

# SEARCHLIGHT SOUTH AFRICA

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Death in Boipatong

Civil Society Theory

Nationalisation: A Matter of Slogans?

The Mistrrial of Winnie Mandela

Ruth Schechter and Olive Schreiner



# SEARCHLIGHT SOUTH AFRICA

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Cover Picture: Rufino Tamayo, *Animals* (1942)

## SEARCHLIGHT SOUTH AFRICA

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### Our Note to Readers

From issue No 8, *Searchlight South Africa* has been printed and distributed in Johannesburg, to avoid the endless interference with our mail in South Africa. We have also reduced our price to a minimum in South Africa because of the extreme poverty of African workers. Readers who can afford a higher price will benefit. We hope that they will send us donations to recover some of our costs. Unfortunately we cannot lower the price outside South Africa, but we are not raising our price to meet higher postage and other costs.

There will be no changes in our policies and the editorial board will stay, at least for the present, in London.

### Late Again!:

This issue was ready for dispatch to Johannesburg — late as usual — when news of the massacre at Boipatong was flashed round the world. It seemed inappropriate to go to press without discussing the issues raised by this event. The problem presented by the killings go beyond the events of one night. More shootings followed and it seemed to us that new initiatives were needed. In the coming period the trade unions, the community organizations and the political bodies will have to use new strategies in their fight with the government. Whether they will meet the challenge or keep running to foreign bodies to cover their ineptitude, remains to be seen. However, without believing that we have all or any of the answers we have advanced some ideas for discussion. We hope they will help to generate debate, and hopefully lead to action.

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## DEATH IN BOIPATONG

### *The Dead of Boipatong*

More than forty people were massacred at Boipatong on Wednesday 17 June. Men, women and children, and even those in their mother's womb were hacked to death. Life, which hitherto offered only suffering, was snuffed out by men so low, that they could only attack at the dead of night when the shadows concealed their identity.

Even though the evidence is hidden and might never be established there is little doubt about who is guilty. This killing must be laid at the door of the Intelligence Department and their allies in the Inkatha Freedom Party. It is clearly the work of men who are out to destabilize the townships, destroy all movements of opposition and reimpose the state of emergency. Addressing this issue, John Carlin said in *The Independent* (24 June 1992):

In Boipatong, as in the majority of other massacres, the people who actually do the killing are blacks linked to the Inkatha Freedom Party...Those who direct them are whites operating within the intelligence structures of the police and army.

The only issue in doubt is how high up does the authority come from? Does it stop at the 'securocrats', the generals and colonels who effectively ran the country during the Eighties? Or does it go right up to F W de Klerk, as Nelson Mandela claims? These questions have not been conclusively answered.

The argument that this event was the result of previous shootings in the area is beside the point. The townships and squatter camps are witness to violence and murders week after week. Some are the work of criminal gangs, others are political. To trace causal connections between the events is sometimes possible and, where the connections can be shown, the roots of the violence must be exposed. But seeking these connections is usually fruitless and must not obscure the basic problem: the decline of township life and descent into blood feuds that can only stop the transformation of the country.

In its attempts to muddy the picture, the government and its allies have turned on the ANC and claimed that the violence at Boipatong was a direct result of the call for a mass action campaign. While the campaign is open to criticism, the government's response is blatant nonsense. It has sought to hide behind a smokescreen of disinformation aimed at hiding its own complicity. If there was a direct cause it was the National Party's new campaign that described the ANC as 'enemy number one'. How else can we explain the failure of the police to send its force into the camp after receiving a warning of the imminence of the attack?

That was not the end. Mr de Klerk had to see the scene for himself. He said he came to offer sympathy — the sympathy of the hangman in the house of the dead.

Did he really believe that people would stand by and hear his honeyed words? Did he not know that his presence would act as a provocation? If he did not, he must go, because he showed himself to be a fool. If he did know he is even more culpable: his tour could only provoke the people of Boipatong. The people who assembled had no doubt about what had happened. Their anger boiled over as they crowded round the president's car. The banners they carried said it all: '*To Hell with De Klerk and your Inkatha Murderers*'. The residents of this squatter camp turned on de Klerk. Yet, although this was an unarmed crowd the police opened fire. When a man was shot dead and the people nearby sought to retrieve the body, the police pumped bullets into unarmed bodies. Even as the crowd turned and ran the police continued firing. All they had demanded was the right to remove the corpse and pay it the respect the living normally show to their dead.

The number killed, mutilated or maimed is not yet clear. The count is still rising. Fifty-four are known to have died in these three days and over two hundred and twenty were injured: two hundred and seventy-four innocent people who sheltered in the squatters camp. We believe this to be a deed as dastardly as that of any shooting in the past: of Bulhoek, Bondelzwarts, Marabastad, Sharpeville and Soweto. The list of names is endless and they merge into one another. Boipatong is one more place name to be added to the towns that have added their inhabitants to the list of martyrs.

### *The Living in Boipatong*

In answer to the anguish of a people, Nelson Mandela went to Boipatong. Unlike what took place during the visit of de Klerk, the people sat and listened. They wanted protection and the right to self-defence. This was their most urgent demand, added to the many urgent needs in their daily lives.

It was a forlorn hope: Mr Mandela did not respond to the call for arms. This is a problem that the ANC and its allies have not been able to confront, despite their claim that their armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, remains intact. Joe Slovo, the chairman of the Communist Party, in an act of bravado, said a year ago that the ANC would arm the people if the massacres did not stop, but the ANC and SACP have no arms to give and can no longer obtain them from eastern Europe. Mr Slovo was guilty of offering assistance that could not be delivered. However, there is a problem that goes far beyond the offer to arm the people: this is an issue over which he dare not respond. The guns that have found their way into the townships have been used by criminals and thugs to terrorize those who now call for arms. The ANC is too disorganized and too weak to conduct an extended campaign in the streets against the army and the police. If there were arms available, and if they could be distributed, it would not be politic to hand them out indiscriminately. Besides the fact that new violence would merely provide the police with the excuse to shoot on an even bigger scale. The way to self defence would have to be through an organized guard that does not exist and could not be formed in the near future.

If Mr Mandela did not respond to the call for arms, what did he come to say? Speaking to an audience that was in mourning, all he could say was that the peace negotiations lay in tatters and the ANC would no longer speak to the government. The people came to hear what the ANC, the movement they support, had to say and Mr Mandela could only talk about the end of talks. Is he so far removed from the plight of the people that he has nothing to say about the misery of their lives or the conditions of the camps in which they are forced to live? Nothing about the iniquity of hostels that house migrant workers? Nothing about the internal fighting that is reducing South Africa to conditions that have come to be associated with Lebanon a few years back and Yugoslavia today.

Yet, in one respect he was correct. The talks that had been dragging on, and had been at the centre of 20 months of endeavour by the ANC, had reached a dead end. To continue them in the same way, even if there had been no massacres, would have been counter productive, leaving the government in a position of power. The talking shop known as Codesa had to be closed. However, was Boipatong the appropriate place to make this announcement?

Mandela in his address also dared the government to call a state of emergency, saying that he would lead the defiance. These words, coming from the man who had served a prison sentence of 27 years, sounded brave, but they can achieve nothing. The time for token defiance is gone. What the people need and want is change in their living conditions. Yet, in the 18 months since it has been unbanned the ANC has conducted no campaign to alter conditions in South Africa. That is why people are tired of talks about talks.

There have been no campaigns for housing, the end of hostels and squatter camps, health care, schooling, or public transport. And because squatter camps must go, how is it possible to call for running water, electricity, roads, sewage, sports fields, shopping centres, or the many amenities wanted by the people? The issue, which Mr Mandela did not address, is that people cannot live this way any longer. It is this situation that invites the formation of killer gangs, and that allows the police to terrorize the population, with or without the assistance of Inkatha.

Where were the other voices? Archbishop Tutu, expressing his anger, demanded that South Africa be expelled from the Olympic Games. Stop the rugby tours by Australia and New Zealand, he called. He was followed in Britain by Peter Hain, the Labour MP who once organized boycotts of South African touring teams. The chorus will grow. Anything rather than face up to the basic problem in South Africa: that cheap labour requires cheap housing, and it is easier to kill people than to provide the facilities required for a meaningful life.

### *The Time For Mourning Is Over*

The people of Boipatong buried their dead in the glare of world attention. A number of men were arrested at the nearby hostel which was said to harbour the killers. Whether charges will be proffered is not known, but even if the

perpetrators are brought to book it is doubtful whether they will ever be punished. The records indicate that those who work for the state can usually expect to go free, or expect release after a very short period in prison.

The demand that the guilty be caught is part of the larger demand that justice be seen to prevail in a new South Africa. In itself, that is only a small part of what is required. The list of demands are so extensive that it might be more fruitful to set out the requirements of the coming period and divide the list into two.

Firstly there are the demands of people who have to exist in the twilight world where the main planks of apartheid have been abolished, but where conditions of life have not improved for most and have even deteriorated.

That the massacre occurred in a squatter's camp was not exceptional. The vast bulk of the people live either as squatters or in townships that are insufferably bad. The continued existence of these miserable 'high density' areas is an indictment of the society that has locked people into these custom-built slums. The living conditions of the better off are barely tolerable; those of the poorer, sub-human. Yet, in the past two years, few steps have been taken to reverse the situation. To speak of a better society under these conditions is absurd. Nor have there been steps to alter other basic living conditions. It is not necessary to spell out the conditions that need urgent change: sanitation, housing, water and lighting, roads and transport, schooling, health care are only the beginning. There are no equitable pension schemes, no social welfare, no mental health care, and no facilities for the handicapped. The list is endless and grass root movements must be revived to take these issues in hand.

Not that such groups can expect an easy passage. The authorities will plead a shortage of money, a lack of professional men and women, a dearth of suitable buildings, a shortage of equipment. The local authorities will block progress or temporize. Only agitation followed by real campaigns can force a way through the delaying tactics of those that rule and, we expect, the inertia of liberation movements that should have initiated campaigns of this kind years ago.

The choice of campaigns can be decided at local level, and these can be linked through regional movements. The tactics used will vary from passive resistance to occupations; boycotts and expropriations; strikes and go-slows. There can be marches and there can be stay at homes: the methods chosen to suit the situation and the occasion. All these will also need the mobilization of taxi drivers and others to counter the opposition that is bound to be provoked by the ruling class. Above all methods must be found to protect the residents through self-aid groups.

In such campaigning, which must advance from objective to objective there must be no deception, no false bravado, and no self appointed leaders who terrorize the factories, the hospitals, the schools, or the townships. The one lesson to be learnt from the formation of trade unions and community organizations since the 1970s, is that real campaigning people's organizations can only develop where bureaucratic political interference from high is absent.

Advancing in tandem with local campaigns, and obviously co-ordinated with local initiatives, it is possible to take up the larger question: creating the appropriate institution to resolve the crisis. This has become even more urgent now that all talks between the government of Mr de Klerk and the ANC have been suspended. Perhaps this halt has even pointed to a way forward that has been previously neglected. It was Pallo Jordan who said at one stage that the government was acting as player and as referee. His answer then was to call on international bodies to intervene. Other members of the ANC have joined him in looking to international bodies. That way lies frustration. If there is to be any meaningful change, it must come from the strength of the people. We believe there is a way, as proposed once before in a little known paper, *Umlilo — The Flame*.

That paper appeared in 1935 when the All African Convention was summoned by the African leaders to stop the Hertzog Bills which intended removing Cape Africans from the franchise and finally demarcating the land that Africans could own. Writing in *Umlilo*, C B I Dladla and Ralph Lee, both formerly in the Communist Party but now members of the Workers Party of South Africa, proposed to those who were to meet that they convert the All African Convention into a National Convention. That is, that the Convention declare that it was the representative body of the people of South Africa and, as such, able to express the views of the majority. Here, gathered in assembly, were the men and women who alone had the right to decide the fate of the nation.

The time was not ripe for that move. The Convention that was convened was composed largely of a timid petty bourgeoisie, most without a mandate and without any backing from their communities. They had come to protest, not to fight. Furthermore the Convention was controlled by a cabal that would not even allow a radical motion to be put. There might have been more hope if the workers had been organized and represented. However, the trade union movement was still in its infancy and the strength of the workers limited by its small size and lack of experience.

There have been considerable changes since 1935. There is in existence a strong and consolidated trade union movement; workers in the factories and the townships have well defined demands; youth and women are militant; and the liberation movements, despite organizational weakness have a large supportive constituency. If it is not possible to get the government to take negotiations seriously then the opposition movement must take the next step and call an assembly. Even more urgently, if such negotiations are not initiated by the majority, and if the initiative is left in the hands of the government, there can only be a reversion to cycles of violence that must cripple each and every opposition party.

It is not for us to say what the next step should be. The precise details must be decided in South Africa and there are several possibilities. A meeting of interested parties can be summoned to discuss the calling of a Convention and the method of appointing delegates. The agenda can be determined in advance by a working party. Interested parties, including the National Party should be invited. Interna-

tional observers (and only observers) can be invited from among jurists or international bodies. We repeat: the mechanism for calling the Convention and its scope can be determined, democratically, by local representatives and can be made fully representative. Our only demand would be that the trade unions and community bodies, excluded from Codesa under the fiction that they were represented by the ANC be directly involved. They are needed, both to participate in the deliberations and to provide the defence of the assembly.

Although we believe that this is a way forward and is possible, we doubt whether the ANC and its allies will take this step. They will be only too willing to accept token concessions and crawl back to the talking table if they can only get some token concession from Mr de Klerk. They will not participate in an operation in which they will have to take responsibility for action and possible confrontation with the government. Yet, such is our belief that a new initiative is called for, that we must urge the members of the ANC to press their leaders to take such a step. If they do not, then the initiative must be taken by the other liberation movements, working in tandem with the trade union bodies Cosatu and Nactu. To fail to do this can only leave the country in the hands of warring factions that must tear the country apart. It is either forward to a new society, or a retreat to chaos.

## DOCUMENTS OF THE DAY

### *The Massacre*

**Allister Sparks, who was present at the shooting the day before wrote:** A young man had been shot and the crowd wanted to retrieve the body

The crowd was boiling with rage. They were trying to reach the body to take it away for their own community funeral, while a cordon of about thirty policemen, dressed in camouflage uniform and with their shotguns held across their chests, strained to keep them back. It must be said that the provocation was great...

I was standing alongside the end policeman, less than a yard from the front of a crowd, when moments later I heard a shot ring out from the end of the police line, followed quickly by another. Instantly the whole line opened fire, pumping their heavy-gauge 12-bore shot into the crowd at point-blank range.

There was no order to shoot, nor was there any warning to the crowd...

When the shooting stopped there was an eerie silence. I lifted my head and saw a field of carnage ahead of me. A pile of bodies lay in a tangle about 20 feet away. Beyond them were more, strewn haphazardly across the field up to about 100 yards away. They lay dead still for a moment, then some of them moved. Then there were groans, and screams from the shocked crowd...

The police made no move, either then or later to go to [the wounded] and offer assistance. They stayed in their line, guns at the ready..I counted 20 people lying there. Most had gaping body wounds. One had half his face shot away. A young woman press photographer was kneeling next to him...

Observer, 21 June 1992

*The Secret Policeman*

**Lieutenant-Colonel John Horak** whose story appeared in *The Independent* on 24 June 1992 is a defector from the security services after 32 years, during which he was a journalist on the liberal *Daily Mail*, and later manager of the Morning Group of the South African Associated Newspapers. Included in his interview is the following:

*The system of national security operates from the State President to local town clerks...*

*The Chairman in each area is the senior police officer. He's left to do the job and if he's an arrogant sort, he takes all the decisions. The police only feed up the line problems they can't cope with. They could have someone killed locally — the phrase is usually something like 'permanently removed from society' — and the only thing which reaches the committee is a note to say the problem has been solved. They don't explain anything so the people at the top can always say they never knew.*

Asked about co-operation between the police and Inkatha at the Boipatong massacre, Horak said:

*This is credible. The Local Joint Management Committee conducts its own affairs. It would be down to the local man.*

*You will not find any document showing an agreement between the SAP [South African Police] and the Inkatha movement but they do work together. The general view is to let them fight it out, turn a blind eye.*

In a moment of doubt Horak sought the advice from a church minister. It appears that it's 'your Christian duty to spy on the Communists'. The minister 'prayed to God that I would have the courage to carry on with my duty'.

*The Curse of State Terrorism*

**Extract from a report by David Beresford** on the spreading violence in South Africa. Starting with a gruesome story of the mutilation and killing of a young man accused by ANC supporters of being a member of Inkatha, Beresford also referred to a journalist who was on a military hit-list but survived because the assassin bungled the job. He said there was a temptation to call down Mercurio's curse on the parties in South Africa taken from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: 'A plague on both your houses, for they have indeed made worm's meat'. He continued:

Exactly where the dividing line lies between civil strife and civil war is a moot point, but it is certainly a line which South Africa is fast approaching. As ever in a conflict of its type, viciousness of an extreme order is being exercised increasingly by both sides...

Beresford then referred to stories that were current about the necklacing of an Inkatha supporter prior to the massacre in Boipatong. However these accounts overlooked the assassination of white police commander by black gunmen in the area. A more persuasive measure of responsibility, he said, lay in the recently published account by the Human Rights Commission of 49 massacres, claiming

1,250 lives over the past two years. Then referring to 'a thread of history which provides perhaps the most telling perspective', Beresford continued:

It is a thread which can be picked up as distantly as the Rhodesian bush war, when the South African military were involved in activities truly worthy of Nazi war criminals. They included experimentation (with black human guinea pigs) in the use of poison and the subsequent application as a weapon of war against Zanu and Zapu — episodes of infamy reported by at least two veterans of the Rhodesian conflict...The thread can be pursued to Mozambique with the development on an almost unprecedented scale of the strategy of destabilisation through the training, equipping and promotion of Renamo by the South African security services. The blatant use of state terrorism and murder are extended to the domestic front...It is a history that has bred an extreme and justifiable prejudice against the South African authorities in both the international and black, domestic, communities...

In his conclusion Beresford stated that the government in Pretoria had to exorcise the curse of Mercurio by 'a sustained demonstration of its claimed newfound principles'. It was also a curse, he said, which the ANC and its supporters would do well to bear in mind when faced with the necklacing and killings perpetrated by its members in the townships. With this we concur.

Guardian 3 July 1992

### BONGANI NTSHANGASE

Bongani Ntshangase, a former teacher in South Africa and at the ANC school Somafco at Mazimbu in Tanzania, where he was highly respected, was shot dead in Natal on the 21st of May.

Mr Ntshangase had been in South Africa for a short time after being repatriated from Kenya, where he had fled with his wife Linda after being released from an ANC prison in Tanzania on 1 August 1991. He and four others were released after a campaign by Mrs Ntshangase and the pressure group Justice for Southern Africa. A press release concerning Mr Ntshangase and a suspected purge of Zulu-speaking members of the ANC in Tanzania was reported in January 1992 in *Searchlight South Africa*, No 8 (pp 29-32).

In a letter to Justice for Southern Africa of 14 August 1991, Mrs Ntshangase wrote that fellow Zulu speakers in Tanzania were 'in peril ...both from the ANC and the Tanzanian government'. She felt 'absolutely insecure' and thought that she 'might be assassinated'. She felt the same fear for her husband and his colleagues.

Our sympathy goes out to Linda and the family of Bongani. The grief they feel makes us even more determined to campaign for Justice in South Africa

## RESTATING OUR POLICY

It was during the uprising of 1984–86 that *Searchlight South Africa* was first mooted. Although there were many articles and theses written or started in the heady days of township revolt and trade union action in South Africa, most were restricted to local activity. Even now, in mid-1992, despite the publication of several collections of articles, there appears to be no history of the revolt on a nation-wide scale.

This failure to analyze the revolt in its totality is not only an academic issue. The revolt was crushed by the drafting of the army and police into the townships and, brave as the township residents were, they did not have the resources to stand up against the state. Calls by the ANC to make the country unmanageable were irresponsible, and carried the false hope that the regime could be overthrown at that time. Even more irresponsible was the encouragement of mindless terror exercised by gangs of undisciplined youth, exemplified by Winnie Mandela's call for the use of necklacing as a step towards freedom.

The crushing of the revolt left the opposition weakened, and this was to affect the subsequent course of events. Although the government was under severe pressure (partly as a result of the revolt), it was still in control of instruments of oppression — the police, the army and the state administration. Concessions would have to be made to meet new international developments, but in the process the government held the whip hand and opposition forces, despite popular support, argued from a position of weakness. Furthermore, instead of making the country ungovernable, the government had it in its power to make the townships unmanageable; instead of the notorious 'necklace' bringing victory, the state could manipulate men with spears, pangas and AK47s to bring terror to township residents and to opposition leaders.

It was time for a magazine with a distinctive approach, able to put events in perspective, unafraid to print articles that nobody else dared to consider, and looking to the future to spell out the course of likely events.

What was envisaged by those who met to launch the journal were a number of positions to which we subscribed:

- 1) We were Marxists and based our demands on the need for a working class movement that could build a socialist South Africa. This would be a movement that would, in the words of Rosa Luxemburg, conduct a dialogue with the working class. It would have a distinctive message, based on an understanding of historical processes, and able to respond to the needs of the working class. Socialists could advance ideas, but could only act in response to the answer that was returned: workers and others would present their ideas, and accept or reject advice as they found most appropriate.

This approach, which has few adherents inside socialist circles anywhere, offers a way forward and is in contrast to the methods used by the Communist Party. We warned against their methods. There was a further and even more urgent reason for opposing the Communists. Although they claimed to be the representatives of the working class (an arrogant claim which must be rejected,) they had surrendered the aim of socialism by being absorbed into the nationalist movement.

- 2) We saw no hope in the continuation of the capitalist system. It was not working on a world scale and it could not solve the most pressing problems of the people of South Africa. To call for a 'free market', a system that does not operate anywhere, but operates on the basis of unemployment, impoverishment, homelessness and human degradation, is absurd. Yet this is what the government insists on, and this is what the nationalist movements and the trade unions accept as the norm.
- 3) We saw a need for a programme that would propose effective steps to stamp out segregation and would tackle the basic problems of the country. This included steps to get the economy functioning, creating new avenues of employment and resolving the land question. Three hundred and fifty years of colonial rule had to be overturned and centuries of pre-capitalist rural production radically transformed. Segregated townships (now further blighted by vast squatter camps) had to go and houses had to be built. All segregation in schools and hospitals had to be removed and full education and health provisions ensured.
- 4) Democratic grass root movements in the factories and the workshops had to be revived or rebuilt, as well as community bodies that could participate in the struggle for better conditions. At the same time the trade unions had to be separated from the nationalist movements and made autonomous to protect workers' rights under any and every government. Such bodies to be maintained after political change to protect the people from the state.
- 5) The police and army had to be culled and cut to size. In the first phase these bodies had to be neutralized to prevent their being used against working class and community organizations. This applied as much to the remnants of Umkhonto we Sizwe and any other para-military organisations as to the existing state forces. Methods would have to be devised to tame this Moloch, with its appetite for blood, until it was no longer the arbiter of events in the country and its use could be dispensed with.

Our central points were directed to events inside South Africa but we had come to our position after giving serious thought to the global situation.

- 6) We rejected the Communist Party, not only because we had observed its activities over sixty years, but also from our reading of events in what was then the Soviet Union or USSR. We did not believe that the USSR was a workers' state and saw no evidence of socialism or communism in that country. We came to the same conclusions about the so-called People's Democracies of eastern Europe. So-called progressive states in the rest of world, commencing with

China and Vietnam and Cambodia and extending to Cuba, Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique, were all oppressive and showed no signs of the Marxism they claimed to represent. We saw only tyrannies, in which millions of people had been killed to fulfil some mad ideological belief (as in Cambodia) or because they had dared to oppose brutal dictatorship. We could not accept as socialist, regimes that seized citizens off the streets to fill slave camps, and tortured or killed citizens in the gold mines of Kolyma (in the USSR), and elsewhere.

