concentrating on the petty issues that keep them disorganized. And when the firestorm comes, they look around, perplexed, and wonder how it all happened.

But why should we care about all of this, anyway? Why should a genocidal coup of thirty years ago trouble us? What significance does a dust-up in some country at the tip of South America have to us as we Rush to get home from work in time to catch the Wednesday Night Lineup on TV? After all, we live

in a democracy, with a free press and public officials chosen by us. Our political leaders always look out for our best interest. They never lie to us. The *foreigners* are the ones who are dangerous. Them and the Communists. And the troublemakers. And the Muslim extremists. And the drug addicts. And the Bleeding Heart Liberals. And the radicals. And the *peace-niks*. And the feminazis. And the enviro-terrorists like Greenpeace. And the beggars on the street corners with their *squeegees* and scrawled signs. And those damned Un-Embedded Journalists. And those Black guys who want to play quarterback. And those Annoying Conscious Rappers who keep trying to interrupt my Saturday night *freak-nic* by putting those disturbing messages in our music. I mean, they should all just stop trying to mess with our Wonderful Oil Companies, our Benevolent Politicians, our Entertainment Media, and our Free Market Capitalist Saviors. Things are perfect just like they are. Everyone else should be forced to change to conform with us. After all, we are the greatest civilization in the history of the world.

Aren't we?

Aren't we??

"Workers of my fatherland, have faith in Chile and her destiny. Others will overcome this grey, sad moment when treason strains to conquer. Go forward knowing that much more sooner than later, the great avenues will open anew to let pass free people to build a better society.

--La Moneda, September 11, 1973

Engraved on the Tombstone of Salvador Allende

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Remembering Safiya Bukhari, *Continued From Page 1*

ally avoiding the March, but the people of Washington, DC (Banneker City) nonetheless had the opportunity to hear from people such as AIM's **Dennis Banks**, veteran Black Panther **Geronimo jiJaga** (who had himself been released from prison the year before, ending a 27-year imprisonment on trumped-up charges), **Pam** and **Ramona Africa** of MOVE, and a number of other veteran political organizers and former political prisoners. They were there to speak out for those they left behind the prison walls, those who could no longer speak out for themselves, people such as **Mumia Abu-Jamal**, **Leonard Peltier**, **Marshall "Eddie" Conway**, **Russell "Maroon" Shoats**, **Romaine "Chip" Fitzgerald**, **The MOVE Nine**, **Sundiata Acoli**, **Mutulu Shakur**, **Thomas Manning** and countless others.

And Safiya was the driving force behind it all.

Safiya's passion about the political prisoners' movement was easy to feel and to understand. The fire that burned within her was evident to anyone who heard her speak. The eloquence, the conviction in the truth of what she was saying, and the commitment to do all in her power to free her imprisoned comrades were there whenever she addressed the crowd. And she came to this point in her life and political development honestly.

"Finally, there are those prisoners whose arrest and subsequent imprisonment stem directly from their political beliefs, affiliations and activities in furtherance of their political beliefs and goals. These are brothers and sisters who dedicated their lives to fighting for the freedom and liberation of people of Afrikan descent. Those brothers and sisters who looked at a situation that was untenable and made a decision to fight back through political organizing, agitation and education and were framed by government agencies because they were too effective at what they were doing.

"Criminal evidence was manufactured, charges were leveled and they were tried in criminal courts and sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Those brothers and sisters who, like Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey and those who fought wars of liberation before them, took up arms against the criminal government of the United States, were captured and, in defiance of international law governing the treatment of prisoners of war--- were tried as criminals in the courts and given lengthy prison terms. There is no question that these brothers and sisters are political prisoners. ...

"Organizations come and go, but we have to create within our people the spirit of struggle. We have to build a movement to liberate our people. The issue of political prisoners is part of that movement that we are building and in building that movement we must understand that this is not a separate issue. It is an integral part of that movement; it can't be put in front of the movement and can't be an afterthought. It must be woven into the very fibers. We have to change the dynamics of how we deal with the issue of our political prisoners - Organize, Educate, Liberate to FREE OUR POLITICAL PRISONERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR!"

--Safiya Bukhari on Political Prisoners

Her passion to free political prisoners comes from her personal experiences. As she once told **Sally O'Brien**, co-producer and co-host with Safiya of New York City's WBAI-FM **"Where We Live"** radio show, "In college I supported the

war in Vietnam. I was so far right it was ridiculous. But by the time the summer of 1969 was over, in November, I was in the [Black Panther] Party." The vicious police beating of a Party member for selling the Party's newspaper on a street corner was one of several experiences that shocked her into a life of progressive political activism.

Within two years, she was running the Party's East Coast Information and Communication section. Two years after that she found herself being subjected to harassment arrests and her name on a police "hit list", complete with a bounty placed on her head. At this time, she joined the BLACK LIBERATION ARMY, an underground Panther offshoot. In 1975, she was traveling with comrades in Virginia when she was captured by police after a shootout which killed one of her companions. She was held in a Virginia correctional institution, interrupted by a brief escape, until 1983, when she was released on parole.

She had already been working with the PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NEW AFRIKA (PG-RNA) and served for some time as their Vice President. PG-RNA is dedicated to the establishment of an independent nation in the southern former slave states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina for the descendants of the Afrikans who helped build them. In 1992 she founded the NEW YORK FREE MUMIA ABU-JAMAL COALITION.

The JERICHO MOVEMENT TO FREE US POLITICAL PRISONERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR marked another milestone in an illustrious career of service to the Afrikan community and oppressed people everywhere. Failing health cut her dream short and deprived us of yet another tireless fighter for justice.

