

George Francis Lobo

(1921-2008)

The former CPSA activist, George Lobo died on the 28th May after a long illness, wise-cracking with his hospital visitors almost to the end. At a well attended funeral at Golders Green crematorium, former Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) officers, Mike Terry (Executive Secretary) and Gerard Omasta-Milsom (Trade Union Officer) paid tribute to George's work with AAM. Letters of condolence were also received from Labour Peers, Neil Kinnock and Bob Hughes and from Tony Dykes, director of Action for Southern Africa. In his address, Mike Terry said that George was "one of the unsung heroes of the Anti-Apartheid Movement" whose work on its trade union committee as a CPSA representative, had been invaluable in strengthening TUC and UK union support for the ANC and the black independent unions.

George was born in Goa, then an enclave of Portugal. As was obligatory for all native children there, he was given the surname of the current Portuguese military commander and brought up as a Roman Catholic. He liked to joke, "The Jesuits didn't get me, I got them." By his early twenties, George had gained a deserved reputation as a militant trade union leader, organising Indian seamen and dockworkers. He was also heavily involved in the Congress Party's struggle to free India from the British Raj.

After independence was won, George was appointed as an assistant commissioner, initially in London and then at the consulate in Glasgow, where he made himself busy transforming

the somewhat grim building into a more welcoming place for Glasgow's Indian community. His refusal to toe the party line without question, however, did not always endear him to his superior officers and after a bust-up, he transferred to the UK Civil Service and immediately became active in the CPSA.

The CPSA was then locked in an unending power struggle between its Left and Right wings. George was mainstream left in his opinions but even when elected to the union's NEC, he somehow managed to remain popular with all factions where normally personal hostilities ran deep. Possibly his brief spell in the diplomatic service had paid dividends. After becoming the CPSA representative on AAM's trade union committee, George threw himself anew into the anti-racist cause. Small in stature, generally mild mannered and quiet spoken, he did not look impressive but he was transformed on the public platform into a powerful and effective orator. He had the knack of speaking from the heart while remaining in complete control of his words and his emotions. It was a gift he would make full use of in the Anti-Apartheid cause. During the 1980s there was a determined attempt by some Trotskyist groups to wrest control of AAM from its leadership which they claimed was too close to the ANC's communist wing and the SA Communist Party. In part this was due to the Trotskyists propensity to see Stalinists under every bed; however there was certainly a deliberate entryist plot to turn AAM from a single issue organisation into

a broader based anti-racist and anti-imperialist body. George became one of the most effective defenders of the AAM leadership. He was not slow to tell the mainly student Trots that they had merely dreamt of anti-imperialist revolutions, whereas he had actually taken part in one which had sent the British Raj packing. He would then shift to a vigorous defence of ANC policies and the AAM leadership. The danger of an entryist take-over eventually receded.

George retired from the Civil Service in 1986 but not from AAM work. He became a familiar figure around the trade union and political conference circuit, running AAM stalls and organising and speaking at fringe meetings, forever ready to explain the Movement's policies. But he was far from being an earnest, joyless trojan. It must be said that as the sun went down, George enjoyed a dram (or three) of his favourite malt whisky with a convivial group of friends. His company was certainly worth cultivating for George could get you into any conference drinks session in the land, whether invited or not. "Come" he would say, "and leave the talking to me." It was fun to see him argue his way past the bouncers, most of them towering over him at the door of the reception or drinks tent. The man had an abundance of charm as well as steel.

George is survived by his wife Lydia, daughter Sandra, grandson Kevin and a sister in India to whom PCS sends its sincere condolences.

Ian Stuart