- 7) We stood for internationalism because we believe that workers cannot achieve socialism if they confine their interests to one country, and are convinced that socialism cannot succeed if it remains isolated inside a capitalist world. This did place us in a difficult position because there was no viable international organization and no real move towards such a movement. The era had been poisoned by the dominance of USSR in the socialist movement and by the pusillanimity of the Social Democrats. Stalinism would have to be exorcised and its evil influence understood before a new movement could arise.
- 8) We despaired of the many tiny groups in the main capitalist countries that claim to sponsor international organizations. The working class everywhere is split nationally and internationally, and no small sect is going to rally the workers until they come together democratically to confront the forces of capitalism. That meant that we would have to wait, but it would not stop us writing, thinking, or supporting campaigns. We did not call for a new socialist movement in South Africa: instead we offered our pages to those who wished to build such a movement to allow for discussion on a programme for the left.
- 9) We recognized at the outset that there was a need to maintain the thread of socialist continuity in South Africa. The records of movements, their members and their struggles, much of it unrecorded, or perverted by Stalinist historians, had to be recovered and preserved. After 1989, when the Berlin wall crumbled and the ideals of socialism came under increasing attack in the western media, this task became increasingly important.

In order to develop this programme we started with the firm assertion that:

- 10) We were not nationalists and could not belong to the ANC, the PAC, Azapo or the Black Consciousness Movement. As a corollary to this we could not give the ANC our support over other nationalist movements. They were all subject to criticism where their actions (or the actions of individual leaders) were contrary to the needs of the working class. However, in the struggle for a new South Africa we defended the right of the black nationalist movements to exist, and could support some of their demands, even though our paths diverged

Those who eventually met to launch the journal had been frustrated in their attempts at get articles published. Their ideas went beyond the bounds set by academics and activist groups alike. This was part of a general malaise. Publication in the journals of left wing groups were usually confined to opinions that fitted with the group's orientation. Furthermore publication in many academic journals

had to wait in a queue, or were rejected for other reasons. Nonetheless, whether articles were accepted or not, there was no socialist journal devoted to what was happening in South Africa, in which we felt there was analysis that got to the heart of events.

We were not overly successful in finding writers who could ensure the existence of a journal over several issues. Our demands might have been too exacting; our ideas too demanding; our circle of acquaintances too small. But we knew what we wanted. The journal should provide a Marxist analysis of contemporary events in South Africa. In proclaiming the primacy of the working class in transforming the country we would not be beholden to the trade unions. These were vehicles for working class organization and mobilization; but they were only one sector of the working class, and their aims were necessarily restricted to shop floor demands. Our aim was to establish the political presence of the working class and this transcended economic demands, in the same way as working class politics went beyond nationalism. This would always be an issue that socialists had to confront because, as we saw it, the working class movement would aim to solve the national question and should always aim to protect the workers from nationalists.

We did not believe that we alone wanted a working class movement. There were already other parties or groups that claimed to represent the working class. Neither did we believe that there was only one party that could claim to represent the workers. Workers would decide at any particular time whom they wished to follow — and would not necessarily be unanimous in their choice. We could only decide on our orientation and present a position to those who might wish to join with us.

Our political sympathies in Europe lay with the editorial board of the journal *Critique*, because in that journal alone we found criticisms of the eastern bloc with which we could agree. Hillel Ticktin, its main contributor, joined with us when we launched the journal. He was not only the most perceptive Marxist writer on the USSR, but also a South African who had worked with some of us before he had left South Africa and then studied in the USSR.

Eventually five people met together and decided to publish a journal. Nothing came easily. We had no money, and none of us could finance the venture. It was only the generosity of some of our friends that gave us the confidence to begin: and this need to go out with a begging bowl has dogged us through our existence. Painfully we learnt how to use the word processor, then desk-top publication, and in our amateurish fashion learnt how to put a magazine together.

The five became four, and then the four narrowed down to three: Paul Trehwela, Baruch Hirson and Hillel Ticktin. Because Ticktin was in Glasgow, the work devolved on two: the typesetting, the finance, the administration and much of the writing. Occasionally we found others to assist with tasks like proofreading, but this did not always happen and on occasion we were embarrassed by the spate of typing errors.

Our first issue appeared with a mix of current politics and historical essays. Our pride lay in the appearance of topics that had not ever appeared elsewhere: whether of historical or of contemporary interest. This we have maintained through our issues to date. Here was a journal, we hoped, that would make an impact and set a standard in South Africa. In this we had not reckoned with the South African publications board (that is, the censors). Friends on the editorial board of the British journal *Revolutionary History* had given us permission to use their post box. There it stood on our title page, BCM 7646, London WC1N 3XX.

Some clerk, censorious as ever, saw our box number and proclaimed: BCM! Black Consciousness Movement of Azania — and we were banned. In a country which once banned the children's novel *Black Beauty* this was not exceptional. It took us time to catch up with the reason for the banning and this presented us with a poser. We opposed all censorship and a ban on the BCM of Azania was obnoxious, although we did not identify with its political position.

The first three issues were banned for sale in South Africa, and although libraries were exempt, most copies of these and several other issues never made it though the post. The police surveillance was not water tight and we heard of copies reaching some readers, sometimes. The response of subscribers made it seem worthwhile that we continue, even though the sales were badly hit and our finances strained to near exhaustion. Yet even when lawyers who acted on our behalf managed to get the banning withdrawn, over-zealous officials still confiscated copies that were posted in. Dozens, if not hundreds, of copies must be stored somewhere in the vaults of government departments, if they have not been destroyed. Recently we arranged for the journal to be printed and published in South Africa, partly to overcome the illegal confiscation. There was a more pressing reason for moving to South Africa. We could lower the price in the country to meet the extreme poverty of potential readers. We do not yet know whether the shift has paid off: our audience might find it an impossible luxury to buy the journal, even at the low price, and we have still to discover whether all copies sent through the post are delivered to subscribers.

### *The Demise of the USSR and Change in South Africa*

We have remarked in several issues on the enormity of the collapse of the USSR, both as a world power, and as a political and economic entity. We also printed extracts from South African Communist Party (SACP) publications, showing that three months before the collapse this party still heralded that regime as the altar of socialism. It claimed that the USSR had resolved all social and economic problems, and that it was the centre of a world wide socialist emporium. Their report of their conference in Cuba in the SACP journal, the *African Communist* outdid any comic we have ever seen. Delegates had pranced around the conference room singing praise to Oliver

Tambo and Joe Slovo, and the report indicated that not one delegate had objected to the hymns of praise to the USSR.

The sycophantic bowing to Stalin had been replaced over the years as the leaders of the SACP accepted the men who succeeded him: all the way down to Gorbachev who had become the font of wisdom. Despite the panegyrics of the SACP, the collapse of the USSR had been preceded by desperate efforts by Soviet statesmen to extricate themselves from centres of world conflict, including Southern Africa. This had become obvious from many pointed statements coming out of the USSR calling for the end of struggle in South Africa, and the open support that Russian diplomats extended to the South African regime. Despite our criticisms of the USSR and of the SACP's sycophantic admiration, we were caught short by events. We had predicted the collapse of the USSR and the real surprise is that it took so long in coming. Nonetheless, we were taken unaware. The speed of events, starting with the defection of Hungary, then the fall of the Berlin Wall, showed the system to be jerry-built. One institution after another came tumbling down.

There was one further issue of which we had no information. In the past there had been reservations, and even hatred, towards Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communist Party. Since the rift with the USSR the members of the SACP had excommunicated any follower of Mao. It now transpires that this changed in 1983 following an approach to the SACP from the Chinese Communist Party. In an exchange of letters it was agreed that the two parties would stop maligning each other. Consequently the SACP did not join in the condemnation of the massacre at Tienanmen Square. The new friendship with China had no effect on the unfolding world scene but presumably the SACP has been suitably rewarded by its new-found friend. A large Chinese delegation attended the SACP conference in December 1991 and a South African delegation has visited China to discover how to build socialism. Judas was indeed an honourable man when compared with those who will do anything for thirty pieces of silver.

The impact of the Soviet collapse was far reaching. The removal of Soviet influence meant that US hegemony of Southern Africa was assured for the foreseeable future, and that the National Party government would relinquish control of Namibia and also some of the worst aspects of apartheid. The changes in South Africa, that had been brokered before this collapse, were now accelerated. On 2 February 1991 the formerly banned parties were unbanned and Mr Mandela was released, praising Mr de Klerk as an honourable man. Negotiations (informal until then) commenced soon after.

It became necessary to reformulate our ideas. We had called for a Constituent Assembly in our first issue. It was now essential that the calling of an Assembly become part of every socialists' thinking, and that there be serious consideration of how to intervene in the projected negotiations. Socialists could decide for or against participation in the negotiations, and this could be decided as part of an overall strategy — but the negotiations could not be ignored. To do so was to stand

passively by while the nationalists, black and white, decided among themselves what the shape of the future South Africa might be.

In defining our position we had to consider the effect of the defeat of the uprising of 1984-6, and the occupation and control of the townships by the military. Police and army terror had the country in its grips. Forces opposed to the government were not arguing from strength, even if they could command the tacit support of the majority of the population. It was this popular support for the ANC, the SACP and the leaders of the trade union federation Cosatu, that had to be reversed if there was to be any hope for socialism. The failure of the smaller groups to engage in the political situation meant that the possibility of socialism was not on the immediate agenda. It also meant much more. If a Constituent Assembly was summoned it was most likely that the ANC and its allies would have a huge majority. This had to be our starting point. As the majority they would probably have the country in their hands, and although this would have to be conceded, it placed a shadow over the right of independent groups to survive. There was no reason to believe that an ANC controlled government, or one in alliance with the National Party, would tolerate a critical socialist movement. That was not its way with opponents. Socialists would have to find ways of protecting themselves in the coming period and means would have to be found to continue with simple tasks like publishing.

There was another factor that influenced the way we saw the situation. We had given our support to the black nationalist movements against the government, and objected to the many institutions set up by the state to enforce their subjugation. Nonetheless we had heard too many stories about the activities of these movements (or at least their exile wings) to endorse them politically. Consequently, when we were presented by the stories of the prisons in Angola, controlled by the Swapo leadership, we could not keep silent. It was to the credit of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) in Britain that it took up the case of those who had been imprisoned in pits in the ground and kept there for years, without formal trial, and with no reason except the internal wranglings of the movement's leaders. We joined the WRP in exposing the conditions in these prison camps in *Searchlight South Africa* and joined the committee of Solidarity with ex-SWAPO Detainees to secure justice for them. To the shame of all other socialist groups we could gain no further support for this committee.

It was while working on this committee that the rumours we had heard about conditions in the ANC armed forces, Umkhonto we Sizwe, were revealed as fact in the *Sunday Correspondent* in Britain in April 1990. The story went beyond what we had heard previously. Five men and two women had arrived in Nairobi, under great difficulty, and told reporters of horrific events in the armed forces in 1984 in Angola. It became obvious that the committee devoted to the former detainees in Swapo had to be extended to take up the cause of the seven in Nairobi, and others who had been involved in a mutiny against a repressive command structure. Not

unexpectedly, many of those in command had been members of the SACP, but men like Oliver Tambo, president of the ANC, were involved in the repression.

Making contact with the Nairobi 7 was not easy and our resources were thin. Individuals spent hundreds of pounds on phone calls and faxes, to journalists, government agencies, non-governmental agencies, and the small isolated group in Nairobi. Our assistance was unsolicited. We did however ask the group to write their account of what had occurred. Their story, printed with few editorial alterations – and restricted to grammatical corrections – appeared in *Searchlight South Africa*, No 5. Besides the WRP no other socialist journal in Britain would carry the story or join the committee, now renamed Justice for Southern Africa. We were in fact we were frequently condemned for printing the story because we dared to print criticisms of the ANC.

We are proud to have published articles that have not, and could not, appear elsewhere. Our articles have been reprinted in journals in South Africa although they have not acknowledged the source or the names of the authors. This is piracy, but we have ignored this because we would rather that our articles be made available. Furthermore, because our journal had such great difficulty in getting into South Africa we were delighted when we heard that some articles, and particularly the piece on the mutiny, had been photocopied again and again, and distributed. We welcomed the fact that people found our articles important, but at the same time regretted the loss of revenue which we need so badly.

For the editorial board the events surrounding our involvement with the former detainees in Swapo and the ex-mutineers in Umkhonto we Sizwe was salutary. We came to realise as the months went by that in the absence of a socialist movement, and in the light of ANC control of the opposition forces in South Africa, it would become increasingly important to warn of future oppression, whether by the National Party, or the ANC-SACP, or both.

Soon after the first mutineers returned home (preceding the Nairobi 7), one of them, Siphon Phungulwa, was ambushed in the Transkei and killed, probably by members of Umkhonto we Sizwe. Other returnees were forced out of townships by thugs who claimed to be 'comrades'. Inevitably, much to our chagrin, and contrary to our advice, a few ex-mutineers accepted help from reactionaries in South Africa: but we condemned principally those on the left who left these people to their fate and allowed them to fall into the hands of state assisted bodies. We repeated the demands these ex-mutineers were making that they be cleared of the accusations that they had been government agents. Our voice seemed to be lost amidst all the noise made by the ANC. But the story had only begun. We heard of discontent among the exiles and we gathered stories of men kept in prison in Tanzania and in Zambia at the behest of the ANC. We printed the stories we got, checking each account, certain that they were truthful. This included narrative accounts, open letters to Nelson Mandela and letters from east Africa.

As editors, we printed the stories as they were written, making few corrections, and confining these to grammatical slips. Yet, so superior were these accounts to

anything that appeared in official ANC or SACP journals that at a later date it was suggested that we had ghosted the stories. This was not the case and we still have the handwritten originals to prove that they were written by those who put their names to the several documents.

Our journal had changed out of all recognition. What had commenced as a mix of historical articles and commentaries on events in South Africa had taken on a campaigning form. Yet, in this we still did not go far enough. The men and women who were tortured, imprisoned, even mutilated in the camps of Swapo and the ANC (and we believe in the camps of the PAC) must not only be exonerated, but must also be compensated for what they have undergone. They must have the resources to begin a new life, and they must get the education they were denied because they were ensconced in army camps.

This raises an even greater set of injustices needing redress. Thousands of people were holed up in the prisons of South Africa because they opposed apartheid and were prepared to fight for their beliefs. Other thousands were killed or maimed by the police and the army for the same reason. They or their families need to be compensated for the misery inflicted on them, and although money does not bring back lost lives or wasted years, that must become part of the demands for a settlement of the country's future. Justice demands that at least this be done for those who were maltreated or imprisoned by a state which operated a monstrous political system.

### *What of the Future?*

Our aim in presenting this short account is not nostalgic. We are interested in presenting this record only because it points to events today and in the future. Our articles in the first two volumes, an index of which appears at the end of this issue, were designed to take our readers through the complex events in South Africa. In the process we also learnt much about people and events. Our reading extended into areas we had not previously anticipated: from the novels of Rushdie through to the war in the Gulf; from Lenin's writings on national independence to Comintern decrees on South African political activities; from the impact of thinkers of the Carribean (C L R James and George Padmore) to the many socialists in South Africa who have never had their life's work appraised. And we have learnt humility before the heroism of those who stood up against tyranny in South Africa in the ranks of the nationalist movements, and others who fell in the fight against oppressors elsewhere in the world.

Those involved in producing *Searchlight South Africa* have spent a large part of their lives as revolutionary socialists. Some of us spent years in Pretoria Local prison for offences against the state. We were considered by the authorities to be dangerous because, despite our different political affiliations, our objective was to overturn the state and the capitalist system. We have no cause to alter our basic

objective. The current world depression is one further symptom of the decline of capitalism. It can only offer further misery for the vast majority of the world's population. The collapse of the regimes of eastern Europe have only increased the measure of human degradation as national and ethnic enmity tears countries apart. This is the price that people everywhere are paying for the crimes of the 20th century, which include the control of world finance by a handful of corporations; the domination of the former colonies by their one-time imperial masters; the emergence of theocratic tyrannies; and the derailing of the socialist movement by time-servers and rogues.

It is our belief that the reconstruction of the socialist movement requires a reevaluation of our conception of human rights inside the socialist society we wish to build. Socialism without basic human rights and civil freedom can have no meaning. It is in this belief that we welcome the contribution in this issue by Bob Fine on the conception of civil society. The search for ideas to meet the requirements of the 21st century, in South Africa and across the world, must be incorporated into socialist thinking. We will continue our work in this spirit in the months to come.

In concluding this editorial we would be remiss if we did not pause to comment on the massacres in June 1992 which left whole communities in a state of shock and distress.

We have no doubt that the government, or sections of its security forces, are implicated in the massacres. Yet the malaise goes much deeper. Sections of the ANC, as well as the Inkatha movement, are involved in killings and provocations to maim or kill. The social factors that have led people to this point of anarchy are obvious, but that is no excuse for this barbaric blood-letting. The intervention of police (or their deliberate absence from the battle-fields) has been made possible by the blood feuds in the townships, by struggles that have even turned people inside the ANC alliance against each other. We are sickened by the stories of ANC men attacking and killing trade unionists; of the reappearance of the necklace killings, taking us ever nearer to lynch law; of the ganging together of Winnie Mandela and Harry Gwala; of the use of squatter women to occupy ANC offices. These events might seem small when compared with armed men killing women and children indiscriminately, but they are the other side of the same coin: organised destruction that destabilises the society and allows the existing de Klerk government to impose its will on the country.

The call for the immediate convention of a Constituent Assembly has become ever more urgent and this is a task that the liberation movements, the trade unions and the community organizations must undertake on their own initiative. The need to reshape the country is now a matter of life and death.

## Civil Society Theory and the Politics of Transition in South Africa

Robert Fine

The emergence of what is called 'civil society theory' within opposition politics in South Africa, and its widespread use by most parties, has posed an important challenge to the prevailing political perspectives which have previously informed the anti-apartheid movement. Civil society theory has been imported from democratic movements of East Europe and reinforced by their success in hastening the collapse of Stalinism.

Simply stated, the rise of civil society theory expresses the widespread conviction that there is no longer any purchase in the idea of one-party government, the conflation of state and civil society, the denial of civil or political rights in the name of economic development. The term, however, is ambiguous, on one side pointing to the system of needs of a capitalist 'free market' and on the other to the empowering of a range of grass-roots organizations (trade unions, civic associations, rural committees, women's and youth organizations, student movements, etc) which are independent of the state. The emphasis has been on these new social movements retaining or obtaining autonomy from whatever political party is in power, being able to push the state from below for beneficial social changes and nurturing the seeds of democracy, civil rights and tolerance in their own sphere of activity.<sup>1</sup>

In South Africa the theory usually assumes that the associations of civil society and the political leadership of the ANC — as the future government — will work together for the transformation of society, each providing the strengths the other lacks. In relation to those etatist theories (socialist and nationalist) which focus on the political kingdom alone as the centre of all power and source of all development, civil society theory does not ignore the state but advances what has been called a 'dual track' strategy. Albie Sachs put the perspective for the ANC: 'if good non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and open government is the main guarantee that the effects of apartheid will be overcome, then the organs of civil society are the principal guarantors that good government will exist'<sup>2</sup>. The theory declares that the new society will be built by a combination of good government on one side and dynamic community, trade union, and other associations on the other.

This normative vision serves as a counterweight to the suppression of civil society that was the hallmark of apartheid — through the restrictions it imposed on the civil and political rights of the vast majority of its population — and to the highly centralised and statist visions of emancipation from apartheid which characterised the dominant SACP and African Nationalist currents of opposition. It gives political expression to the trade unions, and other new social movements which heroically bore the brunt of the internal struggles of the 1980s. It endeavours to

harmonise the interests of the two major wings of the opposition: the political leadership identified with the ANC-SACP, returned home after many years of exile, and the organizations which grew up within the country independently. Finally, in opposition to the grim prospect of a new class of officials, intellectuals and politicians running post-apartheid South Africa from above — perhaps with an iron fist no less authoritarian than that of apartheid — it seeks to find a space for a radical populism committed to participatory democracy, workers control and political self-education. That is, civil society theory proposes a marriage of power descending from the top and power ascending from the bottom.

*Civil society bound: the old politics*

The rise of civil society theory in South Africa represents an attempt to build a 'third road' in opposition to the two tendencies which have dominated opposition politics in the post-war era: liberalism and radicalism. The strategy of liberalism may be characterised in shorthand as that of 'reform from above' and the strategy of radicalism as that of 'revolution from without'.

Liberalism dominated opposition politics in South Africa up to the end of the 1950s, though there was scarcely a moment when it was not contested by radical forces. With the turn to armed struggle in 1960 and the ANC-SACP's adoption of 'revolutionary nationalism', liberalism was relegated to a subordinate position within the opposition movement as a whole. With the legalisation of the ANC-SACP in the 1990s and the latter's own turn toward negotiations, liberalism has again become the paramount form of liberation politics.

Theoretically, liberalism associates the ideal state with the free play of market forces, while the racially-defined and status-ridden nature of apartheid appears at odds with the rational market requirements of capital. However much capital comes to terms with apartheid, the antagonism between the free movement of capital and the racial superstructure is presented as a basic contradiction. The central proposition of liberalism is that the development of capital in South Africa has been accompanied by a growing need for reform as the irrationality of apartheid becomes more acute, and a growing capacity for reform as both capital and labour accumulate social power. Capital and labour are seen as having a common interest in the reform of apartheid, whatever other conflicts divide them.

The political strategy associated with liberalism is to cement an alliance around a consensual programme of reform from above and self-restraint from below. The candidates for such an alliance are usually conceived as the progressive wing of capital, organised labour and moderate politicians (liberal and nationalist) mediating between them<sup>3</sup>. In its relation to the social movements of civil society, its core strategy is to restrain them within parameters set by reform from above, avoiding or suppressing actions likely to alienate the consensual alliance it solicits.

Radicalism first arose in the 1960s as a response to the perceived failures of liberalism and provided the dominant form of oppositional theory until the end of

the 1980s. Manifested especially in its armed struggle, it presented itself as a break from the limitations of non-violence, legalism and reformism. Within its own language the transition from liberalism to radicalism was presented as a progression from protest to challenge, reform to revolution<sup>4</sup>. Radicalism however, had one thing in common with the doctrine it superseded: it also subsumed the associations of civil society to its own centralised project, in its case that of revolutionary overthrow of the state. It neglected or opposed attempts to reform apartheid from below or to develop the popular organizations of civil society except insofar as they fed into the armed struggle. It was not just a revolutionary strategy but a revolutionism which counterposed itself to civil society. Confounding the general question of reform with the top-down model of reform pursued in the previous period, radicals ended up rejecting all partial reforms, all particular campaigns, all negotiations with the state, all participation in official bodies. At its worst it celebrated violence as the sole instrument of liberation<sup>5</sup>.

The three basic propositions put forward by radicals are that black society is deprived of all means of social self-defence, that no reform is possible or real, and that it is only possible to overthrow the system as a whole through violent revolution from below. It explains apartheid as a specific form of capitalist state based on the super-exploitation of black labour and incorporation of white labour. There have been different emphases on what was crucial to the formation of apartheid — labour control, the decline of the reserves, the threat posed by the black urban proletariat, the local conditions of exploitation in South Africa, etc. — but in all cases the functional requirements of capital are seen as the major determinant of the state.

The common element of radicals and liberals lies in their top-down, etatist approach to theory and politics. For all the limitations of liberalism in the 1950s, the strategy with which it was identified was not without success. It was at the head of a popular movement of trade unions, community groups, women's organizations and other associations of civil society which rocked the state at the end of the decade. By contrast, the radical strategy led to the virtual collapse of civil society and failed to make any significant inroad into the state. These contrasting results indicate deep-seated weaknesses in radical theory and practice. Indeed it was formalised as a theory by exiled intellectuals in the mid-1970s, when the new unions inside South Africa revealed in practice that black society was not deprived of all means of social self-defence, that real reform was possible and that the overthrow of the system as a whole through violent revolution was not the only way. In this regard, radical intellectuals lagged behind the actuality of the labour movement<sup>6</sup>.

#### *Civil society unbound: the new unions*

On the margins of South African political life, there has been a long history of criticism of etatist politics in both liberal and radical forms, but such criticism was weakened by the defeat of the labour movement in the course of the

Second World War and the subsequent marginalisation of socialist ideas. In the 1970s, however, this critique began at last to acquire centrality with the emergence of the new unions. In the absence from South Africa of the exiled liberation movement, the new unions had a political significance which outstretched their organizational form as unions.