The Jericho Movement is planning a **Safiya Bukhari Memorial Weekend** in New York City sometime in 2004. Cultural events and rallies designed to increase awareness of the plight of US political prisoners are being planned. With the current climate of political intimidation, harassment and repression aimed particularly at Muslim and Middle Eastern organizations in the name of "fighting terrorism", organizations like Jericho are needed now more than ever.

There are many challenges that are made to us as Afrikan people and as those who truly value *Ma'at* (the ancient Afrikan value system of truth, justice, righteousness, harmony, reciprocity, balance, compassion, order and propriety). The passing of New Ancestor Safiya Bukhari presents another challenge to us. Those who are concerned about this country's political prisoners, those who are fearful of the imposition of another Police State, and those who simply want to see a society based on freedom, justice and equality, would do well to keep Safiya Bukhari's spirit in their hearts. Her important work must be carried forward. If we fail to meet this challenge, then the words of **Pastor Martin Niemoller** may one day ring as true here as they did in the days of the Third Reich:

First they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist..

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.

Safiya Bukhari spoke out for those who were discarded by much of society despite their tireless work for liberation. Much of her concern came from having been a political prisoner herself. Most of us are fortunate not to have to live that reality. Let us speak out for them now, before we find ourselves dependent on our unconscious brothers and sisters to speak out for us later.

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SAFIYA: LIONESSE FOR LIBERATION! PRESENTE!

[Column Written 8/28/03] by Mumia Abu-Jamal

The women warriors of the Dahomey (present-day Benin--maj) were not an isolated instance of female bravery in combat in Africa. Regiments made up exclusively of women were known in many parts of Africa from the Sudan to Zimbabwe, and in much of West Africa and Angola. A member of Vasco de Gama's expedition along the coast of West Africa reported seeing legions of perhaps 6,000 women soldiers in West Africa some 300 years before the Amazons of Dahomey came into being. And led by the redoubtable Queen Zingha Mbande Ngola, women of the Kingdom of Ngola in Angola fought well against the Portuguese.

-- Robert B. Edgerton, "Warrior Women: The Amazons of Dahomey and the Nature of War" (2000), p. 140

She had not long passed the half-century mark, when her great and powerful heart gave out. Fifty-three years young, with a spirit that was ageless in its love and courage, Sister Safiya Asya Bukhari, has returned to the ancestors.

She was many things to many people: daughter, mother, grandmother; teacher, disciplinarian, soldier and comrade; former Black Panther, former combatant in the Black Liberation Army, thinker, truth-teller, activist and organizer. These were some of the many things she did, in her short, yet extraordinary life. These things, while undoubtedly significant, do not really begin to tell those who did not know her, who she really was.

For many, especially many of the nameless and unknown soldiers from various movements still behind bars, she was a life-line. They knew that she would do whatever was necessary to defend and, if possible, liberate them. They knew that her great, loving Black heart would not turn away from them, as they dwelled in bondage. She worked tirelessly for Black political prisoners, like the **New York 3**, like **Mutulu Shakur**, and others whose names may be little more than distant memories. She was herself a former political prisoner, and spent almost a decade in the dungeons of Virginia, and also spent several years on that state's notorious death row. When she couldn't get the medical treatment that she knew she deserved, she escaped to find the life-saving treatment that Virginia denied her. But like her spiritual grandmother, **Harriet Tubman**, freedom was not hers alone. She worked long and strong for the liberation of her beloved Black people. What may surprise many, however, was her original political orientation. She came from a deeply religious, and (she would hate the word) conservative family. As a bourgeois sorority sister, she came to Harlem to study the needs of the Black poor while completing her studies. She thought people were poor because they were too lazy to work. What she saw in Harlem, the poverty and hopelessness of the people, as well as the deceit of the cops, radicalized her, and led her to the gates of

the Harlem Black Panther Party. She, who was once a conservative, became a revolutionary. And she never, ever stopped!

It is in that spirit that I share with you, the words of Safiya Bukhari, learned through the raw experiences of Life:

"The hard painstaking work of changing ourselves into new beings, of loving ourselves and our people and working with them to create a new reality; this is the first revolution, that internal revolution.

"I'm coming to understand what the old ones meant when they sang the words, 'The race is not given to the swift, nor is it given to the strong, but to him that endures to the end,' and what was meant by the fable of the 'hare and the tortoise'. Some people declare themselves to be revolutionaries, members of one organization or another, i.e., 'I was one of the first Panthers', or 'I used to be a Panther' ... and only come out when there's some major celebration where Panthers are on display ... and live off of their former glory, not understanding that it's not about what you used to be, but what are you doing now. They ran a quick race, utilizing all for the moment and grew tired and gave up. It may take a little longer to do it the hard way, slow and methodical, building a movement step by step and block by block, but doing it this way is designed to build a strong foundation that will withstand the test of time and the attack of the enemy." [Fr. S.A. Bukhari, "Reflections, Musings and Political Opinions" (unpubl. mss.) (1997)]

I say to you, many who have known her, and many who did not; Safiya Bukhari was a true revolutionary. Patient, constant, disciplined, and determined.

Safiya was a Revolutionary, who like the Cuban internationalist, 'Che' Guevara, was 'motivated by great feeling of love.'

It is truly a shame that she left this life so early, but it can be said, with certainty, that she lived her life with Freedom in her rifle scope. She was a woman warrior who should be an inspiration to us all!

Remember her, by making Her Dream, reality!

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