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Introduction

The assassination of Chris Hani outside his home in Dawn Park, a suburb of Boksburg, near Johannesburg, on 10 April 1993 by a right-wing extremist was a decisive moment in the transition to democracy in South Africa. Nelson Mandela's appeal for calm on prime-time television that evening demonstrated that he alone, and not the incumbent president, F.W. de Klerk, had the authority and stature to lead South Africa at a moment of real crisis. Referring to Hani's assassin and the woman who reported the number of his car, resulting in his arrest, he said: 'A white man, full of prejudice and hate, came to our country and committed a deed so foul that our whole nation now teeters on the brink of disaster. A white woman, of Afrikaner origin, risked her life so that we may know, and bring to justice, this assassin.'

Speaking at his funeral on 19 April, Joe Slovo said: 'Chris Hani was killed by those who would like to see an explosion of carnage and race war, a massive spilling of blood, and the end of negotiations. The assassins want to

drag us back to a military battlefield. Let us draw them back to a battlefield of our choosing – the battlefield of the ballot. They may have the guns. But we have the majority. Chris Hani had a dream of democracy. They killed the man, but they can never kill the dream. And the dream of Chris Hani is about to become a reality.’

On the same occasion, Nelson Mandela said: ‘To lose Chris at this time, when a man of his capabilities is so much needed in this country, will not be forgotten. He was a fighter for peace, freedom and justice. Above all, he was a lover of the poor, the workers and the rural masses. He was a true son of the soil.’

Hani’s death added urgency to the search for solutions. Cyril Ramaphosa recalled that after Hani’s death ‘we went in for the kill’. At a meeting with De Klerk later in April, Mandela demanded a date for democratic elections. Within a few months a transitional constitution was agreed and democratic elections were held on 27 April 1994, a date which marked the formal end of apartheid.

It is the purpose of this book to explain how it was that a man from a remote corner of the Transkei, who had never held high office, was held in such high esteem by so many people. I suggest that it was his conspicuous displays of both physical and moral courage, taken together with compassion and humanity, which combined to make him a great leader.