The new unions initiated a process which I have called the 'proletarian reformation' in South Africa<sup>7</sup>. There were three main elements: the self-organization of labour in industrial unions, the struggle for partial reforms in the workplace, and the demand for legal space in which to organise. The doctrine of 'reform from below' took the form of collective struggles over wages, conditions, managerial recognition of unions and the abolition of racism in the workplace. The self-organization of workers and the struggle for reform in the workplace were inseparable twins which lay at the heart of the unions' challenge to the prevailing orthodoxies of radicalism.

The doctrine of 'non-racialism' challenged the prevailing culture of nationalism, offering to workers an experience of combining as workers regardless of 'race' or 'nation', affirming independence from the idea of apartheid and from the nationalism which defined the liberation movement. Commitment to non-racialism was coupled with an internationalism based on links with foreign trade unions and solidarity with foreign workers. The doctrine of 'workers control' broke with the formalistic notion of representation which characterised the old forms of liberation organization, emphasising instead forms of participatory democracy, accountability of delegates to members, open debate, the formation and education of cadres of union activists, visible structures of responsibility between members and leaders, and most of all the principle that workers should participate not only in action but in decision-making processes over how to act. It also stretched over into its more usual meaning of workers controlling their own productive enterprises.

The unions sought to overcome the divorce of economics and politics, by relating demands for a workplace 'rule of law' to normal issues of pay and conditions; and emphasising the importance of trade union independence in the wider struggle for a non-racial democracy. They were schools of democratic socialism, not only through their formal education programmes but in their mode of being.

The significance of the new unions thus lay not only in the reconstruction of black trade unionism but in their attempt to reconstruct the political culture of the liberation movement. The unspoken premise was that there could be no revolution without reformation: without prior reformation, liberation from apartheid could not lead to the constitution of freedom. This perspective was shared by some who saw reformation as the limit of their ambitions and others who saw it as a stepping stone for revolutionising society as a whole.

The limits of the new approach stemmed from the trade union form in which the new unions conceived of politics. Thus the idea of workers control introduced fresh political air into anti-apartheid politics but concealed the existence of an or-

ganised leadership in the unions with its own more or less worked out programme of action. The 'trade union left' was an identifiable political grouping with its own ideas and dominated the unions roughly up to the formation of Cosatu in 1985, when it was increasingly challenged by the SACP-ANC alliance<sup>8</sup>. The trade union left upheld an image of unions as a pure form of working class organisation, while other forms of association — political parties, community groups, social movements — appeared as inherently cross-class, populist, middle class dominated, etc. It perceived this distinction as an essential feature of unions, not as a contingent result of their political development. The privileged status thus afforded to trade unions as a working class organization obscured the political role of the radical intelligentsia within them; conversely the devaluation of other associations of civil society obscured the political battle for their leadership.

The idea of 'workers control' was a vehicle through which the trade union left reduced substantive questions of socialist politics to procedural questions of democracy or respect for trade union independence alone. It was associated with the notion that the unions were the representative voice of the working class as a whole. This possessed the potentiality for inversion of radical democracy to the silencing of opposition when criticism was excluded on the ground that it had not gone through the right channels or appropriate structures. A principle which started life as a means of democratic accountability could — and sometimes did — become a mechanism which could be turned against the trade union left itself.<sup>9</sup>

The associated idea of 'trade union independence' also offered a breath of fresh political air in South Africa. The unions showed that real independence from the state could not be secured formally through affirmations of non-cooperation, boycott, isolation, etc but through the growth of working class organization. The strength of this doctrine of independence was revealed, for example, in the response of the new unions to state-initiated labour reforms, where they successfully broke from the frame of radicalism by adapting constructively to new conditions of legality without succumbing to a corporatist legalism.<sup>10</sup>

The trade union left failed, however, to extend the methods it employed in its own sphere into the political; a key reason being that it had its own version of two-stage theory: first build the unions, only later address political issues concerning the state. In the context of these real limitations, the trade union left was subjected to two criticisms in the mid-1980s, which had superficial similarities but were in fact opposed. The socialist critique of economism was directed at the restriction of socialist ideas to the trade union sphere and called for their extension into politics. In the mid-1980s a critique of this kind emerged from within and without the trade union movement, claiming that unions were the embryo of a wider workers' movement and calling for a Workers Charter or even a Workers Party<sup>11</sup>. Protagonists of this critique, however, were politically weak and there was considerable ambiguity over what was distinctive about working class politics, conceptions stretching from revolutionary vanguardism of a Leninist variety to a Gorzian perspective of 'structural reform'.<sup>12</sup>

The nationalist critique of economism took off from the opposite premise. It was against the extension of independent working class organization into politics, which was defined as the terrain of the national liberation movement, and against trade union independence in the economic sphere from the national liberation movement. It put forward the idea of 'political unionism' which in this context meant union recognition of the political leadership of the SACP-ANC. This critique of 'economism' was sometimes dressed in the cloth of Marx or Lenin but in actuality reserved the political to the national liberation movement and the economic to a trade union movement led by the national liberation movement.

The practical outcome of this argument was a new marriage between the nationalist politicians and the old trade union left in the latter half of the 1980s, based on the idea that in the political battle for democracy the working class had no specific interests of its own. A formal ANC-SACP-Cosatu alliance was effected: members of the trade union left were recruited into the Communist Party or drawn into its 'orbit'; those who continued to oppose the SACP-ANC were isolated; the Freedom Charter was adopted by Cosatu and most of its affiliates in an atmosphere of pressure; the idea of a Workers Charter as the emblem of an independent left was assimilated into the Freedom Charter; the idea of a Workers Party was abandoned or transferred to the Communist Party. The disintegration of the trade union left as a distinctive and independent political entity and the incorporation of its core elements into the national liberation movement was at first presented as a new marriage of nationalism and socialism and has now been reformulated as the twin-track strategy of civil society theory<sup>13</sup>.

✕ In its prime the trade union left shifted the focus of opposition from counterproductive and often rhetorical direct challenges to the apartheid state to nurturing autonomous social institutions which seemingly posed no immediate threat to the state. This 'antipolitics' (as it was sometimes called in east Europe) was from the start political, not just because apartheid politicised autonomous black organization but because it was conceived by the trade union left as the first stage of a larger transformation of society<sup>14</sup>. The achievements of 'social movement unionism' were outstanding; not least, it brought hundreds of thousands of black workers into public life. When the big questions of political power were thrust upon the trade union movement in the 1980s, however, the strategy faltered. The choice before the unions was presented as either 'political' or 'non-political' unionism: between joining the ANC-SACP in its bid for power or focussing on unions independently of politics. This was really no choice at all. The unions were drawn into the political frame of national liberation movement.

#### *The antinomies of civil society*

If there was a decade of 'civil society' in South Africa, it was the 1980s. In every corner of social life popular organization evolved: not just trade unions but all manner of youth, student, women's, community, cultural and ethnic as-

sociation. There was a veritable feast of civic activity with initiatives arising in every corner. The unity of this multifarious movement was for the most part expressed in the form of the ANC, whose goal in this regard was to contain the disparate elements of civil society within the ambit of the national liberation movement through mediating institutions (like the United Democratic Front and the Mass Democratic Movement) as well as through symbols of unity like the Freedom Charter and the release of Nelson Mandela. To those elements of 'civil society' which remained outside its ambit, the ANC could be in turn repressive and inviting; for those within, support for the general struggle of the ANC was to transcend local or sectional concerns.

Seething beneath the surface of civil society, however, strong disintegrative forces were at work. Social and political frustrations were expressed in the distorted forms of communal and gangster violence: elders versus comrades, Zulu versus Xhosa, warlord versus warlord. Many of the associations of civil society were not remotely 'civil'; thus 'popular justice' mainly degenerated into ghastly brutality that was neither popular nor just; and political argument sometimes degenerated into endless blood-feuds. Even within the most 'civil' of societies, that of the trade unions, the pursuit of factional aims was marred by all manner of intimidation.

The violence between competing interests that was the mark of civil society was not resolved by ANC leadership. The political leadership of the liberation movement espoused a militant form of radicalism which stressed the hollowness of all state reforms, the impermissibility of participation in official bodies and the centrality of mass insurrection. Its slogans at home were extremely radical: non-collaboration with the state, render South Africa ungovernable, no education before liberation, people's power, insurrection, etc. The rhetoric of 'dual power', however, served to aggravate the violence of civil society, as one grouping proclaimed its authority in the face of another, ANC-SACP approval was given to those who flew its flag, 'enemies of the people' were targeted, and 'unity' was turned into a demand for political conformity.

The central problem was that the unity of the 'people' tended to be conceived in terms of an abstract and monolithic 'general will', discounting the actual and divergent empirical wills of its constituent members. The 'people' tended to be conceived as singular interest or will which was embodied in a single movement. Rival claimants often shared the same conception of the 'people', as did those like the Communist Party which claimed to represent the 'working class' as a singular whole. In this rule of abstractions, there was a tendency for 'unity' to be imposed from above in a fashion that was destined to increase fragmentation on the ground. The unitary idea of the 'people' — whether in the field of justice, education or community — was turned to the service of factional political ends, so that any claimant to the title of representative of the people became an object of suspicion and possible overthrow.<sup>15</sup>

The state could exploit and aggravate these divisions because civil society was unable to create its own cohesion under the banner of the ANC-SACP. For many

who suffered from the violence of the times, these events resulted in a Hobbesian desire for peace and security at any cost. The state encouraged political violence between the conflicting interests of civil society and justified itself as the only force capable of containing this violence through police measures. The unleashing of civil society became the ground, paradoxically, for re-legitimising the state.

There is no doubt that the state was shaken by the uprising of the 1980s and the international sanctions which accompanied it and that this was the background to the change of political climate which occurred at the end of the decade. It is a myth, however, to interpret the reform of apartheid as a clearcut victory for democratic forces, for the apartheid state survived and quelled the uprising of the mid-1980s and the reform programme was initiated by Botha at the beginning of the 1980s. At this time almost all members of the liberation movement derided reform in radical style as a fiction or tactical device, ruling out the possibility that it expressed a real crisis of apartheid capitalism and imperative for restructuring.

In the event, the reform programme — which acted as a trigger to the urban revolt of the 1980s and revealed the political vulnerability of apartheid — was revived when the De Klerk government picked up the mantle of reform at the end of the decade on the basis of a far-reaching corporatist strategy. Instead of looking to a black bourgeoisie independent of the ANC-SACP, the state now looked its enemy in the face. Reform was delivered from the top down: in the form of the legalisation of liberation organizations, the release of political prisoners, the return of political exiles, the offer of negotiations for a new constitution, the deracialisation of the National Party, the repeal of most apartheid laws. This was corporatism with a vengeance.

The liberation movement naturally shifted strategy in accordance with these new conditions, but the thrust of its new direction was a return to liberalism. The ANC-SACP abandoned armed struggle and insurrection; it began to operate openly inside the country; most of its leaders and activists returned from exile; it entered negotiations with the government; the international sanctions campaign was eased; there was a 'discourse shift' from that of isolating and destroying apartheid to reconstruction. Some militants resisted this turn, reluctant to surrender the heroic spirit of the 1980s, but the main body of the leadership declared its eagerness to join the search for consensus<sup>16</sup>. It was not just that a change of strategy occurred in line with a change of circumstances, but rather that the change of circumstances dominated the change of strategy. In this shift from radicalism everything was turned on its head: insurrection into 'elite-pacting', armed struggle into legalism, non-collaboration into social partnership. Having for decades characterised the Nationalist government as absolute evil, the main body of the ANC-SACP swung into the politics of corporatism.

The new turn was legitimated through a revamped theory of nationalism. The ANC-SACP moved to a form of an all-embracing pan-South African nationalism<sup>17</sup>, overcoming differences imposed by apartheid, uniting the people around a common national identity, turning away from primordial racial

categories, looking instead to a new South Africa of the future. If apartheid divides, the new nationalism unites; if apartheid looks to the past, South African nationalism looks ahead to a nation yet to be formed. Reconciliation was the key.

The defects of nationalism, however, are not easily overcome. The emancipation of South African society from its racist political shell may be accompanied by the growth of South African patriotism, but it is not a 'natural' outcome. South African nationalism raises its own spectres. What relations will the new nation seek with surrounding, weaker nations, and where will it draw its borders with Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland? Who would decide? How will South Africa respond to democratic opposition movements in neighbouring states with which 'national interest' requires friendly relations? How will it distinguish between local and foreign workers? Most important of all, how will the new nation respond to the social demands of its own poor when these are seen to conflict with the 'national interest'? None of these questions are easily answered, but the promotion of nationalism suggests the prioritising of 'national interest' over other concerns<sup>18</sup>.

With regard to the unions, Pan-South African nationalism functions to assimilate the non-racialism of the unions, originally associated with labour internationalism, into the corporatist framework and to draw the unions toward a commitment to the new South African national interest. For their part most of the trade union left reject the response of far-left political groupings, to the extent that the latter refuse negotiations and remain wedded to the old radical political vocabulary<sup>19</sup>. On the other hand, it has also been warning against 'elite-pacting', the turning of popular forces into 'spectators' of the negotiating process and the subordination of social issues<sup>20</sup>. In short, it seeks a middle road.

Civil society theory functions here as an alternative to the radicalism of the far-left and the liberalism of 'elite-pacters'. The main problem is that the theorisation of civil society comes at a time when the initiative for political reform is with the government, negotiations are being centralised among the leading parties, many of the community and youth organizations established in the 1980s have lost their base, the trade union left has lost its distinct identity, most unions are hitched to the wagon of ANC-SACP politics, and internecine violence is rife in the towns and rural areas. Thus the positing of civil society as a normative theory of what 'ought to be' comes in the wake of its actual historical decline (though the unions continue to grow in numbers and organization). Civil society theory is a call for the associations of civil society to affirm their independence and raise their specific interests in the context of negotiations taking place between the main political parties over their heads. The problem is to turn this 'ought' into more than an idea, if it is not to become a mask for the etatisation of politics.

### *Civil society and party politics*

There are many aspects to the building of civil society — economic, legal, constitutional, political — but I want to focus on one in my conclusion: the party

political question. It concerns the form of mediation between civil society and the state. With the worldwide decline of the 'one-party state' model in Eastern Europe and many parts of Africa, most sections of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa are now committed in principle to party political pluralism. But there are major problems of transition.

The suppression of the party-system by apartheid, for the vast majority of the population, has been long and deep in South Africa, perhaps adding another significance to the concept of 'apartheid' as 'a-party'. The impact of this repression on the opposition movement has been contradictory. On the one hand, the struggle for a multi-party parliamentary democracy has been a major thread of liberation culture. On the other, it has been internalised in the political consciousness of the liberation movement itself: if the myth of racial identity is used by the apartheid state to justify its suppression of the party system, the substitution of national movements for political parties does not transcend this suppression.

The critique of party politics became a central theme of the South African opposition after the war. In debates between the ANC and its rivals, each side accused the other of being a political party in disguise, sowing class divisions rather than national unity, dictating political ideas from above rather than expressing national consciousness from below. The party-form was identified with divisiveness, exclusion and rigidity; the congress or movement-form with unity, fluidity and inclusion. Consequently real distinctions between leaders and the people were obscured by the apparent identity of the national movement with the 'nation'. The idea of the 'people' was turned into a formalism whose singular consciousness was homogenised by the movement which spoke in its name; the plurality of particular opinions was negated by the homogenous notion of 'public opinion'; the policy choices of one party or movement were dressed up as the 'general will' of the people or nation as a whole; and definite political perspectives were presented in the language of rational necessity. Political argument was restricted to competing claims to represent the oppressed masses, the ground was prepared for painting political opponents as 'enemies of the people', and political differences were displaced onto the irrational terrain of 'friend and foe'<sup>21</sup>. The Communist Party's own formal self-conception of being the sole, legitimate representative of the working class accentuated these tendencies.

Important democratic practices were submerged inside the liberation movement with its rejection of party politics. The idea of a party is that it represents no more than a part of the whole rather than the will of the people as a whole; its programme and practices are open to rational criticism by other parties rather than being elevated as the *vox populi* or *vox rationis*; its policies can be revised or scrapped according to its decision-making structures rather than being set in stone as eternal principles; individuals join or support a party as citizens and not by virtue of ascribed national or racial status.

In 'normal' bourgeois society the fundamental problem of representation is that political parties are sucked into the state, undergoing a process of statification

which substitutes party political pluralism for popular participation in public life. This process, however, is never unconflictual or completed so long as the party system remains intact; however arrogant and hierarchical the party bosses become, to remain a party is to leave open some space for dissent from below. Thus the history of socialist political parties has been one of constant battle for their destatification and their accountability to their members.

To be sure, the media-driven statification of political parties — their trivialisation which removes them from the real needs and concerns of individuals — has led generations of critics to reject the party system as a whole in favour of some 'higher' form of political organization. This critique has been given all number of political expressions, left and right, and is the impulse which has led many marxists into the cul-de-sac of 'anti-parliamentarism'. In a review of my book with Dennis Davis, *Beyond Apartheid*, the SACP theoretician Jeremy Cronin posed this objection to our emphasis on political parties:

The regime hopes to present the South African situation as a relatively 'normalised' bourgeois democracy with a variety of political parties. Competing for the centre in this conception would be an ANC that hoists a flag called 'social democracy' and the NP and friends would hoist another flag called 'christian democracy'. Out on the fringes would be a series of miniscule 'ideological' parties to the left and right. But the democratisation of our society requires a broad national democratic front and not a charade of a west European democracy.<sup>22</sup>

I do not wish to defend 'the charade of west European democracy' against critics of its limited democratic content, but it is absurd to identify party political pluralism in South Africa with conservatism. On the contrary, is it not more likely that the right will do its utmost to restrict any such development and impose a more authoritarian solution? In dismay at the prospect of a 'normalised' christian versus social democrat divide, Cronin loses sight of the real threat. He endorses a 'national democratic front' but if this means a government of 'national unity' in which the ANC-SACP shared power with the Nationalist Party, such an outcome would be much worse than the 'western' party system which Cronin still spurns.

Between civil society and the state there has to be some general form of mediation, for if each particular interest of civil society lobbies the state on behalf of its own private concerns — no matter how justified — then judgement of their claims and determination of priorities between them are left in the hands of one body alone, the state executive. The state executive is in principle the representation of the state interest in civil society; the party system is in principle the representation of the private interests of civil society in the state. If the state executive is not to be the sole mediation between state and civil society, then the party system of representation is essential.

The primary illusion of civil society theory lies in its idealisation of civil society itself as an independent realm of benevolence. However, bourgeois civil society is the realm of violence, self-interest, inequality and exploitation; none of the as-

sociations of civil society, not even the most democratic unions, are immune to these forces nor to their 'colonisation' by the state. Political parties for all their attendant dangers are the crucial means by which the particular interests of civil society are taken beyond themselves and lifted to the general interests of the state. For if this 'universalisation of the particular' is not effected from below, it will necessarily be imposed from above.

The problem of the transition from national liberation movements to party political pluralism is urgent. In substance the long-delayed development of a democratic socialist party (or parties) in South Africa remains as crucial as ever; in form the emancipation of party politics, breathing the fresh air of public life and open debate, remains an essential part of the wider emancipation of politics from race-thinking. The weakness of civil society theory is that it offers an unstable compromise, the limitations of which have been brought to public view in eastern Europe. To my mind, therefore, the question of mediation between state and civil society is crucial if liberation from apartheid is also to establish a constitution of liberty in South Africa<sup>23</sup>.

## References

### Abbreviations used in these notes

NLR	New Left Review
ROAPE	Review of African Political Economy
SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
WIP	Work in Progress

1. Monty Narsoo (1991), 'Civil society: a contested terrain', *WIP*, 76 July; Moses Mayekiso (1990), 'Building civil society', *South African Review*, 6, 1. For the civil society perspective in the context of Stalinism see Andrew Arato (1981), 'Civil society against the state: Poland 1980-81', *Telos*, 47.
2. Albie Sachs (1991), 'Affirmative action in South Africa', The Alistair Berkley Memorial Lecture. See also ANC NEC (1989), *Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa*, IDASA.
3. See Merl Lipton (1985), *Capitalism and Apartheid*, Gower, and J Butler et al (eds)(1988), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa*, David Philip.
4. Harold Wolpe (1984), 'Strategic Issues in the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa', *Review*, 8, 2.
5. Joe Slovo (1977), 'No Middle Road', in B Davidson et al, *Southern Africa: The New Politics of Revolution*, Penguin.
6. The state has been characterised by many radicals as a 'colonialism of a special type', or as a form of 'racial capitalism', 'fascism' or 'Bonapartism'. The concept of 'totalitarianism' was rarely used, perhaps because it would have drawn attention to parallels between apartheid and the regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR, or because apartheid never entirely eradicated civil society.
7. I first came across the term 'proletarian reformation' in Leon Trotsky (1974), *Writings 1934-35*, Pathfinder.
8. For discussions of the trade union left see Johann Maree (ed), *Independent Trade Unions in South Africa*, Raven; S Friedman (1987), *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions*, Raven; Jeremy Baskin (1991), *Striking Back: A History of COSATU*, Verso.
9. See Jan Theron (1990), 'Workers control and democracy: the case of FAWU' and FAWU's response, *SALB*, 15, 3, Sept.
10. Contributions to this debate include: Phil Bonner (1983), 'Independent trade unionism in SA after Wiehahn', *SALB*, 8, 4; Bob Fine et al (1981), 'Trade unions and the state', *Capital and Class*, 15,

- and SALB 7, 1, 81; Fink Haysom (1981), 'In search of concessions: reply to Fine et al', SALB, (1981) 7, 3; Bob Fine (1982), 'Trade unions and the state once more', SALB, 8, 1.
11. See Joe Foster (1982), 'The Workers' Struggle: Where does FOSATU Stand?', ROAPE, 24.
  12. For left versions of radicalism see Alex Callinicos (1988), *South Africa Between Reform and Revolution*, London; Adam Habib (1991), 'The SACP's Restructuring of Communist Theory: A Shift to the Right', *Transformation*, 14; David Kitson (1991), 'Is the SACP really Communist?', WIP, 73 March/April; Alex Callinicos (1990), 'Can South Africa be Reformed?', *International Socialism*, 46. For the structural reform perspective see John Saul (1991), 'South Africa: Between "Barbarism" and "Structural Reform"', NLR, 186, and for the idea of a mass rather than vanguard party of labour see Workers Liberty (1985), *Breaking the Chains*, London. See also Pete Hudson (1986), 'The Freedom Charter and the Theory of the National Democratic Revolution', *Transformation*, 1; P Hudson (1988), 'Images of the Future and Strategies in the Present: The Freedom Charter and the South African Left', in P Frankel et al (eds), *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa*, Croom Helm; and Daryl Glaser, 'Democracy, Socialism and the Future', WIP.
  13. John Saul (1986) pointed to 'the advance in the wedding of popular democracy and socialist occupations' represented by the Cosatu-ANC-SACP alliance. 'South Africa: The question of strategy', NLR, 160, Nov-Dec. See also Alec Erwin (1985), 'The question of unity in the struggle', SALB, 11, 1, Sept. and J Cronin (1986), 'National Democratic Struggle and the Question of Transformation', *Transformation*, 2, for early formulations.
  14. For the use of the term 'antipolitics' in the Polish opposition, see David Ost (1990), *Solidarity and the Politics of Antipolitics*, Temple.
  15. See especially Daryl Glaser (1991), 'Discourses of Democracy in the South African Left' in R Cohen and H Goulbourne, *Democracy and Socialism in Africa*, pp 93-121.
  16. These are discussed in WIP (1990), 69, September, and reviewed in Yunus Carrim (1990), 'From banned liberation movement to legal political party: challenges before the ANC', unpub.
  17. Pan-South African nationalism was discussed in the late 1950s by Kenneth Hendrikse in *The Citizen*, but suffered paradoxically from anti-semitism. It was theorised much more richly by Neville Alexander (1979), *One Azania, One Nation*, Zed, but never fully emancipated from black consciousness. In a watered down form, it appeared in Joe Slovo (1989), 'The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution', *International Viewpoints*, Jan. The idea of a 'government of national unity' is being plugged hard by the centre: see H Gilliom and L Schlemmer (1989), *From Apartheid to Nation-Building*, OUP.
  18. Most left discussions around issues of national growth and social redistribution seek to reconcile these goals. See Alec Erwin (1990), 'South Africa's Post-Apartheid Economy: Planning for Prosperity', SALB, 14, 66; Alec Erwin (1990), 'Comment' on the Harare Recommendations on Post-Apartheid Economic Policy', *Transformation*, 12; Stephen Gelb (1990), 'Democratising Economic Growth', *ibid*; and ANC/Cosatu (1991), 'The economy beyond apartheid', *New Nation*, June; Lawrence Harris (1990), 'Building the Mixed Economy', paper presented to the ANC's Department of Economics and Planning workshop, Harare, April-May.
  19. See fn 18 and also 'A Year in the Life of the Left', WIP (1991), 72, Jan-Feb.
  20. Reports from the December 1991 Conference of the SACP suggest a Stalinist fight-back. For the profession of a new-found anti-Stalinism, see Joe Slovo (1990), 'Has Socialism Failed?', *African Communist*, 121; for the limits of current anti-Stalinism in the SACP see Pallo Jordan (1990), 'The crisis of conscience in the SACP', *Transformation*, 11. For an overview see Heribert Adam (1991), 'Transition to democracy: South Africa and Eastern Europe', *Telos* (1990) 85, Fall.
  21. See Carl Schmitt (1976), *The Concept of the Political*, Rutgers. This was Schmitt's irrational characterisation of 'the political' in the 1930s prior to his joining the Nazi Party.
  22. WIP (1991), 76, p 49.
  23. The phrase 'constitutio libertatis' is from Hannah Arendt (1988), *On Revolution*, Penguin, ch 4

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# THE MISTRIAL OF WINNIE MANDELA: A PROBLEM OF JUSTICE

Paul Trewhela

Find what occurred at Linz,  
What huge imago made  
A psychopathic god.

