

Komboa: Anti-Vietnam Warrior

Hapotoc

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Lorenzo “Komboa” Ervin is a thirty year old ex-GI now serving life in Marion maximum security jail for hijacking a plane as a protest against US involvement in Vietnam.

In the early ‘sixties, soon after joining up, he and other young black GIs serving in Mannheim, West Germany, secretly formed Black GIs United to fight racism in the army, and became involved in anti-Vietnam war activities, taking part in demonstrations with West German students. Later, as whole units of GIs in France and West Germany were sent to Vietnam, Black GIs United responded by calling on soldiers to desert. The consequent harassment suffered by Komboa and his friends came to a head when Komboa was himself drafted to Vietnam and decided to go AWOL instead.

He was soon captured, and after being severely beaten-up and serving six months in the stockade, he was thrown out of the army and sent home to Chatanooga. Once there, he became involved with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and its attempts to educate black youth about their own history and what was really happening in Vietnam. This earned him the constant attention of the local police and at one point they tried to frame him and two others for several robberies, but bungled the attempt so effectively that all three were acquitted.

He was soon on the run again, however, after being arrested for contempt when he refused to testify before the Hamilton Grand Jury ‘investigation’ into the Black Power movement in Chattanooga. He decided that now was the time for a dramatic protest and so, in February 1969 at Atlanta airport, he boarded a plane bound for Miami. Shortly after take-off, he produced a gun and announced that he was commandeering the plane as a “protest against the war in Vietnam and the domestic war against Black America, especially the attacks on the Black Panther Party and the SNCC.”

The plane landed in Cuba, where Komboa sought political asylum, arranging with Cuban officials to stay there for a few months and then to travel, with a Cuban passport, to Czechoslovakia to stay with African students there.

After a short stay in Prague he complied with the foreign minister’s request that he should go to the US embassy to get an American passport. It was, of course, a trap and security staff were waiting for him with a plane ticket back to the FBI in New York. Nevertheless he made a run for it as they took him out of the embassy and escaped to East Berlin, where he knew he could stay with African students. His freedom didn’t last long, and in September 1969 the CIA kidnapped him from his bed, drugged him and smuggled him across the border to the US consulate in West Berlin. There he was told that he was a suspected “communist intelligence agent” and asked to sign a “confession.” He refused and was systematically tortured for a week by being deprived of sleep, and by the use of drugs, which made him vomit and defecate continuously. After this, he signed the “confession” and a “voluntary repatriation” form and was taken back to the USA.

At his trial in Newnan, Georgia, a redneck jury and a racist judge sent him to prison for life. He has received little support from outside the US, and is under constant threat from Socialist screws. His former Marxist-Leninist

comrades now regard him as a traitor because, after correspondence with several anarchists, he declared himself to have “naturally progressed” to anarchism.

Related

See “A Letter from Komboa,” FE #293–294, August 21, 1978.



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