

Inside Pinto's influence within Mau Mau circles

By **CYPRIAN FERNANDES** | October 28th 2018 at 12:00:00 GMT +0300



Pio Gama Pinto (left) with Joseph Murumbi (right). [File/Standard]

When Pio Gama Pinto was arrested in April 1954, one of the grounds for his detention was his alleged knowledge of illegal arms traffic to the benefit of Mau Mau.

In succinct terms, those who framed the orders said he assisted Mau Mau in drafting documents, arranged for the printing of membership cards and assisted the non-militant wing of the movement to plan its subversive campaign.

In Pio Gama Pinto, Kenya's Unsung Martyr 1927-1965, edited by Shiraz Durrani, there is consummate anecdotal evidence that Pinto worked with the Mau Mau Central Committee and therefore was an intrinsic part of the organisation.

Pinto was largely responsible for having prevented the wrath of the Mau Mau from being vented on the Indian community.

Had he not managed to enter the secret conclaves of the freedom fighters unnoticed, and had he not won the trust of leaders such as Stanley Mathenge, Jomo Kenyatta, Senior Chief Koinange and Tom Mboya for his sound and clear advice, thousands of Indians may well have been murdered and their property looted.

"Pio Gama Pinto and I were in one kundi (Mau Mau cell). Issac GW gave me the Mau Mau oath in 1946. My sister and mother knew Pinto. Pinto's work was to kuunganisha makabila (bring together different nationalities), establish links with like-minded people who shared goals," Durrani's book says.

Other evidence may be needed to confirm this, but the facts indicate that Pinto was an active supporter of the movement. He could not have been involved in the formation of the Mau Mau War Council in Nairobi nor in the procurement of arms had he not been part of the central leadership of Mau Mau.

His involvement ranged from supplying weapons to the fighters, providing medical and other care to fighters and their families, organising legal aid to those condemned by the colonial system to jail terms, researching and writing documents, letters for the struggle, to gathering international support for the liberation struggle.

The progressive, anti-imperialist elements in the South Asian community, men like Pinto, Jaswant Bharaj and others, played a very important role in supplying KFLA with firearms, intelligence information, fund, medicine and helped the movement to produce revolutionary literature. Pinto in particular established contacts with the illegal South Asian gun-traders who secretly sold firearms and ammunition to KFLA.

Money, food and arms

"Pio's work under the Central Committee of Mau Mau was especially important during the Emergency. The Committee needed money, food and arms for the fighters. Most of the leaders were in prison...Despite these difficult conditions, money was collected from supporters... These were carefully collected in sacks and taken to certain trusted persons. Pio was one of these. He would then take the money to wherever he was directed by the Central Committee.

"Pio's work in support of the freedom fighters grew as the struggle became more intense. The Emergency meant that for many Kenyans, there was military rule in the country...Pio now had to help the freedom fighters in the forests of Mount Kenya and the Aberdares," reads the book.

He also had to look after their families and the families of those who had been killed. He continued to gather food, equipment and medicine for the soldiers in the forests, as well as for families left behind.

“Pinto joined other brave patriots in the work of transporting weapons and other necessities to the Mau Mau freedom fighters in their hideouts. Pinto became an important person in the struggle not only because of his clear ideological grasp of the situation and his total commitment to the liberation struggle but also because he linked different aspects of the struggle and ensured that all worked together to strengthen the overall anti-imperialist struggle.”

“The imperialist manipulation of Kenya’s politics provided the momentum that ultimately led to the assassination of Pio Gama Pinto. Thus, the responsibility of his death lies not only with the Government of Kenya but also with the British government whose policy and actions supported the Western-orientated government. It is doubtful if the moderates would ever have come to power without the Western support.”

According to Duranni, Pinto’s concern about the lot of ordinary people was that we must try and build a society where differences in wealth should not penalise the poor. He, therefore, wanted to see development in all parts of our country, especially those areas that had experienced very little development under British rule. He further wanted to see the establishment of rent control in urban areas as a way of protecting the tenants from being exploited by landlords.

He also advocated the establishment of free health service and free education as a method of assisting the less privileged people in the community. Finally, Pio was opposed to the practice whereby a few individuals in privileged positions were to amass excessive wealth at the expense of the masses. He believed that people in such positions should do more for the masses and that such public service would be a reward in itself.