W H Auden, '1st September 1939'

The worst sound I ever heard was a woman screaming as she was being carried to the gallows to be hanged

It was in Pretoria Central Prison in 1966. Thank goodness I didn't see her. We were all locked up, standard procedure when they hanged people, but no-one could not hear her as we lay in our separate cells. Later we were told she was carried to the gallows strapped into a stretcher. She screamed in terror all the way. We heard her as they crossed the big hall with her, going into B Wing, where they kept the condemned men. At the end of B Wing, away from the hall, was the gallows.

It was terrible when men were hanged, always in batches, and every few weeks, but this was worse: the loneliness, that appallingly purposive public journey, the indignity, carried by men like a carpet, rolled up, almost like her own dead self in a coffin, except she was entirely alive and knew exactly what they were going to do. Her last act of humanity was this terrified protest at what was being done to her. I don't think anyone who heard that screaming can forget it. That poor woman, whatever she did, or did not do, has been dead now all this time, but her screaming is still there in the mind.<sup>1</sup>

This memory comes back, and chills the blood, in thinking of the life and trial — now, more likely, trials — of Nomzamo Winnie Mandela, one of the first black social worker in South Africa and wife of Nelson Mandela, then a prisoner on Robben Island, about whom we sang songs in Local Prison: *Shosholozza Mandela*, and *Mandela uyeza, unamandla* — Mandela is coming, he has strength. The fixed certainties of that period are now dissolved. The rope hanging over Mandela's head in the Rivonia Trial, a matter of tenacity and defiance in 1964, transforms itself now into the abstract judicial possibility of a rope hanging over the head of his wife, then a symbol of courage and now a symbol of another kind.

Thinking of these two women, the dead woman carried screaming through the prison and the living one, the summation of this terrible intervening quarter century is that there must be an end to bloody vengeance in South Africa; but there must be equal justice. No more revenge killings, no more hanging, burning, stabbing, shooting and flogging of people, but no special exemptions either for some before the law, whether the murdering policeman and military intelligence agent

or the self-proclaimed angel of death in the People's Cause. The pain-soaked old South Africa, so much the 'new South Africa,' must be set behind. We are far from being there.

### *A Chronicle of Current Events*

These thoughts rise to the surface with each further revelation about the crazed cycle of violence centring on Mrs Mandela's household in the late 1980s, following the defeat of the mass township revolt of 1984-86: a defeat inflicted, through hundreds of dead, by concentrated military and police violence. Given the present slaughter of scores of people every week, culminating in the massacre at Boipatong, the epic levels of homelessness and unemployment, the grim reaper of drought extending across the whole sub-continent, it might be thought that the matter of Mrs Mandela deserves merely a shrug of the shoulders, as a piece of trivia to titillate the media. That would be to mistake its emblematic importance: for an understanding of the past, and for clearing a way through the present to a more sane and humane future.

In April when fresh revelations broke over her head, the following happened: her husband announced his separation from her, she announced her resignation as head of social welfare in the ANC, she gave political direction at a house in Sharpeville where eight people had been massacred the night before, a white police captain was sentenced to hang for state-organised mass killings at Trust Feed in central Natal in 1988, and five white MPs — elected to represent the Democratic Party in the tri-cameral parliament — announced they were joining the ANC. Then, as Mrs Mandela prepared to represent the ANC on a May Day platform in Port Elizabeth, the inner city of Los Angeles exploded in a fire storm on the other side of the world, to the media comparison: Beverly Hills and LA South Central, Johannesburg and Soweto. With South Africa a universal standard of measurement by which to judge the United States, still less can the once-regarded First Lady of South Africa simply be passed over.<sup>2</sup>

She was sentenced in May last year to six years in prison for kidnapping and abducting four youths to her house in Soweto in December 1988, one of whom, Stompie Moeketsi Seipei, was later murdered. Her housekeeper, Mrs Xoliswa Falati, and her driver, Mr John Morgan, were convicted and sentenced alongside her. She was acquitted of having assaulted the youths, including Seipei, the judge accepting her alibi that she was 300 miles away at Brandfort in the Orange Free State on the day of Seipei's death (30 December). Falati and Morgan corroborated her alibi. A co-accused who had participated in the assaults, Katiza Cebekhulu, a youth of the same age as some of the victims, was not available to give evidence as he absconded early in the trial and disappeared. One of the four youths who had been kidnapped and assaulted, Gabriel Pelo Mekgwe, was also unable to give evidence because he too disappeared, after having been seen leaving a house in

Soweto in the company of ANC men. Despite her conviction and sentence, Mrs Mandela — on bail pending an appeal, apparently postponed indefinitely — was very warmly received by delegates at the ANC conference in Durban the following July. She was elected there to the National Executive Committee by a large plurality (and elected again, unopposed, this year, after resigning her welfare post, to the Transvaal Women's League of the ANC).

By the time of the July conference of the ANC last year, Cebekhulu and Mekgwe had both turned up in Zambia, effectively prisoners of the ANC. They remained in Zambia with the connivance of the one-party government of Kenneth Kaunda (then in its last months before being voted out of office in the first multi-party elections in Zambia in a quarter of a century), despite or rather because of their centrality to the judicial process concerning Mrs Mandela in Johannesburg. Cebekhulu was held in prison by the Zambian government, without trial, at the ANC's behest, even though he had broken no law in Zambia (except perhaps as a piece of luggage being conveyed over the frontier by the ANC). Mekgwe's situation was not much different. He seems to have been held prisoner in Zambia by the ANC itself, with permission of the state. The ANC has since admitted that Mekgwe (who has since returned to South Africa) was abducted to Zambia by its 'Special Projects Department', a euphemism for its loathed security department, responsible for many murders in exile. The ANC wishes people to believe that this was the error of an individual, acting without official authorisation.

As contender for government in South Africa, the ANC thus colluded with the Zambian state in the matter of Cebekhulu to thwart the judicial process in a criminal trial involving an international political celebrity. The legal process in Zambia and South Africa, as well as in Mozambique and Angola, where Cebekhulu was conveyed en route to Zambia, was systematically debauched by the ANC in its own political interest. The affair was all the more sinister as Cebekhulu was arrested and jailed in Zambia on the day after an interview with him was published in the *Zambia Daily Mail* on 14 May last year, in which he revealed how the ANC had removed him from South Africa after the beginning of the trial to protect Mrs Mandela. He later gave an interview to Zambia's *Weekly Post* from prison, in which he stated that Winnie Mandela had personally promised him 'everything — a car, a house, money and education' in exchange for his disappearance, but that these promises had not materialised. (*Independent*, 30 August 1991)

In a three-hour interview in Johannesburg on 5 October 1990, before his disappearance, Cebekhulu had told John Carlin of the London *Independent* 'he had witnessed terrible beatings that Mrs Mandela gave the four young men, Stompie in particular.' In another interview from Zambia Central Prison he said that

the truth did not come out during Mrs Mandela's trial and he would reveal everything he knows about the death of Stompie after his release. (*Star*, 28 August 1991)

Cebekhulu was not an unknown figure in the drama. Two days after inauguration of the new president, Mr Frederick Chiluba, Cebekhulu was visited on 4

November by the president himself, together with a British Conservative MP, Mrs Emma Nicholson — presumably an emissary of the the Foreign Office. Yet despite his central role as the missing co-accused in Mrs Mandela's trial and despite fruitless efforts to secure asylum for him outside of Africa, he remained incarcerated in Lusaka Central Prison. The office of the new president has stated that there are now no political prisoners in Zambia.<sup>3</sup>

In 1988 Cebekhulu had given evidence in court in South Africa (never acted on by the police or the public prosecutor) implicating Mrs Mandela in the planned murder of two young men — a charge repeated at first hand in an interview on BBC Radio Four.<sup>4</sup> He has expressed his willingness to be returned to South Africa, provided his safety there could be assured. Britain and the United States are among three countries believed to have refused him asylum. A whole collection of states thus combined to pervert the course of justice in the matter of Cebekhulu, not least the South African state, under conditions of remarkable discretion (if not actual obstruction of justice) by the Conservative government in Britain.

Cebekhulu remained in limbo, imprisoned without trial in Zambia in the interest of southern African *Realpolitik*, when Mrs Mandela's alibi was blown from another direction. Her co-accused, Mrs Falati, fearing for her life at the hands of her former patron (according to her own account), and allegedly indignant that she had refused to pay the costs of her appeal, confessed to the press that she had committed perjury to shield Mrs Mandela. Mrs Mandela had in fact been at her home in Soweto at the time of Seipei's death, and had indeed assaulted him, she stated. The London *Sunday Times* reported that Falati had told ANC intelligence officers that Mrs Mandela had also initiated the murder of a Soweto doctor, Dr Abubaker Asvat, who had been brought to her house to tend to the dying Seipei. (5 April 1992) Asvat, she suggested, had been murdered as a potential witness. Falati's retraction of support for the crucial alibi was rapidly followed by that of her co-accused, Mrs Mandela's driver, John Morgan.

A substantial basis thus emerged for a retrial, with or without Cebekhulu, who had himself apparently taken part in the assault on Seipei, perhaps under duress. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported in the US that while in prison in Lusaka, Cebekhulu had told a lawyer acting on its behalf that 'Mrs Mandela ordered Dr Asvat's death because he could have given evidence of her part in Stompie's killing.' (*Guardian*, 6 April) In his statement to the South African police as quoted in the *Weekly Mail* of 15 April, Cebekhulu had directly contradicted Mrs Mandela, saying that Asvat had 'investigated Stompie' shortly after the assaults. The same paper reported that one of two men sentenced to hang for Asvat's murder — supposedly in a robbery attempt — had made a statement to police that Mrs Mandela had paid R20,000 for Asvat's murder, but that the statement had never been brought before the court. If true, this would confirm an extraordinary degree of state negligence in the prosecution of Mrs Mandela — a reluctance to proceed indicating a fixed, and probably Machiavellian, design: even complicity. (The second convicted murderer produced a contrary account.) It also became clear that Dr

Asvat was in terror in the *final two days of his life, after being visited by a new patient, Mrs Mandela's hit-man, Jerry Richardson.*

### *Separate Accounts*

Faced with this plethora of potential witnesses, Nelson Mandela announced his separation from his wife. Under extreme pressure from the ANC, Mrs Mandela shortly afterwards announced her resignation as the ANC's head of social welfare (but not from the NEC, or other posts). According to press reports, Nelson Mandela had by this time convinced himself that his wife was enjoying a sexual relationship with a much younger man, which had continued after his release from prison. He nevertheless continued to profess not only love for his wife but also his faith in her innocence (and the venality of the media).

Here Mandela continued the cover-up organised by the ANC over a very long time. Only his own 'direct orders' from prison, transmitted through his lawyer, Ismail Ayob, had in fact secured the release of two surviving young men from Mrs Mandela's house on 16 January 1989, after Seipei's death. (*Guardian*, 18 April) As a lawyer, if not as a husband, he had been apprised for more than three years of the real state of his wife's supposed innocence on the charge of kidnapping. It then appeared that a grouping of ANC stalwarts — formed under the umbrella of the Winnie Mandela Crisis Committee, and including the secretary of the South African Council of Churches, the Rev Frank Chikane, the current ANC secretary general and trade union leader, Cyril Ramaphosa, and a nun since elected to the ANC national executive, Sister Bernard Ncube — had known all along about Mrs Mandela's doings. They too had kept silent, preferring to try to control her erratic behaviour through covert representations: to no avail. An internal ANC report — suppressed by the ANC over the following three years — showed that the Crisis Committee suspected Mrs Mandela's involvement in Seipei's death from the outset. The report, sent to the then ANC president Oliver Tambo in Lusaka, made it clear 'they had evidence Stompie had died as a result of the assaults at the Mandela house.' (*Guardian*, 18 April) Tambo and the exile leadership kept quiet.

The picture emerged of leaders of the former United Democratic Front and of the ANC in exile frantically attempting to hold together a rapidly disintegrating icon, more concerned with public perceptions of the Mandela image (and of the ANC) than the lives of Mrs Mandela's victims. This spectacle could not inspire confidence, whether in the integrity of ANC leaders or their ability to confront the nature of their organisation. Nor could there be confidence in the personal attempt by Nelson Mandela to silence a newspaper in the interest of his wife. This was the *Sowetan*, one of whose editors, Sam Mabe, was shot dead in mysterious circumstances in Soweto two years ago. It seems likely that the London *Sunday Times* was referring to Mabe when it reported Mrs Falati as saying that Winnie

Mandela had 'ordered the murders of several people, including a black journalist who was investigating her'. (5 April)

On the eve of publication of the offending revelations from Mrs Falati, Nelson Mandela personally urged the *Sowetan* to suppress the story on the spurious grounds of 'black solidarity'. It was only after the newspaper's refusal to be silenced, even by Mandela himself, and its publication of the offending article alongside the London *Sunday Times*, that he announced his separation from his wife, while continuing to proclaim her innocence.

The murky sub-text to the affair indicates that the whole past of the ANC requires accounting. Ranged alongside Mandela at his strangely public and corporative announcement of what is entirely a private affair (his personal relation to his wife) were two men at the most senior level of the ANC in exile: Tambo, who had kept quiet about Mrs Mandela, and the former secretary general, Alfred Nzo. These men had presided over the system of prison camps imposed by the ANC over its own members in practically every African country in which it had a substantial presence during the three decades of the exile. Mandela's effort to silence the press was consistent with the strangling grip of the ANC security department over public discussion of its affairs in exile, and the permanent menace directed against journalists in South Africa — especially black journalists — if they seek to publish anything unflattering to the ANC.<sup>5</sup>

His announcement of his separation from his wife involved once again a confusion of public and private. This was a private matter. It required no public appearance from Mr Mandela. A public repudiation of the conduct for which his wife had been convicted was, however, the minimum expected of a public figure perceived to represent a future system of impartial justice and the interests of the victims of official violence in this most brutal of societies. This was not forthcoming. The mother of Stompie Seipei could have little confidence in his judgement or resolve as the most illustrious representative of the future party of government. It is not a good omen.

### *Walking the Plank*

Winnie Mandela had to go because she was a loose cannon on deck the ship of state.<sup>6</sup> There was no saying whom she might hole next. She was personally a metaphor for an environment not suitable for business, which requires orderly, predictable conditions of public conduct and decision-making for its long term investment decisions. Who could be sure if, in the future, a delegation from the ANC leader's wife might not arrive at company headquarters or, worse still, at the private residences of the directors, with a request for a contribution to this or that deserving charity, to be supervised by Mrs Mandela herself?<sup>7</sup> Or that an incautious remark at a soiree in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg might not result the next morning in a summons to an interview with the ANC Special Projects Department? The Mandela United Football

Club, and its founder/director, looked under these conditions suspiciously like the embryo of a future Praetorian Guard, with its hands on the keys (and the coffers) of the kingdom. Images of the Empress Messalina, or Poppaea, flitted across the literary memories of the more classically trained members of the foreign diplomatic corps, and also of the home grown business elite reared in classics in the South African seminaries of Bishops, Michaelhouse, Hilton and St Johns.

Despite having been inducted into the South African chapter of bodies of good works such as the Soroptimists (a lady of the year in 1986, while members of Umkhonto assaulted the police with AK-47s during the rent boycott in Alexandra), despite her panegyric to the spirit of capitalism in her introduction to a book in the same spirit by Leon Louw and Frances Kendall published in 1986/87, despite rumours of business operations planned in collaboration with various international soldiers of fortune, leading the *Sun* newspaper in Britain to comment that 'nobody is sure' where the £300,000 to build the Mandela mansion in Orlando West had come from (14 April) — despite all this, the question persisted in the minds of the great and the good: who would shake her hand, were she to stand beside a future state president of South Africa? After her conviction in the kidnapping case, with the image of the murdered Stompie Seipei in everybody's mind, no quantity of water could wash out the damned spot.

Nelson Mandela was called upon to sacrifice his wife, and thus himself, for reasons of state. He fell on his sword, the victim of his love for her. This was a fairy tale with no happy ending. The decision in 1961 of a handful of courageous individuals to embark on violent measures against the state continues to reap its harvest of pain. In this bitter end to romance, the South African past with its ogres and demons continues to lay heavy hand on the living: in the personal life, no less than in society.<sup>8</sup>

A metaphor for wilful political violence (by 'the oppressed', rather than 'the oppressor'), the whims of Mrs Mandela threatened to spill out of bounds beyond the mean streets of Soweto into acts of state. As a moment in transition from near-insurrectionary conditions, directed towards overthrowal of the state, to the purely bourgeois reconstruction of the state — as molten lava gells to rock — such wilful assumption of the prerogatives of state could not be allowed to continue. The state, not Comrade Nomzamo (as her husband described her in announcing their separation), or any other 'comrade', or group of comrades, is to order execution of those it deems fit to execute. Her private assumption of the public power was too public by far, and stood athwart the ABC of ordinary civil polity, in which a public rationale and an impersonal process of decision-making is required for public acts. In her personal acts she was too public, and in her public acts too personal. Her perceived administration of violence to private ends was too naked.

Such arbitrary behaviour, reminiscent of a condition of *bellum omnium contra omnes* (war of all against all), must call forth the assertion of power by that true Leviathan, the state. The call 'Amandla Ngawethu' (power is ours), on her lips and

on the lips of ANC supporters, was after all merely that, a call: a wish, a phrase. A phrase indicative of a lack of power on the part of the powerless, not its substance. No whites, and certainly no capital, suffered because of the deprivations of Mrs Mandela and her retinue, but many blacks did. In Soweto, the biggest black population centre in the country, her predation had an effect not unlike the planned result of the state-organized slaughter of township residents and commuters since 1990. It served to rob people of a rational and justified self-confidence in their own powers to create a better future for themselves, and substituted instead the enervating paralysis of waiting upon the decision of the Great Individual, or the state, or other agencies external to the people themselves. Its effect was complementary, not contrary, to the tendency of the state and also of capitalism itself, with its displacement from people to things. The personal violence of Mrs Mandela served to reinforce in the population of Soweto, and throughout the country, the principle of the actual powerlessness of black people in South Africa. It added further degradation to their subjection to the white state.

The heroic conduct of the 1960s, followed by the black consciousness thinking of the 1970s and the children's revolt of 1976 helped to develop among blacks on a very wide scale a confidence in themselves unlike anything that existed before, but the consequence of Mrs Mandela in the 1980s was shame and anger, especially in Soweto. It was deeply humiliating for the people of Soweto for her to carry out her deeds in the name of South Africa's black majority, and to be internationally lauded while enforcing a rule of silence on her doorstep.

The lesson she sought to instill was already all too well learned in this society. Don't step out of line. Don't make waves. Don't put your head above the parapet. Don't annoy the powers that be. Don't express your privately held opinions. Everything that a thinker like Biko sought to develop among blacks at the level of consciousness — in terms of personal courage, above all — was shoved down their throats, and black people were made to eat their own previous opinion of themselves. This was a phenomenon of reaction, not of revolution; of a society that had lost its way, and was blindly inflicting wounds upon itself. Mrs Mandela added humiliation to powerlessness by making the powerless celebrate and dance to her personal arrogation of their own right to represent themselves. The greater the previous sacrifice by the society, and the more dearly bought its achievements, the greater the shame. A colossal selfishness and desire for self-aggrandizement — psychological as well as in the acquisition of property — here decked itself out in the stolen clothes of concern for the welfare of the people, anger at the suffering of 'the masses', desire for retribution against 'the enemy', etc. That was the substance of Mrs Mandela's radicalism, which entranced practically all the international left and the liberal media pundits.

### *Forms of Religious Experience*

At the time of Nelson Mandela's announcement of their separation she was: head of the department of social welfare in the ANC (in a society lacking the

most elementary provision of welfare), member of the NEC, member of the executive of the ANC's Johannesburg region and member of the executive of one of its Soweto branches. (*Independent*, 15 April) She had been placed in office as head of social welfare by her husband's decree, despite the existence of an elected incumbent. This is to say that through Mrs Mandela the members of the ANC and the people of Soweto had been politically disenfranchised in a society in which blacks had no franchise anyway. For the greatest concentration of black people in the industrial heartland of the continent to be rendered so abject politically as to have their mandate delegated to such a person is a cardinal fact of politics, both within South Africa and internationally. It states that the black population of South Africa remains far from being able to overturn the historically formed economic, social and political power structure in the country, that the ANC takes part in the present constitutional negotiations from a position of defeat, and that (with appropriate modification) most if not all the old ills will continue to flourish.

As with construction of the Lenin mausoleum in Moscow in the 1920s and all such quasi-religious acts of faith, the process by which first Nelson Mandela and then his wife were made into icons is itself an index of a substantial lack of real authority on the part of those people reposing their will in such alienated, external, distant shapes. It is bad enough when human authority is placed in a thing, a fetish. But when the process of icon-making fixes itself on a person it tends either to conceive a monster ('Stalin is the Lenin of today') or to destroy the human individual lying hidden under all that lustre (as with Presley); or both. With Mrs Mandela it is both, transformed into a monster through international adulation of the iconic lustre around her husband and herself, and also destroyed by it.<sup>9</sup>

There is no comfort here for opponents of the inhuman character of the old South Africa, that the heroine of the 'new South Africa' should carry so starkly the birthmarks of the old. Looking ahead to South Africa's first all-race elections, it is not surprising that a far-sighted representative of the old regime should have stated: 'She is the National Party's biggest asset. Just imagine the election posters we can print: Vote ANC and get Winnie as a bonus'. (*Independent*, 14 April)

This cynic, an anonymous government minister, neglects to add that her misfortune was to share the features of his own brutality. It was precisely for this reason that the state — the great terrorist — permitted her a free hand to terrorise the people of Soweto, until it became expedient to call her to account. An unnamed member of the ANC executive has said privately, as reported in the *Independent*, of 14 April: 'She's a millstone round our necks. In a national election she could sink us'. He adds:

Just think how much dirt the government's intelligence services must have in their possession, waiting until the moment is politically ripe to make it public. The ANC, through its president, therefore dumped Mrs Mandela for much the same reason and with even greater calculation than the Conservative Party in Britain dumped Mrs Thatcher. It would be wrong, however, to think

that Mrs Mandela (or Mrs Thatcher) represents only herself, or that this was a purely personal crime, in some way exceptional or an aberration. When 'the movement' looks at Mrs Mandela, it reflects upon itself, as in a mirror. A whole history of fatty accumulation in the arteries brought about this attack at the heart. The murders of the Mandela United Football Club happened because for many, murder was normal; the pathological had ceased to be a matter for pathology. If primary responsibility for provoking these murders belongs to the state through its routine carnage, then it was the responsibility of 'the movement' for permitting it to happen, for not having erected stronger moral barriers to provocation. There is another, more frightening dimension. Despite the double disenfranchisement of the people of Soweto through the autocracy of Mrs Mandela, she nevertheless remains an authentic political representative of a very large — perhaps growing — constituency: the vast numbers of largely unemployed, poorly educated, hopeless youth. Excluded from access to whatever goods may be up for grabs for the developing black middle class, their rage and frustration may easily find its voice in her.

