

The profile of **Jerry Dimotana Thibedi**, MEC for Public Works (North West Province)

If the Security Branch of the South African Police (SAP) had it their way during South Africa's turbulent period of 1985-1987, today the name of **Jerry Dimotana Thibedi** would be on that long list of young political activists to die a very cruel, brutal and painful death.

Nor sooner had his political career blossomed, as a community and working class organiser and leader, his name was quickly out of the hat for "elimination" .

Thibedi (now 53) was viewed, by the then apartheid Security Police branch as a "high profile activist".

He was among those political activists and young revolutionaries of the 1980s who during the height and intensity of the people's struggle for liberation that engulfed almost every township and village, was among those who stood head and shoulders in the forefront.

Hence it took little effort for him to be identified for elimination by the Security Branch establishment of the then South African Police (SAP).

Miraculously, **Thibedi** escaped a well planned attempt on his life, executed with military precision by the apartheid security agents. The timing thereof could have also wiped-out his family.

Though he hardly speaks about this particular harrowing experience, those who have worked with and under him, interpret his past political activism with respect. Often, he was dubbed ``the brain-power'' behind the strong trade union movement in Northern Regions of the former Transvaal.

One does not have to look further than the *Truth And Reconciliation Commission*, *Amnesty Committee* records about **Thibedi**.

The testimony in there, relights the harsh realities and the price he and many others had to pay, in their commitment, quest and forward march to fight and ultimately defeat white supremacy and its minority rule in this country.

Why? **Thibedi** had to be eliminated during that era, is vividly captured in an application for Amnesty, by former security policeman, Colonel Johannes Loots.

Loots, acting in concert with Warrant Officer Jansen van Vuuren, Captain Hechter, former MK soldier turned Askari, Joe Mamasela, applied for amnesty in respect of the following offences:

Conspiracy to murder and the attempted murder of **Thibedi**, including also, the Contravention of Sections of the Arms and Ammunition Act 75 of 1969 and the Explosives Act of 1956.

The application was in terms of Section 18 of the *Promotion Of National Unity And Reconciliation Act* 34 of 1995.

If for a moment this may sound like hype, the story in short goes like this:

The offences against Colonel Loots, under general instructions given to him by his boss Brigadier Jan Cronje, related to the attack on **Thibedi** and/or his house during 1986 or 1987 in Mabopane.

Mabopane was the former Bophuthatswana bantustan township, north of Pretoria.

The instructions and decisions by Brigadier Cronje was to have **Thibedi** killed. Colonel Loots testified that **Thibedi** was regarded as “a high profile activist” because he was a high-ranking member of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) in the Pretoria townships of Mamelodi and Soshanguve.

In his evidence, Loots said **Thibedi** played “a prominent role” in stay-aways, consumer and school boycotts and other related activities launched by Cosatu in order to undermine “the government”.

Therefore, **Thibedi** consequently “qualified for elimination”.

Acting under instructions from Brigadier Cronje, Loots took a decision to kill **Thibedi**. The bomb, which he and Van Vuuren manufactured, was thrown into **Thibedi’s** house by Hechter, Van Vuuren and Mamasela.

The explosion thereof completely destroyed the house, but miraculously **Thibedi** and his family escaped unhurt physically. They suffered emotional and psychological scars.

What the three eliminators- Hechter, Van Vuuren and Mamasela- regarded as their culprit’s “safe house”, turned out to be a house occupied by **Thibedi**, his wife and children.

During other *Amnesty Committee* hearings, testimony was heard that the trio instructed to kill **Thibedi**, also featured prominently in some of the most gruesome killings of political opponents and people whom they suspected of being ANC activists during the same period.

Included in their hit-list, was the brutal and cold blooded murder in 1987 of the Hammaskraal-based policeman, Richard Motasi and his wife Irene. Both were executed minutes apart inside their house by Loots, Hector, Mamasela and Slang Sehlale.

Born in 1954 in the village of Makapanstad, (Mosetlha), which is situated on the outskirts of Hammaskraal, **Thibedi's** political career began nearly 26 years ago when he became a voluntary organiser of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983.

Prior to his political activism, **Thibedi** worked for Metropolitan Insurance Company in Mabopane. He also did a stint at Siemens Cables, Rosslyn, as a Laboratory Inspector between the late '70s and 1983 after he completed his Standard 10 (Matric) at Ithuteng Commercial School in Makapanstad in 1974.

After three years with the UDF, he was elected the first Chairperson of Cosatu in the Northern Transvaal region from 1986 until 1988.

During this period, he participated in the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) in the former Northern Transvaal, Eastern Transvaal and Witwatersrand (PWV).

Thibedi's political activism during this period also saw him going in and out of prison as a result of one of the successive "state of emergencies" declared by the then government in response to the MDM.

These “state of emergencies” saw uniformed and armed white troops in military vehicles and others on horse back, brought into the townships as back-up to riot and security police units to terrorize the people.

In 1988, **Thibedi** became the Regional Education Officer (REO) of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) and was appointed the union’s National Organiser a year later.

During his tenure as REO for Numsa, the union sent him to the University Of Witwatersrand (WITS) to train as an Assistant Researcher, working with a team of leading researchers under the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP).

The objectives of the research included, looking at ways of re-structuring the manufacturing industry in the post apartheid South Africa.

Thibedi served Numsa until 1994.

Following the historic birth of a democratic government in the country in 1994,

Thibedi joined the *North West Provincial Legislature* (NWPL).

He was elected the first *Speaker* of NWPL and served in that portfolio until 1999 and also served as the Chairperson of *the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association* (CPA), North West Branch, from 1995 until 1999.

Thibedi was appointed Member of the Executive Council (MEC) in the Office Of the Premier (*Corporate & Traditional Affairs*) between 1999 and 2002 before being deployed as the MEC for Roads and Public Works.

This was from 2002 to 2004. In 2004, he was deployed as MEC for Transport and Roads.

Following Premier Edna Molewa's reshuffling of her Executive Council in 2005, **Thibedi's** department acquired an additional portfolio of Safety and Liaison, which among other responsibilities included monitoring and oversight of the South African Police Services (SAPS). He became MEC for Transport, Roads and Community Safety until May 31, 2007.

He is currently MEC for Public Works following another reorganisation of the Executive Council by Premier Molewa.

In 1998 **Thibedi** was elected Deputy Chairperson of the ruling *African National Congress* (ANC) in the North West, the position he held until 2005.

He was also elected into the Central Committee of the *South African Communist Party* (SACP) during the same year (1998) the position he still holds to date.

His academic achievements include two Diplomas in Executive Management and Transformation the qualifications were obtained from *Harvard University* (US) in 1998 and 2001 respectively. He also has a Diploma in Accounting (1982) from the Pretoria Institute of Management Studies

Thibedi is currently studying towards a Masters Degree (MA) in *Governance And Political Transformation* at the University of the Free State.

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