

# George Bizos's Genuine Stalingrad Strategy

by **Johann Kriegler**, retired Justice of the Constitutional Court

George Bizos's career at the Bar was extraordinary from the outset. Little more than a dozen years after he escaped from Nazi-occupied Greece a simple country lad, still a stateless alien in a country thousands of miles away, he was admitted as an advocate swearing allegiance to a foreign sovereign in a strange language. Throughout his extraordinary career he served the law faithfully.

The state funeral he was so rightly given was appropriately laudatory and fittingly ceremonial. George indeed played a unique role in public life and made a remarkable contribution to our constitutional transition. But it is fitting that the Bar pays special tribute to a man who brought such esteem to our profession. I gladly add my voice in memory of a colleague who learned his craft in the era of the giants of our profession, then honed his skills and came to possess the full complement of an advocate's armament.

Over time George exercised his prowess on the national stage, fighting great cases, representing great personages, defending noble (and at times lost) causes. When our nation turned full circle he, too, changed tack and found himself uncharacteristically being briefed to represent rather than opposing government, but still with the same competence and dedication.

George the advocate was an exponent of true Stalingrad tactics, not the tricks engaged in by shysters who prostitute their professional skill to abet clients who have good reason to put off the day of judicial reckoning. With him it was the genuine Stalingrad exercise: choosing the battleground carefully,



George Bizos and Mrs Johanna Ramotse, Terror Trial 1970

mustering all available forces, planning each phase painstakingly, selecting and getting to hand all appropriate weapons, testing them, priming them, meanwhile identifying the enemy's strengths and its weaknesses – and then doing battle from one strong point to the next, never flagging.

It was seldom grand opera, rather deliberate and unrelenting progression, a masterclass in trial advocacy. I often cite his cross-examination technique as exemplary: counsel patiently and

unobtrusively, almost conversationally, asking essentially uncontentious peripheral questions, metaphorically closing the doors and windows, sealing all apertures, and then confronting the cornered witness with a meticulously worded *coup de grâce*. A joy to watch, even when it's your witness.

Since our paths first crossed in 1954, when as a judge's clerk I administered his inappropriate admission oath, we stayed in touch for sixty-six years. I came to know, then respect and ultimately