In another sense, too, these were not merely personal crimes. Especially in the Natal Midlands, where state carnage through official killers as well as hit-squads from Inkatha has lasted longest and taken the heaviest toll, it might be thought that the supposed radicalism of Mrs Mandela was the appropriate antidote to the violence of the state. She was not loathe to suggest this herself. The day after her appearance in Sharpeville after the murder of eight ANC members in a squatter camp, she appeared at Richmond in Natal, one of the greatest killing fields in the country over the previous 15 months. There she revived the old rhetoric of combat, such a dismal failure in its actual results over the past 30 years. Calling on President FW de Klerk to resign, she stated that the government's 'insincerity and dishonesty in dealing with the issue of violence' was going to have to 'force us to go back to original positions and question the whole concept of negotiations'. (*Independent*, 28 April) One does not have to dispute the insincerity and dishonesty of the de Klerk government in order to question the phrase in the mouth of Mrs Mandela. Yet it was her standpoint that was confirmed by the breakdown of negotiations, brought about principally through state intransigence and the activities of its murder machine.

### *The Word and the Deed*

No one could say that those who have been victims of the most appalling terror, organised and protected by the state, have not the right to defend themselves, with arms, against murderers. The problem lies in the openly stalinist ethos associated with Harry Gwala, the SACP/ANC leader at the command centre of ANC combat formations responsible for assassination of Inkatha warlords and others, such as Winnington Sabelo, shot dead in his shop in Umhlangeni in Natal in February. (*Weekly Mail*, 14 February) Gwala has boasted of his

role in the organisation of violence against the state-sponsored chauvinists of Inkatha. (*Independent*, 18 April) He has called for an alliance such as between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt to 'impose peace,' presumably with himself in the role of Stalin. With considerable qualities of resolution and defiance, Gwala was a principle educator of scores of ANC members in Robben Island prison from the 1960s to the 1980s during his own 20 years of imprisonment. There he did not endear himself to members of the Pan Africanist Congress by threatening to cut off the heads of their leaders 'when the ANC came to power'. (personal communication) A former teacher, he was the mentor of the former chairman of the SACP in exile, Moses Mabhida, also a Zulu-speaker and one of a handful of top ANC officials with unrestricted access to Quatro prison camp in Angola, where critical members of the ANC were subject to the refinements of the gulag.

Natal was for many years the region of South Africa most sympathetic to the unreconstructed stalinism of Joseph Stalin himself, continuing through the 1960s and afterwards in a warm sympathy for maoism, the doctrine of people's war and the liberating air of the Great Cultural Revolution. Paradoxically, its leading theorist for many years, Rowley Arenstein, concluded his political trajectory as adviser to Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi of Inkatha, while the memory of Joseph Stalin as war-leader burned most fiercely among active service units engaged in the war of brothers against Inkatha. Still more paradoxically, the literary advocacy of this war to the knife against Inkatha in mid-Natal fell to the trotskysts of the Marxist Workers Tendency (MWT), nominally loyal to the ANC although long since expelled from it. What the MWT said through its news organ, *Inqaba yabaSebenzi*, the followers of Gwala did.

From the side of Gwala there is offered the prospect of a military conquest of Inkatha, followed by the chimera of a military conquest of the state, resulting in the installation still more metaphysically of a guerrilla regime on the model perhaps of Castro in Cuba or even Mao in China. There is not the slightest justification for a single drop of blood to fall with the aim of bringing such a regime into being, whether in one country (South Africa) or one region (mid-Natal). The political, moral and social bankruptcy of such politics is now demonstrated across continents. The armed agenda of Harry Gwala in Natal, to which the figure of Mrs Mandela in Soweto and her football club might have appeared as the crowning glory, is no alternative to the passive accommodation to the state by her husband and other leading lights in the ANC.<sup>10</sup> In relation to Inkatha, the ideal of a guerrilla conquest of power held by Gwala and his followers serves as a self-justifying symbiosis, in which the violence of Inkatha and the violence of the comrades of the ANC is mutually self-sustaining, mutually complementary and mutually reproductive. The possibility of a more cultured society, with a more humane civic consciousness, is not compatible with the politics of kill and be killed.

This was starkly visible in the all-white referendum in March, poised between President de Klerk — supported by big capital and the National Intelligence Ser-

vice, formerly Bureau of State Security (BOSS) — and the fascist bands of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging, supported constitutionally by the Conservative Party and former president PW Botha and unconstitutionally by the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) and the state structure of violence behind Inkatha.<sup>11</sup> The ANC's stand in favour of de Klerk in this referendum was proof of its own passivity, its failure to initiate a mass campaign throughout the society in favour of civil rights in order to isolate the terrorists of the right. The ANC made no substantial effort to establish the illegality of the organisers of mass murder and individual assassination, even in terms of the existing constitution, independently of de Klerk's regime. This has altered now and yet remains the same.

The long history which nurtured the psychopathology of Mrs Mandela and the triumphalism of Mr Gwala has a great deal to answer for. The alternative posed to the violence of the state has largely been a false alternative. For this reason also there can be no holding back on the need to apply to Mrs Mandela the same standard of civic justice as to anyone else. The exceptionalism of Mrs Mandela serves to justify the exceptionalism of the really great organiser of death in South Africa, the DMI. One monstrosity helps preserve and shield the other. From this standpoint, let alone the standpoint of his duty as a public representative, Mr Mandela's disclaimer in announcing separation from his wife was not enough.

Firstly, a single standard of justice throughout the society should be seen to prevail; second, a beginning must be made to bind up the nation's wounds. In the Roman republic, it was the fate of the consul Junius Brutus, as chief magistrate, to condemn his own son to the axe as if he were a stranger. There is no hiding the tragic in the conflict of the private and the public person in the lives of Nelson and Winnie Mandela, a tragedy as rich in its dimensions as in Aeschylus, or Shakespeare. Yet Roman virtue was called for, after 27 years of Roman endurance in prison, from an elderly man as human as anyone. The tragic figure of Nelson Mandela, cast in stoic posture, could provide guidance to this agonised society not by a statement of personal separation from his wife (suggesting squalid pressure from politicians in a smoke-filled room) but by a courageous public statement of the norms of civic virtue. So far this has not come to pass.

### *A Culture of Lies*

This requires also that an end be made to the culture of lies, integral to the ANC. Over the decades of illegality, the truth was what the ANC wished or declared it to be. What was convenient was true. A standard of perceived political expediency governed the organisation, resulting in shameful silence and the still more shameful leaking of truth concerning the murder of Seipei and the reign of the football club. The ANC operated a strict moral relativism, deriving in part from the Soviet Union in the 1930s, according to which that is true today is which suits the organisation today. If the interests, or strategy, or policies of the organisation shift, then historical truth shifts also. In its toing and froing over the circumstances of the murders of Seipei and Dr Asvat, the

ANC succeeded only in further losing moral credibility it had once acquired. Habits of mind instilled over decades in exile, in the underground and in prison proved unadaptable to universal scrutiny.

Under these circumstances, the discomfort inflicted on the ANC and Mandela himself by his wife's doings might indicate, perhaps, the first stirring of a new criterion of truth in South African politics. This society cannot afford a blatant bending of the law to suit individuals. Only evil consequences can follow a failure of justice in such a matter.<sup>12</sup> As a minimum, Katiza Cebekhulu must be assured full safety to return to South Africa to present his evidence. If his safety requires it, he must then be given asylum abroad. (The same applies to Mekgwe). The truth about the murders of Seipei, Asvat and others must become accessible to all, in open court, and first of all to their families. There must be complete transparency concerning the past activities of the DMI, the NIS, the South African police, Inkatha, Mrs Mandela and the ANC security department in exile as well as within the country; and also a full, unexpurgated audit of the activities of 'the comrades'.<sup>13</sup> Blood vengeance against the criminal must go, with an end to legalised, formal murder by the state within its prisons, as well as the flogging of prisoners in prison yards. Overhaul and reform of the whole prison system must begin immediately. Equal justice must be done, and seen to be done, with favour towards none. Such public cleaning of the stables would be the beginning of therapy in this deeply traumatised society, albeit only a beginning.

Under these circumstances, the way in which the trial of Mrs Mandela proceeds will indicate whether or not South Africa can begin to settle the ghost of the scream in Pretoria Central Prison. It is a society that desperately needs to temper the cycle described by Auden, a cycle all the more terrible because the poet's words address the generation of the Mandela United Football Club:

*I and the public know  
What all schoolchildren learn,  
Those to whom evil is done  
Do evil in return.*

## Notes

1. Hugh Lewin has written about the same experience in his book, *Bandiet*.
2. The US film maker, Spike Lee, director of the film *Do the Right Thing* (which portrays racist police and judiciary in the US) observed after the events in Los Angeles: 'The whole world has witnessed the way blacks are treated in this country, the so-called leader of the free world. The very next day, a South African jury convicted a racist cop who was sentenced to death for having murdered blacks'. (*Guardian*, 8 May)  
As events in South Africa reflect back into the US and elsewhere, the fate of Winnie Mandela in South Africa extends way beyond its boundaries.
3. Letter from Mr Vincent Malambo, Special Assistant to the President, Political and Legal Affairs, to Mr Bill McElroy, London, 16 April 1992.
4. Trehwela, Paul (1991), 'The Trial of Winnie Mandela'. *Searchlight South Africa*, No 7, July.

- 5.. This is documented in *Mau-mauling the Media: New Censorship for the New South Africa*, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1991, following a conference in Johannesburg in 1990. In an executive summary, the SAIRR states that black journalists estimate 'roughly 60 per cent of what was happening in the country did not reach the press', the result of 'an unofficial form of censorship, perpetrated by political activists, that was largely unrecognised and unreported' [p.v]. Thami Mazwai and Aggrey Klaaste of the *Sowetan* — colleagues of the journalist Sam Mabe, later shot dead in his car in Soweto — took a prominent part in the conference.
6. Through discussions in the official Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa), the ANC is deeply engaged in the process of reconstruction of the state, in the same way as defeated Boer generals were drawn into state affairs through the constitutional convention that issued in the Act of Union in 1910.
7. The ANC is reported to be 'conducting an inquiry into the disappearance of R400,000 (£80,000) from its social welfare budget.' (*Independent*, 19 April)
- 8.. Similar pressure in the working of South African political life on the most intimate of personal relationships can be found in the fiction of Gillian Slovo, whose mother, Ruth First, was blown up in Maputo by agents of South African state security in 1982. In *Ties of Blood* (Michael Joseph, 1989), as in the film *A World Apart*, it is the strained relation of daughter to mother that comes most vividly to life, not the rendering of South African social and political conditions. In the breakdown between the public and the personal life, there were many emotional orphans created in the past 30 years. Scorched marriages, scarred children were a commonplace of 'the struggle'. The therapeutic need apparent in a work like *Ties of Blood* — a kind of exorcism, or catharsis — goes way beyond its author alone. The whole society stands in need of emotional therapy, in which buried pain may rise to consciousness, become visible, and so be dealt with openly. This is so for the tens of thousands of victims of torture and brutality first of all.
- 9.. What do schools in the US do with a book like *Winnie Mandela: The Soul of South Africa*, written by Michael Meltzer and published for children by Viking Kestrel in 1986, in its series 'Women of Our Time'? Do they now remove it surreptitiously from their shelves? But is this 'politically correct'? It would be worth reflecting on the soul of Mr Meltzer.
10. In 1988, in her heyday, Mrs Mandela appeared as guest speaker at the ML Sultan Technikon in Durban to launch a biography of her husband written by Professor Fatima Meer of the University of Natal. While she was speaking, members of her football club exhibited their skills by beating up students protesting at the autocratic tenor of Professor Meer. (The journalist and academic RW Johnson was present, and reported the incident). A leader of the UDF and personal friend of the Mandela family, Mrs Meer played a major part in November 1988 in opposing the proposed — and aborted — visit to South Africa of Salman Rushdie to speak on censorship. (*Searchlight South Africa*, No 3, July 1989) In February 1990 she hosted the media presentation on one of the British television channels of the release of Nelson Mandela.
11. The *eminence grise* of the NIS, its former chief, Dr Niel Barnard, has given interviews leading to a series of articles in the South African press which reveal long-term planning and preparation by the NIS for the release of Nelson Mandela. (*Star*, 26 February 1992) The NIS went into eclipse at the end of the 1970s when the regime of PW Botha, representing the military terror of the DMI, replaced the police regime of BJ Vorster, representing the NIS (or BOSS). The atrocities of the DMI were reported in Trewhela, 'Within the Secret State: The Directorate of Military Intelligence', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 8 (January 1992). At the time of writing I was not aware that shortly after taking office as state president in 1989, de Klerk disbanded the State Security Council through which the DMI had controlled cabinet business (and the whole country) and replaced it with a new security structure, headed by the NIS. This is analysed by Laurie Nathan and Mark Phillips, 'Security Reforms. The Pen and the Sword', *Indicator SA*, Vol 8, No 4 (Spring 1991), and in *SouthScan*, Vol 6, No 40 (25 October 1991). Barnard's relations with his former master, Botha, who appointed him to head the NIS, have descended into acrimony. The secret history of the state in South Africa is one of wrangling for supremacy by these murderous bureaucratic saurians, much as in the former Soviet Union. Like its prototype, the KGB, which supported Andropov and Gorbachev, the NIS backed 'reform' — the DMI, reaction. This major change in structure and in orientation within the state prepared conditions for prosecution of individual DMI and police operatives responsible for massacres.

12. Chinua Achebe has written of the evil consequences of the 'failure of the state to fulfil its primary obligation to its citizens,' at the time of the killing of Igbo civilians in northern Nigeria in 1966 (the federal government sat by and let it happen). The result was the attempted secession of Eastern Nigeria, and a war costing two million lives. In warning words for southern Africa, Achebe says he finds it 'difficult to forgive Nigeria and my countrymen and women for the political nonchalance and cruelty that unleashed upon us these terrible events which set us back a whole generation...' ('Words of Anxious Love,' *Guardian*, 7 May)
13. As recently as January, there was a report that two members of the ANC security department (known as 'Ricky' and 'Mao') had approached a member of the fascist AWB who was also a former member of Special Forces — a sub-department of the DMI — to carry out a 'hit' on a former senior Umkhonto commander who had been captured and 'turned' by the regime in the mid-1980s. The ANC admitted that Patrick Lekota, their new head of intelligence, had paid the AWB man R12,000 for information regarding alleged weapons purchases by the far right. It was alleged that this man had been offered a further R50,000 (£10,000) to carry out the assassination, which did not take place. (*Independent*, 18 January) It would be interesting to know where the ANC obtains the money for this kind of dealing.

### Sources

Britain: *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Sun*, *Sunday Times*. South Africa: *Indicator*, *SouthScan*, *Star*, *Weekly Mail*.

April-June 1992

## CRITIQUE

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## RUTH SCHECHTER: FRIEND TO OLIVE SCHREINER

Baruch Hirson

### *The Intellectual as Socialist*

In tracing the history of socialism in South Africa, historians have previously searched through the records of political group's, trade union organisations and the lives of leading left-wing politicians. The works based on these researches (or reminiscences) provide the bare bones of the history of the left in South Africa. What is missing is the study of the socialist intellectuals and their ideas in this political current, both for their contributions and for the problems introduced by an intelligentsia who saw so clearly the evils of colour discrimination but conceived only dimly its relation to class exploitation.

It is not always obvious where this study should begin or which subjects this investigation should cover. There seems to be no obvious thinker to whom the researcher can turn: few if any people equal in calibre to the leading socialist thinkers in Europe or the USA in the late 19th or early 20th century. Yet such men and women must have been present for the movement to have come into existence, gained ground and continued for almost a century. What appears in the histories, and this is at least partly correct, is that some of the ideas translated into socialist programmes came from immigrants at the turn of this century, bringing their ideas from eastern Europe or Britain. These were tested against local conditions and adjusted to meet perceived needs.

Other ideas, fed into the socialist movement by persons with no political affiliation, get bare mention or are overlooked. It is precisely to some such people, living in Cape Town in the 1920s and 1930s, that this paper is directed: to Olive Schreiner (who died in December 1920) and her closest disciple, Ruth Schechter Alexander; and to the Cape Town academics of the 1920s and 1930s. There is a continuum before the Second World War that links these people: their criticism of racism, opposition to imperialism and war, defence of minority rights, and their rationalism and socialism. Then the thread was broken and new ideas were fed into the socialist movement by a new generation.

The early luminaries and their traditions were forgotten in the events that followed the war. Their names were expunged from memory, their achievements, both academic and social, seemingly ignored by a new generation of political activists. And for those who still remember names like Benjamin Farrington, classicist and writer on science in antiquity; Lancelot Hogben, zoologist and populariser of scientific advancement; Frederick Bodmer, linguist and lecturer in German, it is not generally known that they lived in South Africa, lectured in Cape

Town, and participated actively in the cultural and literary life of the town. In writing about them I am aware of the difficulties involved in determining the influence they exercised, both on the general public and on socialist organizations. Many of the people involved stayed for a short period in that intellectual milieu and then went their separate ways. They tended to be isolated in academic circles and had only peripheral contact with political bodies. Their ideas, even when heard at learned societies, did not always appear relevant to the struggles being conducted in the country and, even when they impinged directly on political groups, the extent of their influence defies measurement. Nonetheless the potential impact of such people requires serious research. Of these none are more important than Ruth Schechter Alexander, whose name cannot be found in any of the annals of socialist history, whose essays are long forgotten and whose organization of a literary salon seems to be unrecorded.

### *Ruth Schechter: A Family Background*

When Ruth Schechter married Morris Alexander in 1907 at the age of 19, and went with him to South Africa, it is said that friends asked in sympathy 'what will she do in that outlandish place'. To this her father replied: 'perhaps she will see Olive Schreiner'. Solomon Schechter had read Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm* (published in 1883) and, according to a lecture given by Ruth in 1929, had been deeply impressed by the thoughts expressed by the author. It is not known whether he had also heard of Olive's defence of the Jews in a letter to the Social Democratic Federation of Cape Town in February 1905, in which she attacked the Russian state for encouraging the pogroms in which hundreds of Jews were injured or killed, and thousands of lives disrupted. Nor is it known if he heard of Olive's defence of the right of Jews to be in South Africa when she referred with approbation to the recognition of Yiddish as an European language, in an address in 1906. Without this Jews would have been denied entry to South Africa. Yet this might have been a vital bridge to her meeting with Ruth, because it was largely because of Morris Alexander's intervention that this legislation was passed in the Cape and Olive would have known of the centrality of his actions.

Ruth left the family home (then in New York), went to Cape Town and did meet Olive Schreiner. Indeed, Olive was a visitor at her house, and Ruth became her close friend and admirer. As a bonus, Ruth's parents and siblings, who visited South Africa in 1910, also met and enjoyed the friendship of this great writer.

Ruth Alexander, as she was now known, was a person of decided opinion and not easily persuaded by others. However, there is no doubt that Olive Schreiner was her guiding light throughout her adult life. Ruth's course was set by what she learned from her friend and some of the apparent contradictions in her life can be understood through an unravelling of the relationship between these two women. Ruth's family heritage shaped her earlier values, and these remained with her

throughout her life. Then, at the end of Olive Schreiner's life, Ruth met the lecturers at the University of Cape Town and her continued association with these men, throughout her residence in South Africa, reinforced her decisions on the path she would take.

Born on 1 May 1888 in London, Ruth was the daughter of one of most famous Jewish scholars of his time, Dr Solomon Schechter. Educated at school in Cambridge and New York, Ruth did not go to university but acquired a more intensive and deeply rooted education from her mother, who had been a teacher of young ladies in Germany and was an accomplished linguist, who had translated Zangwill's books into German and, according to Farrington, as her father's unofficial secretary. Ruth had also met scholars, students, artists and leading intellectuals at home. It was there that she 'acquired the delight in impersonal conversation about things of the mind, in the absence of which she found all society insipid and dull'.<sup>1</sup>

Dr Schechter was Reader in Talmudic at Cambridge University and then President of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. In Cambridge his circle of acquaintances and friends were drawn from the intelligentsia, whether Jewish or English, religious or agnostic.<sup>2</sup> In 1896 he was informed by two Presbyterian women that they had acquired fragments of old documents in Cairo. He found one of them to be from the long lost Hebrew version of the Apocryphal Book of Ben Sira. Funded by the Master of St John's College, Charles Taylor, he travelled to Cairo. There he entered the depository of sacred texts (the *genizah*) of the Ben Ezra Synagogue at Fostat (Old Cairo). Almost completely sealed off from the outside world and entered through a small aperture, the *genizah* contained a mass of fragments of books and documents dating from the 10th century. Schechter requested and was given the documents, and had them transported to Cambridge.

Writing about the treasure, Schechter said in his *Studies in Judaism*:

One can hardly realise the confusion in a genuine, old *genizah* until one has seen it. It is a battlefield of books, and the literary production of many centuries had their share in the battle, and their *dissecta membra* are now strewn over an area. Some of the belligerents have perished outright and are literally ground to dust in the terrible struggle for space, while others, as if overtaken by a general crush, are squeezed into big, unshapely lumps, which even with the aid of chemical appliances [in the 1890s] can no longer be separated without serious damage to their constituents...

In their present condition these lumps sometimes afford curiously suggestive combinations; as, for instance, when you find a piece of some rationalistic work, in which the very existence of either angels or devils is denied, clinging for its very life to an amulet in which these same beings (mainly the latter) are bound over to be on their good behaviour and not to interfere with Miss Jair's love for somebody. The development of the romance is obscured by the fact that the last lines of the amulet are mounted on some IOU or lease, and this in turn is squeezed between the sheets of an old moralist, who treats all atten-

tion to money affairs with scorn and indignation. Again, all these contradictory matters cleave tightly to some sheets from a very old Bible.

The genizah depository was accepted by the Senate of Cambridge University and housed at the library as the Taylor-Schechter collection. Schechter and his associates separated, cleaned and pressed, over 34,000 fragments of Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic literature, letters and catalogues concerning relations with Muslims and Christians, plagues, police and prisons, warfare and welfare.<sup>3</sup>

Ruth was reared in an atmosphere in which these fragments lay at the centre of her father's work. She absorbed the climate generated by the interest in these ancient documents and was deeply devoted to her father. Ruth's parents shaped her values and attitudes, her religious fervour and interest in Zionism, and the intellectual background that carried her through life. It could not have been otherwise: the family was imbued with the sensibility and culture of nineteenth century Europe and with a keen awareness of world events.

When Ruth was 12 years old she met Morris Alexander, then 23 years old. He had won a scholarship to Cambridge in 1899 to read law<sup>4</sup> and became a close friend of the family. There was a romantic, if precocious, attachment and after Alexander's return to South Africa they corresponded. Alexander's ardour grew and Ruth had adolescent fantasies about this scholar from Cape Town who, after his return to South Africa, fought for the right of entry of Jewish immigrants into the Cape colony. Intended immigrants were required by Cape legislation to be proficient in a European language, but Yiddish, written in Hebrew characters, was designated as Semitic. In 1906 Alexander, working through the newly formed Cape Jewish Board of Deputies (of which he was president) succeeded in persuading the Parliament that the language be recognized as 'European'. It was this event that was celebrated in 1906, when Olive Schreiner's address was read.

In June 1907, with the top Jewish dignitaries of New York in attendance, Morris Alexander claimed his bride. On their honeymoon the couple stopped in at the Zionist Congress in Europe, and after five months absence Alexander and his bride returned to Cape Town. By all accounts, including the letters that Ruth wrote, the marriage was a happy one. At least during the first period.<sup>5</sup> Ruth was the devout and observant wife of a man who had a career open to him as an Advocate and in 1908 he started his long parliamentary career as a member of the Cape Legislative Assembly. He led the Jewish Board of Deputies in Cape Town and that gave Ruth a preeminent position in the Jewish community and (if she had desired it) in the social set that rotated around the legal fraternity, the ruling parliamentary party and government officials.

Morris Alexander was an early liberal in the South African parliament and gave his personal support to Indian leaders who organized the early opposition to discrimination. His house was always open to visiting Indians, commencing with Gandhi. There was a room in which they could stay, and a succession of Indian dignitaries found a place to stay in a town which was otherwise closed to them.

His one major act of parliamentary rebellion came in 1920 when he stood in the election as an independent, demonstrating a dislike of the party of General Smuts. He was successful and sat alone in the House until 1929 when he lost his seat. He opposed discrimination on grounds of race, creed or colour, although he was never in the forefront of those that took such a stand; but he was one of the few in Parliament who opposed the removal of the Cape African vote in 1935–36. He also supported the cause of women's suffrage although he did not extend this, as did Ruth, to the demand that all women be enfranchised. In 1937, after Ruth had left him, he renewed his fight to have Yiddish recognised as a European language for immigrants to South Africa

Without wishing to belittle Alexander, evidence suggests that he stood as an independent in 1921 at the insistence of his wife. Ruth was impatient with General Smuts and his ruling South African Party. On 27 May 1917 she received a letter from John X Merriman, a leading Cape parliamentarian who, at one stage, had been expected to become the first South African Prime Minister. Merriman spoke of his 'despair' at Smuts's speech five days previously at the Savoy Hotel in London. It had been delivered, he wrote, to persuade a 'gullible public' that coming legislation 'whose effect — I will not say whose intention — is to reduce the native to the status of a barbarian serf', is founded on the "Bed rock of Xtian principles". [This] is indeed an evil omen'.<sup>6</sup>

This letter undoubtedly affected Ruth because, except for letters she received from Olive Schreiner, this was one of the few she kept. After this Ruth would have little cause to believe that General Smuts would allow any betterment in the conditions of the black population. Three years later, Alexander balked at the absorption of the Unionist Party (to which he had belonged) by the South African Party (led by Smuts). At the next parliamentary elections, in early 1921, Alexander stood as an independent. While he made an urgent visit to his ill brother in London, Ruth managed his constituency business with the assistance of Olive Schreiner.

Alexander was returned unopposed and on his return home he received a letter on board ship from Ruth. In it she said that many people had congratulated him on his stand against the two major parties, but she warned that he would have requests from both Smuts and Nationalist candidates for assistance in the election. He 'had to decide before the boat docked where he stood'. She continued:

My dear, my dear, my big man, you stand at the parting of the ways. Within the next two weeks you must become either in very truth the leader of a new Party with malice towards none, with charity towards all, with courage ever to fight for right as God gives us to see the right, or to sink to an unrecognized appendage of this group or that. Little fear enough for you of that. But if it is to be the other way for you, the way that I swear is yours if you choose to tread its lofty, difficult path, my darling, it is you who may yet bring peace to this torn country. Then you must be very careful, very certain in these first steps along the road.<sup>7</sup>

It seems superfluous to comment in 1992 on the illusory base of Ruth's political aspirations in 1921, particularly as women were marginal to parliamentary politics at the time. It was even more fanciful for Ruth to see in Morris the saviour of South Africa. Yet Olive Schreiner's involvement in this parliamentary campaign is not surprising. The close bond between the two women would account for Olive's participation in the constituency rooms, and her recognition of Morris's fight for the right of the Jews to enter South Africa would have clinched the matter.

This seems to have been the last occasion in which Ruth participated actively in her husband's political activities. There is no indication that she willingly took any further part in the public activities of her husband, even when propriety indicated that she should be present at an official function. It is not known when and on what issue the break came, but taking into account new friendships and new ideas that were forming, it is possible that she was alienated by Morris Alexander's speech in Parliament in April 1923, after the brutal suppression of the general strike on the Rand, in which he declared that 'Judaism was the very antithesis of Bolshevism'. But this is to jump ahead of the story and there are some crucial facts to recount.

Ruth was a young woman, just over 30 years of age, with three growing children. Alongside her interests in politics and cultural affairs, she also had to manage the home and see to the rearing of her children. They obviously brought happiness — but also much grief. Solly, the youngest, brought most joy. He read science at Cape Town and medicine in Britain. Then, married and divorced in London, he was close to his mother. He married again in Britain and migrated to Australia where he had three sons and appears to have severed relations with his parents. However, the two girls were the cause of great anxiety and, seemingly left to the care of Ruth, absorbed a large part of her time and energies. The eldest, Esther, was put into a mental home when still young and remained under care throughout her life: she is said to be there still. The younger daughter, Muriel or 'Bobbet', was also unstable and spent many years in mental homes or under psychiatric treatment. But I know little of the family life. There is a paucity of information, punctuated by flashes of information in letters, but not enough to flesh out their lives. Enid Alexander, second wife of Morris, barely mentions the children or their upbringing in the biography of her husband, and does not allude to the difficulties faced by the family in the treatment of the two girls.

There were also wider family involvements. Ruth's relationship with the Alexander family does not appear to have been close, but her friendship with her cousin, Tzipporah Schechter Genussow (daughter of Israel, fraternal twin of Solomon) who came to South Africa in 1913 appears to have been warm. Menachem Genussow was a friend of Morris Alexander, and when the former took greetings from Solomon Schechter to his brother Israel in Palestine he met and married Tziporrah. The Genussows were prominent South African Zionists (although they get bare mention in the histories of South African Zionism) but left for Palestine between 1925 and 1931.<sup>8</sup> Then, at some stage in the early 1920s, Ruth

moved away from Jewish and Zionist circles and contact between the two sections of the family fell away, as did so much else in Ruth's life.<sup>9</sup>

Ruth's politics diverged from that of her husband, and this was one of the factors that led to tension in the family. However it is unlikely that this led to Ruth's departure from South Africa in December 1933 (as claimed by Enid Alexander) and their divorce in August 1935. Other persons had entered her life long before the final split and they all contributed to the path she chose. What is of note here, before exploring her involvement with these people, is the fact that whatever she did would have been known by members of her community. Ruth could not hide behind anonymity, nor would she have wanted to, however discretely she acted. In this respect the Jewish community had the final word. Ruth, once so prominent in the Cape, so celebrated as the daughter of the great Solomon Schechter and starring in her own right in literary circles, does not appear (as far as I can discover) in any of the annals of Jewish society outside the biography of Morris Alexander. She became a non-person by virtue of what she did, and in the time-honoured tradition of the Jewish community, she was cast out when she left South Africa to marry an Irish communist and become a propagandist for the British-Soviet Unity Committees. The metamorphosis of this remarkable person, and the reason for her ostracism, need explanation.

### *The Meeting with Olive Schreiner*

Ruth Alexander sailed for the Cape to the refrain that perhaps she would meet Olive Schreiner, the South African novelist who had stirred the imagination of the British intelligentsia. I have yet to find accounts of the welcome that must have greeted their arrival in Cape Town in 1907 but it is hard to believe that the event was not celebrated. Morris was a prominent citizen and the stories of her father's work would have drawn attention to Ruth.

Solomon Schechter's prescience proved correct. Ruth met Olive Schreiner shortly after she arrived at the Cape and a strong bond connected them.<sup>10</sup> The meetings and correspondence that followed their introduction to each other were a dominant factor in Ruth's life through to Schreiner's death in December 1920. This was a meeting of like minds in which the warmth and wisdom of the older woman met with the spontaneity and growing understanding of the younger. Ruth visited Olive, confided in her, and in those days conveyed the happiness that she had found in her domestic affairs. They were friends socially and in their strong convictions. The letters that were exchanged indicate the empathy between the two women. Ruth responded warmly to the growing friendship. Verse that Ruth wrote was sent to Olive for her pleasure and hopefully for approval.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore Ruth introduced interesting persons to Olive — one of whom was undoubtedly Benjamin Farrington, a young lecturer in Latin, who arrived at the University of Cape Town in March 1920.<sup>12</sup>

In June 1914, writing from Nauheim in Germany, Olive alluded to anti-semitic remarks in the hotel in which she was staying. In response, wrote Olive, Will [Schreiner] had said that the most gifted person they had met in Cape Town was a Jewess. And in a marginal note, Olive added, 'meaning you'. Olive said that she had been delighted that Will should have made that statement; and that Ruth's mother and sister could not have rejoiced as much as she at seeing other people appreciating her. If that was not sufficient praise, Olive added that Ruth was still going to develop, intellectually and in other ways.

In a decade of contact the discourse covered a wide range of common interest, with Olive Schreiner guiding her young disciple. They discussed their families (including Ruth's growing family) and wrote about the problems faced by Gandhi's disciples, and their campaigns against the discriminatory laws that affected the Indians of South Africa. They condemned the ubiquitous anti-semitism and racism; and took similar positions on the women's suffrage movement.

On these problems the two women were in close accord, but it was usually Schreiner who took the lead in defining attitudes. They held in common an ideal of individual human rights. They condemned notions of racial or ethnic superiority and they opposed the use of force in national conflicts. They upheld the rights of individuals to impartial justice and in their attitudes felt no need to appeal to the sanctions of church or a god; and it was undoubtedly Olive who first introduced Ruth to agnosticism. Ruth's ultimate rejection of religion could only have led to further strains in her relations with her husband and the local Jewish community.

The values shaped in the 13 years of their acquaintance became the touchstone of everything Ruth did after Olive's death — although it led to an adulation on Ruth's part that seems excessive and *gauche*. Nonetheless, the essays she wrote on Olive must be understood against the close relationship that existed between the two women. Writing in November 1959, Farrington said:

In the twenty-two years I knew Ruth she lived in the continual awareness of Olive Schreiner's personality. This awareness lay at the deepest levels of her thought and feeling, and above all, was present when hard decisions had to be made. Nor was it dependent on Olive's books, but on their friendship. This needs to be remembered in estimating the importance of anything Ruth has said about Olive.<sup>13</sup>

Partly out of devotion but also from conviction, Ruth lectured and wrote on Olive Schreiner, her writings and her ideals. The principles that they had agreed determined Ruth's path. One course of action in particular can be traced to Olive's strong conviction that the overthrow of the Russian Tsar was a great liberating event and that the new republic that took its place had to be supported. For Schreiner this position was taken after the terrible pogroms at the turn of the century. Her attitude was strengthened by friends in Europe who denounced Russia as the font of reaction in Europe.

In a letter written to Ruth on 22 August 1915 Olive Schreiner said: 'I am so glad Russia is being beaten. It may mean freedom for Russia but I fear England and

France will come to the autocracy's help again as they did after the Japanese war and crush down the movement for freedom. If only Finland would rise and just proclaim herself freed'. On 12 May 1920 she commented: 'I am so glad that the working men here refused to load the ship with guns to fight the Russian republic...Through all the dark and agony of this time I see far, far off a better and brighter day dawning'. But the remark that Ruth remembered and quoted, first in her talk on 'Olive Schreiner' in 1929, and then in her last published article (and repeated in the Commemoration service at her burial in 1942), harked back on a visit to Olive in 1920.

Ruth reports that answering an urgent message for her to come unusually early one day, Schreiner said on the phone that 'something beautiful has happened that has made me very happy'. When they met, Olive exclaimed: 'Haven't you seen the papers! Didn't you see that Denikin [the 'White Russian' General] is out of Russia. Don't you see what it means!' Then, said Ruth, 'for an hour, with flashing eyes and in full tones she told me what it did mean — the lifting of the blockade, the ability of the Russians to get hold again of food and medicine and machinery, and to begin to get their house in order'.<sup>14</sup>

Olive was desperately ill and did not have long to live. She thought, as did many others at the time, that in the events in Russia she had caught a glimpse of the future. This she communicated to Ruth in that impressionable meeting in late 1920. That is only part of what she transmitted to her young friend. Ruth referred to aspects of their conversations in some of her lectures and reviews, but much that was not unrecorded can only be surmised. After Olive's death Ruth protested in print against publications of her friends work by Cronwright, Olive's husband. Relatives and intimates of Olive wrote to congratulate Ruth at the time. They are testimony to the high regard in which Ruth was held by Olive's friends. The letters are deposited in the South African Library.

#### *Enter Benjamin Farrington*

Ruth's formal scholastic career had ended in secondary school but the atmosphere at home, which was saturated with ideas and achievement through study, and her work for her father, had given her an appetite for learning that she never lost. Sometime in 1918 (if not earlier)<sup>15</sup> she made contact with the University of Cape Town — but the nature of this contact remains obscure. On 14 December 1918, Olive commented in a letter: 'I am so glad you are working at the University. I'm sure its so wise'. Then in a letter of 1 April 1919 she wrote: 'I hope it goes well with your studies'. Whether Ruth started on a degree or on some research project is unknown — but she had obviously made friends among members of the staff. According to a taped interview with Benjamin Farrington, one of Ruth's first friends was J S Marais the historian, then in the classics department. Marais introduced Ruth to Gerard Paul Lestrade who had just completed a masterate in classics, prior to his

studying ethnology abroad.<sup>16</sup> Ruth was to say in 1932, in a letter to Farrington, that Lestrade was more than a little bit in love with her.

In March 1920 Benjamin Farrington arrived from Ireland to join the university staff with an impressive reputation as a student of English literature, Greek and Latin. He was appointed lecturer in Latin, became senior lecturer in 1922 and then professor of Latin. Soon after he arrived in Cape Town he was introduced by Lestrade to Ruth and was, thereafter, a constant visitor at the Alexander home. He had been an assistant, teaching classics at Queen's University, Belfast, over the past four years and had been witness to the repression of the Irish uprising. Although he did not come from the Catholic community, he had joined Sinn Fein. The letters he received in Cape Town from friends and relatives through 1920 were filled with stories of the British troops – including the notorious Black and Tans – of shootings, imprisonments, and political turmoil. It seemed almost inevitable that he should start and publish *The Republic* for South African Irish readers for two years. But radical as he was in Irish affairs, he knew little about South Africa. After visiting Johannesburg in the summer vacation of 1920 he wrote home in the usual naïve colonial style, justifying segregation, the pass laws, separate trams, and so on.<sup>17</sup> Contact with Ruth led to a fresh look at the social issues in South Africa and he followed her lead. In this, as in so many other instances, the thread stretched back from her father, through Olive Schreiner and into the intellectual life of inter-war South Africa.

The marriage of minds between Ben and Ruth started shortly after they met. The romance between these two must have started shortly thereafter. Letters to Ben from members of his family in Ireland in 1920 indicate that he had written about Ruth often and warmly. He was already 29 years old and on several occasions he was asked how his 'Jewess' was. In one letter in 1920, from a widow about to marry his uncle, he was asked whether his relationship was Platonic (which the good lady did not hold by), or whether he went further. Ben undoubtedly ignored the question. Whatever occurred was discreet and might even have been innocent over many years. Ruth was a married woman aged 32 years with three children and, initially, a religious Jewess. She was furthermore the wife of a man who was prominent in Parliament and a leader of the Jewish community. Indiscretion would have placed great stress on family ties and on propriety.

There were internal tensions in Ruth's life, only some of which can be surmised – and this partly from her unpublished novel, *The Exiles*, which has autobiographical overtones. Whatever her problems at home in New York, they were as nothing compared with her reactions against her husband's family, with whom she had little sympathy. The portrait of the family with whom her heroine stayed in Cape Town, allowing for dramatic licence, is that of the middle class society into which Ruth was cast when she arrived in Cape Town, and her caustic descriptions reflect some of her attitude to the family circle.

The contact with Olive Schreiner took her further from the small closed community of Cape Town and her discontents were fuelled through friendship with the

young lecturers at the university. It is clear from her novel that Ruth, without ever denying her Jewishness, discarded her religion. In this there can be little doubt that she was following in the footsteps of Olive. But she would also have been supported in this decision by her contact with Farrington and people like Clare Goodlatte (the former nun, turned Trotskyist), with whom she was in contact. In her new persona Ruth also became critical of at least some of the Indian representatives in South Africa — while continuing to defend the right of local Indians to citizenship — and was a fervent champion of the African and Coloured people. It is significant that her novel took as its theme a love affair between two new immigrants to South Africa. The woman is a Jewess (presumably Ruth herself), come to stay with guardians, with all the faults of the Jewish middle class immersed in the world of money and marriage brokering. The man is a young, and obviously brilliant, lecturer who discovers after he starts teaching at the University that his mother, who had died at child birth, was Coloured. The scenes in the novel are set in the home of the heroine's guardians and in the District Six, which Ruth knew well.<sup>18</sup>

Ruth included a description of District Six in 1933 in the book she started on the Coloured people. This region, situated adjacent to Cape Town's main shopping precinct, was home to a large proportion of Cape Town's coloured people. It was a mixed area with a warren of overcrowded houses that had decayed into one large slum. This was the home of Cape Town's coloured workers, its gangsters and, at its periphery, some of the more affluent Coloured citizens. Many years after Ruth left South Africa the district was cleared of its coloured population in the name of apartheid and its houses bulldozed. White families were supposed to move into this 'reclaimed' suburb but popular protest prevented that happening. District Six was reduced to a derelict field in one of the prime regions of the town.

In Ruth's novel the hero and heroine visit District Six and confront the awful reality of the colour bar. Accompanied by his companion, the hero enters its portals as a person reclaiming his Coloured family. There he experiences all the tension that accompanies this crossing of the colour line. The awkwardness that comes with ignorance, class difference and living style are caught by Ruth in a set of cameos which demonstrates her knowledge of the situation.

The story in the novel revolves around, and is resolved by, the hero's forced resignation as a lecturer. This is the consequence of an invitation from the hero to two relatives who are among the earliest Coloured students admitted to the university, to a dance on the campus. The race issue leads to a fight at the dance, and the hero's defiant disclosure of his origin. His lectures are subsequently boycotted, and his room apple-carted, by intolerant students. The heroine is also disowned by her guardians and this completes her freedom from the Jewish community.

Unable to persuade the local magistrate to marry them, they leave the country together, and long since lovers — although the novel has a time span of only five months — claim married status to get a joint berth on the ship they board. In the introduction to the book Ruth states that all the characters are imaginary, but that some of the events are not. The university dance, which provided the story's

catharsis, was indeed real and the events were predictable. Professor Lancelot Hogben, head of the Zoology department at the University, provides an account of what happened, in his unpublished autobiography. A young Canadian lecturer in Hogben's department fell in love with a well known Coloured woman and invited her and her cousin to the University's annual dance. Informed of this intended contravention of campus custom, and aware of the possible reactions, Hogben and his wife Enid took the group to the dance under their wing. Hogben says that the two were Coloured doctors, both Glasgow graduates, but it is more likely to have been Dr Aswardah Abdurhaman and Cissie Gool (much renowned for her beauty), scions of the most prominent Coloured family of the time.

The reaction was as expected although Hogben saw to it that nothing happened at the dance. At a meeting on the campus summoned to protest against this 'outrage', one rabble-rousing student accused Hogben of having brought an African prostitute to the dance and departing in a state of intoxication. Hogben consulted 'the husband of Ruth Alexander' (as he put it) and, on Alexander's advice, threatened an action for slander against the Student Representative Council. The students capitulated and, at a specially convened meeting, read a public apology, written by Hogben. This, said Hogben with obvious relish, laid stress on the need for racial coexistence.<sup>19</sup>

Those events were still to come when Ruth met Benjamin Farrington. It was this meeting that resolved the many problems faced by Ruth in Cape Town. As the relationship developed, Ruth threw over the bonds of a marriage that had palled, escaped the embrace of a community (and its religion) that had lost its significance for her, and condemn the fetters of segregation that divided the society. Liberation from the orthodox establishment, which Olive Schreiner had sought in her humanistic writing, was translated into reality by Ruth when she broke the icons surrounding her. Had she succeeded in capturing this artistically in her novel, she would have created a significant work. But her didactic intent stifled her creative potential. The novel never came to life, her characters were one-dimensional and never developed as persons, and her rich insights failed to take flight.

In her relationship with Farrington, in which her creativity came to life, she regained the intellectual stimulus that she had enjoyed with her father and then with Olive Schreiner. Ben Farrington inspired all who heard him with his enthusiasm for the Greek and Latin classics and English literature, as also a passionate concern for Irish freedom. He had acquired from Sinn Fein a radicalism and this was transformed over the years into a left-wing internationalism. But the friendship was not a one-sided affair. Ruth had much to contribute and it is obvious that Ben was engulfed in her enthusiasms. Ruth had a deep feel for the people of South Africa, a knowledge of the problems faced by black communities inside a repressive society and a passionate love of freedom and justice. She was also deeply involved in the literary circles in Cape Town and, being proficient in six languages (German, French, Hebrew, Greek, Latin and English), was widely read. She was in demand as a lecturer on contemporary writings and started a salon at

her home for painters and sculptors, poets and novelists. This brought Ruth and Ben into contact with the Cape Town artists, the budding writers, and those interested in literature. It also provided Ruth with a platform, because she was much in demand in literary circles as a lecturer on contemporary writers in Europe.

Working separately, but undoubtedly discussing their ideas, Ben and Ruth enjoyed over a decade of fruitful writing and lecturing in Cape Town. Ben published a number of texts for his courses at the University and prepared the work which he began to publish towards the end of the 1920s. Ruth embarked on book reviews for the local press, for the *New York Nation* and for the *South African Nation*. There is no catalogue of the pieces she published, sometimes weekly, and no notes on the many seminar and lecture course she prepared. Among the papers and cuttings I found in the Lewin papers and elsewhere, are her writings and many of her reviews of the works, published posthumously, of Olive Schreiner. Starting in December 1922, on the second anniversary of Olive's death, there is a handwritten lament at the death of 'so rich a personality, so inexhaustible a courage, so beautiful an honesty, so noble a scorn of baseness, so all compassionate a love...' This was to be the base-line for all Ruth's subsequent reviews.

In February 1923 she wrote a critical review of Olive Schreiner's *Stories, Dreams, and Allegories*, for the *Cape Times* published by S C Cronwright-Schreiner, Olive's widower. While Ruth welcomed the appearance of the book she disapproved of the production of Olive's immature writing for public circulation. Some of the pieces, she protested, could not 'add lustre to the fame of its author'. Ruth was also less than happy in her review on 23 July, in the *Cape Times*, of Cronwright's publication of Olive's *Thoughts on South Africa*. Most of the chapters, she said, had been written and published in 1890-92 and its chapters revised by Olive for separate publication in Cape or English papers in 1902. But chapter 8 of the new volume, which was reproduced from an incomplete typescript, contained material which contradicted many of the contentions in the rest of the book. Nonetheless, once again Ruth greeted the publication of a book which made available the thoughts of Olive Schreiner for the general public.

Ruth was already suspicious of, and more than a little angry, at Cronwright, claiming that he erred in what he published and was dishonest in his choice of material written by Olive. Ruth was outraged in 1924 when she read his *Life of Olive Schreiner*, and then his edited collection of her letters. In two devastating articles, first in *The South African Nation* of 9 August 1924, on the *Life*, and then in the *Cape Times* (on the letters) she contrasted her appraisal of Olive — repeating the phrases used in her essay of 1922 — with the meanness and dishonesty she detected in Cronwright's writings and selections. Ruth answered and dismissed his assertions of Olive's 'childishness', 'dishonesty', 'inconsiderateness', and so on, to show him at best as an ill-informed writer, and at worst, as having provided a 'caricature of a great personality': a violator 'of the privacy of the dead'.

These reviews drew a warm response from members of the Schreiner family and several of Olive's friends. They wrote, complimenting Ruth for having had the

courage to rebuke Cronwright publicly, and urged her to assist in the publication of essays on Olive and to publish a more representative collection of her letters. This was Ruth's intention and she started collecting material for such a book. But Ruth had underestimated Cronwright's determination to stop any other publication of Olive's works and, despite legal opinion from Morris Alexander that he had no legal right to prevent Ruth proceeding, the opposition acted as a deterrent. In like fashion Cronwright insisted on reading the script of her lecture on Olive Schreiner in 1929 before it was delivered. Although Ruth insisted that she would allow no censorship, she was obliged to allow him a pre-view before delivering her address. Cronwright's control of the copyright of his wife's writings probably delayed (and finally inhibited) Ruth in her desire to write her book.

Whether Ruth would have written the book on Olive must remain a matter of speculation. The talk she gave in 1929 was expanded and printed in five instalments in the *Cape Times* the following year. She intended printing it as a monograph but that too was put aside. Ultimately, in 1942, just before her death, Ruth wrote one last article on Olive entitled 'A Very Great Woman'. It was printed in Britain in the journal *University Forward*, in March 1942, alongside other articles written by members or sympathizers of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

A survey of the articles she wrote, including her article comparing Olive to the Brontes, her review of *From Man to Man*, and her major essay on Olive Schreiner in 1929, requires more space than I have available. There is also one important issue that needs examination at this point. Partly under Olive's influence she was devoted to the twin demand for women's suffrage and the breaking of racial barriers. It was this that led her, in 1931, to follow Olive's example and break with the suffragette movement.

At some time, presumably before Union in 1910, Olive sent Ruth a leaflet setting out the aims of the Women's Enfranchisement League of the Cape Colony when launched in 1908. Its object, it said, was to promote an interest in the enfranchisement of women in the Cape Colony 'and advocate the granting of the vote to the women on the same terms as men'. Underlining this last sentence, Olive wrote across the leaflet her reason for leaving the League:

It was not a personal matter that made me leave the society. The women of the Cape Colony all women of the Cape Colony. These were the terms on which I joined.

Ruth stayed in the League but adopted Olive's policy. When, in early 1930, an Act was tabled granting only white women the vote Ruth rallied support to oppose the new colour bar. In a letter to the *Cape Times* on 5 March 1930, together with Caroline Murray, Anna Purcell, F H Schreiner, Lyndall Gregg and Rose Movsovic, all former members of the League committee, Ruth registered her protest against the proposed Women's Enfranchisement Bill. Giving the vote to white women, they said, would alter the whole franchise basis of the Cape.<sup>20</sup>

It was over this issue that the tensions between Ruth and Morris Alexander became uncontainable. After the Bill was passed all white women had to register on

the electoral roll. Ruth protested but, being told by her husband that she was required by law to do so, she signed under protest. She said that if made to do so she would leave the country, but that was only a small, if precipitating factor. The marriage had broken down irretrievably and this was a convenient time to leave a country in which she felt so alienated.

In telling the story of Ruth I have had little time to dwell on her growing relationship with Ben Farrington. Perhaps that is as it should be. The affair was discrete — although Morris undoubtedly knew what was happening — and many tongues were wagging. Ben and Ruth avoided activities that would have offended sectors of the Jewish or university circles. They also had to protect the children, or at least Solly, and Ruth maintained that she would not leave the home until he had completed his university education.

The tensions inside the family were only part of the story. There was also much extra-mural discussions of racism in campus circles and presumably either Ben, or both Ben and Ruth, became involved. The persons concerned, and even the nature of their politics is not always clear. Among the names that stand out are those of Farrington, Lancelot Hogben and Frederick Bodmer. Associated with them at some time were J G Taylor (psychology department) and Dora Taylor (who wrote a four-part article on Olive Schreiner in *Trek*, in 1942, and *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*, in the 1950s) and also, at various times, Jean van der Poel (history), Helene and Jacques Malan (editor of *Trek*), David Schreer (lawyer and businessman), George Sachs (co-founder of the pro-Moscow *Guardian*), Paul Kosten (owner of Modern Books and on the editorial board of *Spark*) and others. Some of them contributed articles to the *Critic*, the University journal, and some (like Bodmer and Schreer) belonged to the Lenin, or later, the Spartacus Club. Schreer suggested that the *Communist Manifesto* be translated into Afrikaans in 1937–38. It is not certain who did the bulk of the translation but it was with the assistance of the Malans and Jean v d Poel. The *Manifesto* appeared in 1938 with an introduction by Trotsky, celebrating the 90th anniversary of its first publication.

Hogben's three years at the university from 1927–30, as Professor of Zoology, had a galvanising effect on the radical members of the university staff. He transformed his own department by using local fauna for demonstration and experimentation. One of his outstanding discoveries was the 'Hogben pregnancy diagnosis test' using the Cape clawed toad *Xenopus laevis*. Hogben and his wife Enid were visitors at Ruth's salon, and following their practice in Britain, kept open house on Saturday nights. Senior students, junior staff members and 'many of the Cape Town intelligentsia outside the University' were invited. The conversation, when political, was openly anti-segregationist. The Hogbens were outspoken on the race issue and friendly with Eddie Roux, who appealed to them to rescue two African leaders, hiding from a lynch gang in Worcester. Enid, together with Roux and Johnny Gomaz, both of the SACP, brought them back to Cape Town.<sup>21</sup>

The Hogbens did not stay. They felt that the country was becoming increasingly oppressive and left, Lancelot Hogben taking a position at the London School of

Economics. His list of publications was wide and included a number of texts that had wide public distribution. These included *Mathematics for the Millions* and *Science for the Citizen*. In 1937 he wrote a 'Preface on Prejudice' as an introduction to *Half Caste* by Cedric Dover condemning the South African 'Pigmentocracy' and complaining of an inability to conduct a consequential conversation (his 'favourite sport') because all attempted dialogues with South African graduates ended with the question: 'What would you do if a black man raped your sister?'

Hogben was not involved in any active political movement, nor were Ben and Ruth, although Farrington did deliver at least one lecture to the Lenin Club. Bodmer was for a short period chairperson of the Spartacus Club, but most academics in this circle stayed away from formal political groups, although they met with people in the Communist or the Workers Party personally. In two letters to Farrington in 1932 Ruth mentioned that she was seeing Clare Goodlatte, the former nun who was to become the editor of *Spark*, the Workers Party's paper.<sup>22</sup>

Academics are not rooted in one country. Hogben, Farrington and others left South Africa to take up posts elsewhere. Bodmer applied for the chair of German in Cape Town but, when it was given to a right winger, or 'truculent nazi' (to quote Hogben), he left the country and under Hogben's editorship, wrote *Loom of Language*. Farrington returned to Britain first as lecturer in Bristol and then as professor of Classics at the University of Wales in Swansea. There was nothing to keep Ruth in South Africa: she went first to New York where she stayed for approximately one year, before departing for Britain. After her divorce she married Farrington.

Ruth joined the Communist Party in Britain. This was the logical outcome of her growing despair of anything ever happening through parliamentary processes in South Africa. She had moved away from the parochial affairs in which Morris Alexander thrived. What concerned her thereafter was the increasingly difficult situation in South Africa — the extension of the oppressive colour bar, the whittling away of any protection from those laws. At the same time there were the fears in the early 1930s of fascism as it grew to become a world-wide phenomenon.

There was also a family connection that undoubtedly affected Ruth. Her younger sister Amy was a prominent party activist in the US Communist Party and wrote in its journal *New Masses*. The actual factors that led Ruth to her new position are unclear: what remains a mystery is her failure to take heed of the warnings from the left-oppositionists in Cape Town with whom she had been in contact. They spoke of the evils of forced collectivization, condemned the purges and expulsions of one-time Bolshevik leaders and cast doubt on the claims of the communists in South Africa. However, according to Farrington, Ruth was finally persuaded when she read the 'Stalin constitution' of 1936. (Farrington's phrase) This document which persuaded (or fooled) so many people outside the USSR proclaimed the full equality of women and men, of races and nationalities, 'in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life...' Ben, who also accepted the truth of the document and joined the Communist Party, quoted Ar-

ticles 122 and 123 in full in the Commemoration Service. This, he said, was taken by Ruth 'to be an epoch-making event'.<sup>23</sup>

In Swansea Ruth worked in the Workers Educational Association, the National Council of Labour Colleges, the Left Book Club, the National Council of Civil Liberties, the Women's Co-operative Guilds, and the British-Soviet Unity Committee. She believed that the struggle in Spain would start the transformation of all Europe. If she heard any critical comments on what was happening, she stopped her ears. Accepting Communist Party propaganda, Ruth turned to the crude literature that was emerging from party functionaries. In her interpretation of and lectures on English literature, to WEA and similar groups, she betrayed her own past by turning to the proponents of proletarian literature. In this she participated in the glorification of the USSR and the Third International which was so much the fashion of the intellectuals who had 'seen the light'.

The factors that turned people like Ruth to an uncritical adulation of Stalinism are explicable in terms of the crisis of the 1930s, superimposed on the social problems they were unable to address in their own societies. They saw no hope outside the Soviet Union and in walking through the morass of European politics this represented for them the one gleam of sanity. They accepted the lies coming out of Moscow uncritically and wandered into a wasteland, thinking they had found salvation for society. In that lies a tragedy that affected tens of thousands of people. Their aims and activities, however devoted, concealed the barbarism of the Stalin regime and added to the glorification of the USSR that destroyed the very revolution they sought. In so doing they betrayed themselves and helped betray the aspirations of a generation of socialists. The effect was disastrous and we have yet to recover from that loss of perspective. Ben continued in the Communist Party after Ruth's death, leaving it only after the Hungarian uprising was suppressed in 1956. He died in 1974.

In her role as propagandist Ruth turned the truth upside down. In the last article she wrote, Ruth turned again to Olive Schreiner, her friend and mentor. Written in support of the war, she once again quoted the passage on Denikin, but this time added an addendum. Schreiner, she said, had been a fighting socialist all her life. She had admired Lenin 'as incomparably the only great man the situation has produced, and as a man of outstanding genius', but she had not understood the 'full implications of Marxism', consequently 'ever and again she comes to vague or unclear conclusions, lessening the force and appeal of her writings for this generation'. In these few words Ruth devalued both her own work and that of Olive Schreiner. That great novelist might not have read much (if any) of Marx, she might not have understood any of his implications, but she never, never, indulged in such absurd preaching.

Ruth Schechter Farrington (as she was in the last years of her life) erred grievously. Throughout her life she had despised injustice and oppression and sought a way to oppose those who inflicted misery on others. The tragedy of the time lies in the way she, and so many like her, gave their support to the greatest

tyranny of the twentieth century: the regime that reigned in Moscow. In reading the Soviet constitution uncritically she accepted the worst confidence trick ever played on persons of good faith. In this Ruth exemplified the surrender of the western intellectuals of the 1930s to a tyranny that surpassed all others in the 20th century. She had turned the teachings of Olive Schreiner upside-down and also lost sight of the words of Abraham Lincoln, so proudly proclaimed in her letter to Morris Alexander in 1920 (as quoted above). The new system she had come to admire had *malice* towards all; with *charity* for none.

### Source Material:

#### Julius Lewin papers:

Obituary to Ruth (memorial service), 5 March 1942; Articles on Cairo genizah (*Jewish Chronicle* and others); Book reviews in *Cape Times*; Book review in *South African Nation*; Printed lecture on Olive Schreiner, *Cape Times*, 1930; Two letters from Farrington; Obituary to Farrington (*Times*, 21 November 1974).

#### South African Library:

Letters from Olive Schreiner to Ruth and other letters relating to possible publication of letters; Correspondence with Cronwright; Lecture on Olive (typescript and *Cape Times*); Several articles on Olive Schreiner; Letters from Farrington to Lily Guinsberg; *University Forward*, March 1942.

#### University of Cape Town:

Letters from Ruth to Morris Alexander, 1913; Extracts from H M Robertson, 'The University of Cape Town, 1918-68', typescript.

#### Farrington's Papers in the possession of Jane Straker.

Photographs of Ruth and of Farrington; Unpublished novel *The Exiles* c1936; *Cape Coloured: A Bye-Product of Empire*, c1938. Fourteen pages devoted to a description of District Six, typescript (21 pages); Letters to Ben from friends and relatives, mainly 1920/21, and from Ruth in 1932; Typescript (3 pages) by Farrington meant to introduce the publication of three essays by Ruth.

#### Hogben's Papers

'An Unauthorized Autobiography of Lancelot Hogben, Ed by Adrian and Anne Hogben, Typescript, 1989; *Lancelot Thomas Hogben 1895-1975*, by G P Wells (Bibliographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society, Vol 24, November 1978); Preface on Prejudice in Cedric Dover, *Half Caste*, Secker & Warburg, 1937.

#### Other Papers/Books

Letters to the author from Raphael Levy.  
 Extracts from lecture by Stefan Reif on Solomon Schechter.  
 Two letters by Ruth to Raphael Levy.  
 Eddie and Win Roux, *Rebel Pity*, Penguin, 1972.  
 Enid Alexander, *Morris Alexander: A Biography*, Juta, 1953.

Gus Saron, *Morris Alexander: Parliamentarian and Jewish Leader*, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1966.

### A note on the origin of this paper.

Although I had known of the socialist current at UCT, represented by Farrington, Bodmer and Hogben among others, I first heard of Ruth Schechter Alexander when given Julius Lewin's papers for dispatch to Johannesburg in July 1991. The two files I found on Ruth were interesting but did not seem to fit into my programme of research. A series of subsequent events gave me a personal interest in pursuing this topic and it was only then that the significance of the subject became obvious.

A month after I saw the Lewin papers I visited Nechama Genussow in Kibbutz Nir David whom I had last seen in Johannesburg in 1941. From a two page printed article on the Genussow family I discovered that Nechama's grandfather was Israel Schechter, Solomon's twin brother. I visited South Africa shortly afterwards and found a copy of Vera Buchanan-Gould's biography of Olive Schreiner, *Not Without Honour*, written in 1949. It had reference to Ruth's projected publication of Olive Schreiner's letters. I read Ruth's letters of 1913 to her husband in the Alexander papers at UCT, but only on return to London found that Ruth's papers were in the South African Library. I obtained copies and these included Olive's letters to Ruth and correspondence about Olive Schreiner's letters.

Seeking old journals I contacted the Jewish Historical Society in London and was informed that the Presidential address by Dr Stefan Reif in October had been on Solomon Schechter. It was through Dr Reif that I obtained the address of Raphael Levy, the son of Ruth's cousin, whom she had seen in the US in 1933-34. Thereafter I found the addresses of Jane Straker, Farrington's daughter by his second wife, Barbara Sell.; of Dr Adrian Hogben; and the family of Solly Alexander in Australia.

In the search for documents I am indebted to the South African Library and the library at UCT, Eleanor Hawarden, Stefan Reif, Raphael Levy, Tikvah Alper, Jane Straker, Adrian and Anne Hogben, Hannah Kantor, Elsie Alexander and many others who have been so co-operative and willing to assist me.

Much more remains to be discovered and this essay must be considered as work in progress.

### References

1. Memorial service, thought to be written by Benjamin Farrington. I have added information about the family received from Raphael Levy, in a letter dated 25 June 1992.
2. According to Farrington's note, these included the novelist Israel Zangwill and J G Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough*. Farrington papers.
3. Quotations and descriptions from Meir Persoff 'Hidden Treasures of Cairo', *Jewish Chronicle Magazine*, London, 25 November 1977. In his letter of 25 June 1992, Raphael Levy notes that Judeo-Arabic was Arabic written in Hebrew characters, the *lingua franca* of Jews living in the Moslem world from the 10th through the 13th centuries. The Hebrew literature was largely sacred, or religious literature.
4. See the biography of Morris Alexander by Enid Alexander.
5. The letters written when returning from a visit abroad in 1913 are those of a devoted wife.
6. Smuts was reported as saying: 'in all our dealings with the natives we must build on...the granite bedrock of the Christian moral code. Honesty, fair-play, justice, and the ordinary Christian virtues must be the basis of all our relations with the natives'.
7. Quoted by Enid Alexander. I did not find the letters from which she quotes in the Alexander papers. I am indebted to Raphael Levy for pointing out that Ruth was quoting from Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address as President on 4 March 1865. With the ebd of the American Civil War in sight he said: 'With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who

- shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations'.
8. Ruth mentioned the marriage in a letter to Morris Alexander in 1913 and said that she hoped they would live nearby so that they could meet. Mr Genussow delayed his emigration to tide over his business interests during the depression.
  9. Nechama Genussow, 'The Genussow Family Achievement', an extract printed in *Telfed*, 1990.
  10. The date is not certain. Farrington states that Schreiner heard Ruth speak at a meeting and was immediately attracted to her, probably in 1907. Ruth in her lecture in 1929 (see below) says that Olive came to see her in 1910 for the first time but does not explain the circumstances.
  11. One poem, shown to Sonia [Havelock] Ellis, was highly praised by her for its Yeatsian flavour.
  12. In September 1920, Schreiner wrote to Ruth: 'What was the name of the young man I met at your house. He seemed such a delightful person. A young person was talking about him here. Says he is so remarkable. The students seemed impressed by him yesterday'. Farrington states that he met Olive Schreiner twice. Farrington's papers.
  13. Farrington, to Lily Guinsberg in Muizenberg. Letter in South African Library.
  14. The *Cape Times*, 10 August 1929, commented on the lecture given to the Cape Town branch of the English Association. It printed a version in five instalments between 26 April-2 May 1930 which was considerably longer than the typescript for the lecture. The passage on Denikin was repeated by Ruth in 'A Very Great Woman', *University Forward*, March 1942.
  15. It was only in 1916 that the University of Cape Town became an independent body and teaching commenced on the new campus at Rondebosch.
  16. Lestrade achieved prominence in his field as an ethnologist. He is said to have mastered 34 languages and Farrington referred to his skill in mastering the African languages and recording their sounds phonetically.
  17. Few of the letters to Farrington discuss the contents of his letters home. However, one correspondent, 'Q', writing on 16 August 1920, took Ben to task for having come to these conclusions.
  18. Ruth started and ran the Castle Coloured Play Centre in District Six financed, according to Enid Alexander, by her husband. See her typescript: *Cape Coloured: A Bye-Product of Empire*.
  19. 'An Unauthorized Autobiography of Lancelot Hogben'. Ike Horvich, one-time chair of the CPSA, thought that the two persons I name were the one's concerned.
  20. The correspondence, and the legal opinion she obtained from her husband, is in the Ruth Alexander file (Olive Schreiner collection) at the South African Library.
  21. The letter is reprinted in Enid Alexander, p 146.
  22. Biographical details are from 'An Unauthorized Autobiography of Lancelot Hogben'.
  23. See my article on Clare Goodlatte in *Searchlight South Africa*, No 2.
  24. Commemoration Service to Ruth.

## Document

# CAPE COLOURED: A BYE-PRODUCT OF EMPIRE

R S Farrington

[Dedicated to My Friends in District Six]

[This book which was started, but did not get beyond 21 typed pages, provides an aspect of Ruth Farrington's thinking in the late 1930s. We reprint the introduction.]

In July 1934 the Union of South Africa appointed a Commission of Enquiry into 'the position in the country's economic and social structure of the Cape Coloured population (including Cape Malays) in the various part of the

Union'. The Commission contained three names that might roughly be labelled Dutch, two British, and one Malay. This one 'non-European', to use the customary South Africanism for a person other than white, Dr Abdurahman, is an outstanding if not altogether impressive figure among the Cape Coloured people. He is an able doctor, and has for thirty years or thereabouts been a member of the Cape Municipal Council and also a member of the Cape Provincial Council. If the Act of Union had not debarred all non-Europeans from Parliament he would certainly have had a seat there for nearly as long. Throughout his long career he has always consistently supported that party which was the strongest in the Cape Province. The other members of the Commission are all white South Africans of the professional class, with a reputation for either mildly liberal or mildly humanitarian ideas about the non-European section of the population. Nevertheless the six were divided into two, sometimes into three, opinions. At the end of their detailed and lengthy proceedings — the Report was submitted to the Governor-General in August 1937 — one conviction and only one united them, though it is one to which they have not in so many words set their names. That is that the position of the Coloured People is hopeless, and that there is no help for it, though minor alleviations may be possible.

It is hopeless, since in the interests of the country as a whole, a phrase which in South Africa means the interests of the whites, the development of the odd half million Cape Coloured cannot proceed along natural lines, either culturally or economically. That, of course, and for the same reasons, is also true of the far larger Native population. But as a whole the Natives have not yet proceeded far enough along the one-way street prescribed for them by their white rulers to beat their heads against the stones of the prison walls in which it ends. Nor, heavy though their grievances are and intolerable the restrictions under which they live, are the whites of South Africa guilty against the Natives to the same extent, since they are not their own creation. The Cape coloured people, betrayed in their beginnings, betrayed again at the time of Union, and yet again when the franchise was standardised for the whole Union in 1931 [when white women were enfranchised], are a bye-product of Empire. The story of their production in the days of the flourishing slave-trade, and of their utterly callous scrapping in the present era, in South Africa, of unlimited cheap wage-slave labour, is as ugly a bit of Imperial history as any, and one to which I will return later.

In the Cape Province, however, where for various social and historic reasons a section of the whites have an uneasy conscience about the Coloured people, it is still permissible to desire their betterment in so far as it in no way impinges upon the prosperity and wellbeing of the whites, and to deplore their present miseries. It should be noted, also, that here the Coloured men still retain their votes, and with them, in one or two constituencies, a modicum of political power. It is to this uneasy conscience, doubtless, that they owe the recent Commission, and the feeling is specially clear in the general Conclusions of the Report.

In the section, for instance, headed 'Social Discontent' in the chapter devoted to 'Special Social Problems', we find the following:

While there is very often profound discontent...among a large part of the Cape Coloured with the position of inferiority they occupy in the social and economic structure of South Africa, this discontent has, up to the present, not tended to take an active aggressive form. This discontent inclines rather to be coloured by a more or less fatalistic acquiescence in a situation in which they feel unable to make any essential change. Many feel that factors, over which they have little or no control, effectively prevent the Coloured man from successfully making his way in the world in which he moves. It is inevitable that this conviction should exert an often paralysing influence on ambition and enterprise. The view was, indeed, more than once expressed to the Commission, that, so far from progress, at least in the economic sphere, having taken place in, say, the last fifteen or twenty years, there has been retrogression. The lack of hope of bringing about improvement by their own efforts naturally contributes to the development of those traits of untrustworthiness and lack of industry and of interest in their work, which Europeans are prone to condemn in this class of Cape Coloured.

The contrast between the sombre picture of despair and stagnation given in these few sentences and the smug wholesale condemnation of 'this class of Cape Coloured', declared at the beginning of the paragraph to be 'a large part of the Cape Coloured', expressed in the last equivocal sentence, is very characteristic of the Report. [In a sentence that is partly scored out, Ruth Farrington said that in the [Report's] Addendum, signed by Messrs Abdurahman, Buchanan and Fowler, the commissioners said that the 'complexity' of the problem was rendered more difficult by the need for 'reconciling or co-ordinating the divergent views of witnesses - and they might reasonably have added, of the members of the Commission - and they then stated]:

...We would emphasise the fact that the majority of the Coloured population are insufficiently educated to set out with anything approaching precision the conditions under which they live and to describe with any degree of clarity their real aspirations...the condition under which the masses of the Coloured people have to live is so abject that they have become imbued with a feeling, having its roots in that resignation which springs from despair, that these conditions cannot or will not be improved, and that as a consequence the retention of the goodwill of their employers is greatly to be preferred to the futility and displeasure which in their minds might at once attend upon the free and open expression of their grievances.

The picture is sufficiently terrible. But even as to the gently subduing cost of whitewash with which the pious recommendations and still more pious hopes of the Report are intended to screen from themselves the inherent crazy rottenness of the social structure of the society in which such a state of things is possible, there is no agreement within the Commission. Half of them, the 'Dutch' half, base their

projects for amelioration upon a policy of segregation; the others repudiate it, and ask for 'equality of opportunity in the industrial, commercial, professional and political life of the country', but disclaim any desire for 'social equality'. It is perhaps the measure of the present humiliation of the Coloured people as a whole that their municipal and provincial representative, one of themselves, should dare to sign his name to such a pronouncement, which if it means anything means the death-sentence of his people.

Now it happens that I lived for over a quarter of a century in or near Cape Town, and that during practically the whole of that period I was in touch with the Coloured people, had friends among them, and was engaged in work of one kind or another in connection with them. I saw much of the misery and of the inarticulate despair and apathy mentioned in the Report. I saw other things also, not mentioned there, closely connected with these. I saw the exploitation by the respectable prosperous whites of the Coloured population, that is, of the proletariat. It was an exploitation, not more culpable, but more shameless, than that in towns where employer and employed are of the same colour. It was made possible by a public opinion based on the conviction that the dark-skinned people who formed half the population of the city were of a different order of human beings, a conviction which underlies not merely every piece of repressive legislation framed against them and the whole body of social discrimination exercised against them, but also the tone and the recommendations of this elaborate and seemingly humane Inquiry into their conditions. I saw further the unbelievable goodness to each other which, as with the submerged and forgotten everywhere, exists and recreates itself without external stimulus or example. I saw intelligence, beauty, responsiveness, charm, initiative, flowering out of bitter poverty, often out of squalor, sometimes withering away as the grim years destroyed the resilience and hopefulness of childhood, sometimes surviving into adult lives of courage and performance. I saw in short that here was a proletariat and a tiny emergent middle class, which, in numbers equal roughly to the white population which lives upon its labour, and outlawed by that white population from all share in the amenities, and from all but a fraction of all educational, cultural, social facilities of the place, yet displayed within itself unmistakably every possibility for human development, and many a hint, notably in musical ability, of special gifts as a people. And I saw also that it stood at the crossroads: that within the next generation it must either begin to succumb to the destructive pressure of the whites, and sink, as since Union it has become increasingly plain the whites would have it, into a centre of untouchable hewers of wood and drawers of water forever, or they must enter upon a struggle for their rights and for their future of an altogether new kind. The vulture-shadow of Fascism overhangs South Africa in all men's sight; once it descends the night, any possible struggle will, unless it is by then already planned and organised, be reduced to a wild and futile scramble for the few poor crumbs of privilege as against the Natives, with which at present the Coloured are too often hushed and beguiled like a child with a stale sugar-stick. And in this struggle they

should have, and they will need, the informed sympathy and co-operation of all anti-fascists within the British Empire.

It is the purpose of this book to give to non-South African readers some account of the Cape Coloured people, of their past, their present, and finally of that determined change of purpose and of action on their part which, as I believe, alone can ensure for them a future.

### Extracts from two letters written by Olive Schreiner

*Addressed to the Social Democratic Federation of Cape Town, 5 February 1905, following the strike wave in Russia in January 1905.*

Absent bodily, I shall yet be with you in thought, and yet more with those in far off Russia who are today carrying on that age-long war of humanity towards a larger freedom and a higher justice — a war which has been waged through the ages now by this people and then by that, now a small nation against one that would subjugate it, then by a class, then by a race; now for religious freedom, then for the right of free thought and free speech; but which, when looked at from the highest stand-point, has always been essentially one battle fought with one end — now with success and then with seeming failure, but always bringing nearer by minute and imperceptible degrees that time in the future when for a free and united humanity a truly human life shall be possible on earth.

I regret especially that I cannot be at your meeting, because I should meet very many of our Russian Jews — members of that great race which has given to Europe its religion and the world some of its finest sons.

As a South African, it is a matter of pride and joy that we have been able to give refuge and to accept among our citizens many whom oppression drove from their birthplace. If the great struggle of our fellows in Russia tends only to diminish their sufferings, then it will not have been in vain. I believe that in this movement in Russia, we are witnessing the beginning of the greatest event that has taken place in the history of humanity during the last centuries.

[Reprinted from, S A Rochlin, 'They Helped to Shape Our Future', *South African Jewish Frontier*, September 1946]

*From the Address by Olive Schreiner, presented by S C Cronwright-Schreiner, to the Jewish Territorial Organisation, Cape Town, 1 July 1906.*

...The colossal nature of the outrages now being perpetrated on the Jews in Russia, make it inevitable that vast numbers will seek to leave their native land, not singly, but almost in bodies; and it would be of incalculable benefit to them, if, instead of having to force their way into the already over-populated

countries of Europe, a free land of their own were open to them for their immediate settlement.

...But it is not only the exile Russian Jew, fleeing from the land of his birth who demands our thoughts today; rather it is that vast body of Jews remaining in their land and at this moment exposed to tortures and wrongs, which would have stood out [as] a blot on the very darkest page in the history of the middle ages...

With regard to South Africa, I can only say that I am grateful that in the Bill now before our Parliament the language of the Russian Jew was not made a ground for excluding him.

I have no higher ambition for my native land than this — that it should be truly said of her now and for all time to come, that no man, of whatever race, or colour, or creed, fleeing from religious or political persecution had ever failed to find a refuge and a home in her. I have no loftier ambition for her than this...

The address, which fills eight typed pages contains an enthusiastic endorsement of Zionism and a eulogy to world Jewry. That was the view at the turn of the century — but not a viewpoint we share. Whether Olive Schreiner would have continued to maintain this viewpoint in the light of more recent history in the Middle East is dubious. Those readers who wish to read the document in full can undoubtedly obtain it in libraries. We will send it to any reader, on request, if the cost of copying is defrayed.

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## A CAN OF WORMS IN LUSAKA: THE IMPRISONMENT OF HUBERT SIPHO MBEJE

The following are extracts from a letter sent on 27 January 1992 to Mr Matthew Ngulube, deputy chief justice of Zambia, concerning a former member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, Hubert Siphon Mbeje, then held in prison in Zambia.

After more than two years in jail, Mr Mbeje was released from Lusaka Central Prison the following month and was repatriated to South Africa. The letter was written after a dossier of documents concerning Mr Mbeje had been provided by his brother Mr Linda Mbeje, who had been trying to secure the exit of his brother from Zambia since 1987. From late 1991, additional efforts to secure Mr Mbeje's release were made by Bill McElroy of the support grouping, Justice for Southern Africa, and Paul Trehwela of *Searchlight South Africa*.

The fate of Hubert Siphon Mbeje in Zambia is important for several reasons. There is no doubt he was brutally assaulted and kidnapped by members of the ANC security department both in 1987 and in 1989, acting with complete impunity. He appears to have been the victim of a serious miscarriage of justice by the Zambian judiciary, acting on behalf of the ANC, which bent the law in Zambia to suit itself.

Mr Mbeje and other South African exiles who had resigned from the ANC (primarily on political grounds) appear further to have been used as scapegoats by very senior figures in the ANC in Zambia in 1989. They appear to have been singled out as a screen for individuals in authority in the ANC after a series of mysterious incidents involving the bombing of ANC premises in Lusaka and the murder of a number of ANC members, including security officials, on the eve of the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC in South Africa.

Those who died mysteriously in Zambia during this period include members of the ANC security department investigating penetration of the ANC in exile by undercover agents of the South African state security forces, following the arrest and interrogation by ANC security of a senior Umkhonto commander, 'Comrade Cyril'. Of those who died mysteriously in Zambia at this time, the best known was Comrade Cyril's former commander in Umkhonto, Muzi Ngwenya (Umkhonto travelling name, Thami Zulu). Two others were the security officials Jackie Mabuza (a nephew of the ANC security chief Joe Nhlanhla) and Zakithi Dlamini, whose deaths were reported by Ellis and Sechaba in their book *Comrades Against Apartheid; The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile, 1960-1990* (pp 192-93).

The letter to the Zambian deputy chief justice, which was submitted through the office of the Zambian high commission in London but did not receive a reply, argued that these unsolved killings suggest high level penetration of the ANC security department itself by South African state security forces. The implication,

if this were correct, is that very important 'assets' of the South African regime have returned as heroes to South Africa, along with other prominent exiles.

It was believed at the time by ANC exiles that the investigation of allegations made by Comrade Cyril — after his own death by poisoning — was discontinued on the orders of the then ANC president, Oliver Tambo, because of the high rate of casualties among the investigating officers.

### *Re: THE CONVICTION OF HUBERT SIPHO MBEJE*

Dear Mr Deputy Chief Justice,

...We were approached towards the end of last year by Mr Linda Mbeje, the older brother of Mr Hubert Siphon Mbeje, who is currently in Lusaka Central Prison. From Mr Linda Mbeje we received a very full collection of documents relating to his efforts to bring his brother out of Zambia since 1987. We have sent copies of these documents to the Zambian High Commission in London, as well as to the British government, in an effort to secure the earliest possible release of Mr Siphon Mbeje; urgent medical attention for his pneumonia, apparently contracted in prison; and asylum in Britain. You will find that the documents make painful reading. They are all too characteristic of the lost hopes and abused good faith of very many fine young people who fled South Africa after the crushing by the state of the Soweto school pupils' revolt of June 1976. Siphon Mbeje was one of that generation, which revived the ANC, provided it with hundreds of new members and eventually helped to bring it to the brink of government in South Africa. But at heavy cost.

Mr Mbeje was born in Soweto in 1958, in a family whose first language is Zulu. As a teenage school pupil he and his friends prepared banners on 15 June 1976 for the children's demonstration that was to begin the political revival, after the defeats of the 1960s. He and they faced the police bullets the next day. After massive state repressions, he disappeared overnight with many other young people from his street, joining the ANC in exile and receiving military training in the ANC army, Umkhonto we Sizwe, under the ANC 'travelling' name 'Kaizer Khumalo'. He became a political commissar in Angola when the ANC was fighting in the civil war there. (*Africa Confidential*, 25.8.89) At some stage, still as a member of the ANC, he came to live in Zambia in Lusaka, under the name Kaizer Khumalo.

Differences of some kind arose between Mr Mbeje and the ANC authorities in Lusaka towards the middle of 1987, or earlier. From several documents in the collection it appears that these differences were political and that a number of other ANC members in Zambia felt they were in the same situation as Mr Mbeje. (Letter from anonymous 'S.African Refugees in Lusaka' to the World Council of Churches, 23.8.89, and to the British Council of Churches, 29.8.89) This appears also in a letter from a Zambian friend of Siphon Mbeje, a supporter of the multi-party system then in exile in Swaziland who had been in prison in Zambia, Mr M. Chasemena. (Letter from Mbabane, Swaziland, to Linda Mbeje in London, May 1990) Reports published in the press in 1989, referring to Mr Mbeje and three other South Africans in Zambia, stated that they 'disagreed with ANC policies' (Reuters, from Lusaka, 23.8.89); that they had 'complained about poor food and conditions in the camps and preferential treatment for the leadership' (*Africa Confidential*, 25.8.89); and that they were 'complaining about lack of democracy in the movement and the poor conditions of those in exile'. (*Independent*, Britain, 14.8.89) All these comments were written after the assault and abduction of Mr Mbeje from a house in Lusaka by eight armed members of the ANC on 5 August 1989: the event that immediately preceded his trial and conviction in the Zambian courts the following October.

### The Assaults

According to Siphon Mbeje, he was the victim of two very serious assaults in Lusaka carried out by 'ANC security personnel' on 17 September 1987. After the second assault he was kidnapped by his attackers and taken to the ANC prison known as 'RC' ['Revolutionary Council'] at Villa Park, Lusaka. He was threatened with being forcibly taken to an ANC prison at Dakawa in Tanzania. After two weeks he escaped, and was in hiding for three weeks. He was then again arrested by ANC security personnel, beaten and again imprisoned at RC prison. After getting away again, the same procedure was repeated a third time after he had already spoken to the Lusaka officer of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Miss Brouwer. After these episodes of assault and kidnapping, he was seen by an ANC doctor at Emmersdale Clinic in Lusaka, Dr Mpho, and by medical staff at the University Teaching Hospital. (Statement by Hubert Siphon Mbeje, Lusaka, 29.12.87)

No effort appears to have been made by the Zambian police or legal authorities to arrest or prosecute any of the ANC security officials named by Mr Mbeje. These are listed as: Duma, Makhandu, Elliot, Dlokolo, Mugabela, Blackman, Brown, Maria, Job, Ayob, Rasta, German and Terrance. ANC security officials appear to have been free to do whatever they liked in Zambia, with immunity from the law. In a letter of resignation to the ANC Chief Representative in Lusaka written at this time, Mr Mbeje stated that 'no action had been taken against these culprits' and that his wrist watch had been stolen. He had enrolled himself under the UNHCR 'because my life has been threatened'. (Undated statement, signed Kaizer Khumalo, written in Lusaka, late December 1987) In a separate statement dated 29.12.87, signed under his real name, Mr Mbeje says that what he needed from the UNHCR was 'protection of which my life was in danger here in Zambia'.

Evidence concerning Mr Mbeje's medical condition in November 1987 appears in statements by Dr Mpho of the Emmersdale Clinic, Lusaka, 11.11.87; the Zambian officer for the UNHCR, Miss Brouwer, 18.11.87; an undated statement by Mr Mbeje's brother, Linda, written in Lusaka after his arrival on 28.11.87; and a statement of the same period (also undated) by Mr Mbeje giving details of serious physical and psychosomatic injuries received by him. The medical attention he received appears to have been utterly inadequate.

The UNHCR in Lusaka took the view in December 1987 that Mr Mbeje's position in Zambia was 'very insecure' and could lead to 'very unfortunate consequences'. (Letter to the Zambian Commissioner for Refugees, Home Affairs Ministry, Lusaka, by UNHCR Representative Abdallah Saied, 30.12.87) He was still suffering from what appeared to be a 'severe beating'. If he continued to stay in Zambia his life was 'in great danger'. He was living mainly in hiding and claimed that the ANC was looking actively for him. (Telex from UNHCR in Lusaka to UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, 30.12.87) An effort was made to get him a UN Convention Travel Document and also to get him temporary asylum in Switzerland, where his sister lives. Asylum was refused by the Swiss authorities. (Telex from UNHCR headquarters in Geneva to UNHCR, Lusaka, 31.12.87) Mr Mbeje's status in Zambia continued to be discussed by the UNHCR representative in London through 1988. (Letter from London office of UNHCR to Linda Mbeje, 18 July 1988)

Two years after this initial series of assaults, which may well have had a permanent effect in undermining Mr Mbeje's health, he was again the victim of a brutal assault and kidnapping at gunpoint by eight armed members of the ANC in Lusaka on 5 August 1989. (Letter to Mr Mbeje's sister, Mrs Nothemba Wyss, in Switzerland, by Ms Vinus Muyaya Choobe, Lusaka, 7.8.89) The violence of the assault is vividly described by Mr Mbeje's companion of the time, Ms Vinus Choobe, in whose house the assault and kidnapping took place. She immediately reported the assault and abduction, which was witnessed by 'lots of people' on the street, to the nearest police station at Kabwala, Lusaka. She writes: 'I didn't get any positive response for I was told to go there on Tuesday 8th' (ie three days later). Ms Choobe placed the matter in the hands of a firm of solicitors (Chifunu Banda and Associates, PO Box 31025, Lusaka). She also reported the matter to the Zambian military at Forces Headquarters, who

said 'they would get in touch with the ANC to find out'. Ms Choobe ends the letter by saying 'ANC have connected all former ANC members to be enemy agents'. This last comment is important for indicating the political climate in which Mr Mbeje's trial and conviction took place two months later.

Mr Mbeje was imprisoned by the ANC for two weeks. One report states that he and three other men — Richard Sikhosana, Norman Phakhati and David Lephoto — had been taken to an ANC house in Lilanda township and that an attempt had been made (later abandoned) to take them to Tanzania. (*Africa Confidential*, 25.8.89) The present documents give no indication what happened to them during this time. However, this further episode of assault, kidnapping and imprisonment by the ANC becomes directly material to the present circumstances of Mr Mbeje, since it leads directly to his prosecution and conviction in court in Zambia on a charge of wounding a former girlfriend, resulting in a three year prison sentence in prison.

During this latest period of abduction of Mr Mbeje by the ANC, a Lusaka magistrate served two summonses on the secretary general of the ANC, Mr Alfred Nzo, requiring him to explain the whereabouts of Mr Mbeje. The ANC stated at this time that it had already released Mr Mbeje. A number of reports appeared in the *Zambian* and *South African* press at this time concerning the matter. There appears to be no evidence that the court or police took any action against the ANC for this latest assault, kidnapping and imprisonment of Mr Mbeje: a matter that places the subsequent prosecution, conviction and imprisonment of Mr Mbeje in prejudice. The police and judicial authorities seem to have concurred in according parastatal and extra-judicial powers to the ANC, in which the ANC security department was permitted to act as proxy for the *Zambian* state in matters affecting its own members or former members, beyond the reach of normal civil law. This leaves open the question how far the *Zambian* legal system has to be considered as acting in proxy for the ANC in its subsequent conviction and imprisonment of Mr Mbeje.

### The Bombings

Mr Mbeje and the other three men were 'handed over' by the ANC to the *Zambian* state authorities, apparently on 18 August 1989. (*Reuters*, from Lusaka, 23.8.89) The assault and kidnapping of Mr Mbeje by the ANC and his subsequent trial and conviction in court took place in an atmosphere of extraordinary tension in Lusaka involving the ANC. A 'spate of bombings' at this time rocked Lusaka 'almost every month'. (Letter from 'SA Refugees in Lusaka' to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, 23.8.89) These bombings were directed frequently against ANC premises in Lusaka. It is suggested in this anonymous letter, which carries an authentic tone, that — perhaps under torture or threat of torture — former ANC members in Zambia who had resigned on political grounds were being accused by ANC security officials of responsibility for these bombings. This is the context to the remark by Ms Vinus Choobe that 'ANC have connected all former ANC members to be enemy agents'. (Letter to Linda Mbeje, 7.8.89)

This is the context also to the remarks by the anonymous 'S.African Refugees in Lusaka' to the British Council of Churches, written immediately after the handing over of Mr Mbeje by the ANC to *Zambian* state authorities. There they state:

We are kindly appealing to your serious considerations about the critical situation we are facing in Zambia.

There are no human rights for S.African refugees in that country, as a result it is meaningless to talk about security under the UNHCR because there is none. The *Zambian* govt ignores the atrocities being waged by the ANC against S.A. refugees, as a result the UNHCR succumbs to that too...

We would wish to bring to your attention four of our friends, refugees, who have been kidnapped by the ANC and framed under diabolical schemes. We say diabolical schemes because we know that they are genuine refugees. (Letter, 29.8.89)

In their letter to the World Council of Churches, addressed care of the former South African student leader, Rev Barney Pitso Moseneke — then a leading official of the WCC — these anonymous refugees suggest that critics who had resigned from the ANC were being forced under torture to confess to having planted these bombs. The letter asks: 'don't you suspect something sinister and ominous?' (Letter, 23.8.89)

Mr Mbeje and the other three men were indeed branded by senior ANC officials with responsibility for the bombings in Lusaka over this period, as well as with spying, drug-smuggling and car-racketeering. A Reuters report from Lusaka stated:

The Lusaka-based ANC said its security officers detained the four on August 4 and 5 for their suspected involvement in recent bomb attacks against the ANC. Relatives of the four said they were abducted because they disagreed with ANC policies. (23.8.89)

According to *Africa Confidential*,

The ANC has accused the four of involvement in at least one of the bombings which has hit Zambia in recent weeks. After they and others who had left the organisation had met the UNHCR some weeks ago, the ANC denounced them as spies, drug-traffickers and car-racketeers. (Vol 30 No 17, 25.8.89)

However, at no stage then or subsequently did either the ANC or the Zambian government attempt to present even a shred of proof concerning these extremely serious charges concerning bombing, spying, drug-trafficking and car-racketeering. No attempt was made to present evidence concerning any such charges before the Zambian courts. Yet the effect of these allegations concerning Mr Mbeje and the others was to poison the atmosphere around him in the period immediately preceding his prosecution and conviction before the Zambian courts on a totally different charge. There was no mention of the criminal charge under which Mr Mbeje was eventually prosecuted in the initial flurry of allegations that accompanied his abduction and assault by the ANC.

This alone could suggest prejudice to Mr Mbeje in the prosecution by the Zambian state, which followed immediately after his abduction by the ANC. There was no attempt by the state to prosecute the members of the ANC security department who had carried out the severe beating and abduction of Mr Mbeje in 1987, despite communication between the UNHCR representative in Lusaka and the Home Affairs Ministry; and there was no prosecution of ANC members for the abduction, imprisonment and assault of Mr Mbeje in 1989, despite widespread international attention to the matter. (Reuters, 9.8.89 and 23.8.89, *Independent*, 14.8.89, *Africa Confidential*, 25.8.89, Radio Botswana, 11.8.89, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, 23.8.89, *Star*, Johannesburg, 24.8.89, *Citizen*, Johannesburg, 24.8.89)

The authors and causes of the bombings in Lusaka in 1988 and 1989 still require to be uncovered. It would be surprising if a relation to South African Military Intelligence were not eventually found, in view of the Zimbabwe bombing case of October 1988. (South African Race Relations Survey, 1988/89, p 527; also discussed in the Channel Four television programme 'The Hidden Hand', Britain, December 1991) There was also a mysterious series of deaths of ANC security officials and other personnel in Zambia in 1989, in some cases involving the use of poisons available to the Directorate of Military Intelligence in South Africa. In the case of the death in Lusaka in November 1989 of the former Umkhonto commander, Muzi Ngwenya (ANC name Thami Zulu), there has been media speculation that the person or persons responsible for his death must have been within the ANC. (Weekly Mail, Johannesburg, 6.9.91; *Guardian*, London, 6.9.91) This suggests to me that at least one DMI operative in Lusaka — the headquarters of the ANC in exile — was working in a senior position in the ANC, probably within the security apparatus. This person or persons would now have returned to South

Africa. I am convinced that Siphon Mbeje, as a known critic of conditions in the ANC, was used as a scapegoat in the bombing upheavals in Lusaka in 1989.

This applies also to the unproven accusations against him from senior ANC sources that he had been involved in drug-smuggling and car-racketeering. From my own information, the trail of smuggling of gems and drugs from Angola through Zambia and the reverse trail of cars stolen in South Africa through Zambia into Angola proceeded through Umkhonto we Sizwe command structures. ANC troops were ordered to guard the transports conveying these goods in the same way that they were ordered to undertake other tasks. My own understanding is that there was indeed a criminal network within the ANC reaching from South Africa as least as far north as Luanda; that this had a certain 'official' status extending to Umkhonto we Sizwe command structures; and that this would have provided an ideal means of penetration by the South African state security forces. Zambia was a transit route for this two-way traffic. In my view, Siphon Mbeje was used also as a scapegoat for this criminal network, which was in place at least as far back as the early 1980s. The critic of corruption was slandered with the same charge that he had made himself against official structures in the ANC...

### The Trial

It appears that Mr Mbeje's abduction by the ANC and subsequent conviction by the Zambian court prevented him from taking up asylum in Britain in 1989, which had previously been arranged through the UNHCR. (Communication from Mr Linda Mbeje, 19 January 1992) It is possible that this was the real purpose of his abduction and subsequent trial and conviction. At the time of his assault and abduction, I understand that Mr Mbeje was planning to leave Zambia for Britain and was in possession of a Geneva Convention travel document, issued by the UNHCR in Lusaka, and stamped with a travel visa for Britain. (Communication by Mr Linda Mbeje) When Mr Mbeje was abducted, this travel document was removed from him and is no longer in his possession. This in itself should have been a matter for investigation. The abduction of Mr Mbeje by the ANC security department, and the failure of the Zambian authorities to act against his assailants, thus involved a serious infringement of British consular facilities. This criminal act appears not to have been investigated. I am not aware of any approach from British consular staff in Zambia or by Zambian police to Mr Mbeje about the matter.

My information is that there were further serious irregularities in the trial of Mr Mbeje. After he was handed over by the ANC to the Zambian authorities on 18 August, the case proceeded with unheard of speed through the Zambian courts, resulting in Mr Mbeje's final conviction in October, two months later. Such dispatch deserves investigation in its own right. It suggests a high level decision to proceed with the charge against Mr Mbeje as a matter of exceptional urgency. This in turn suggests that non-judicial criteria governed the preferment of charges.

In the second instance, I understand that the case was dismissed when initially brought to court. (Communication from Mr Linda Mbeje, 19.1.92) My understanding is that this decision was then appealed by the state to another judge, sitting without jury, when it proceeded to trial and conviction. In the light of the non-prosecution of members of the ANC security department for a far more damaging offence committed against Mr Mbeje himself, this appeal by the state suggests the possibility of a prior decision behind the scenes at a high level to secure conviction by whatever means necessary. Under the circumstances, the decision to appeal the case might warrant investigation, as also the speed with which other business at high court level must have been set aside to hear this case.

Thirdly, the person who would normally have appeared as the principal witness — the victim of the alleged assault, a woman named Esther — apparently did not appear in court at all. I understand that this woman is the daughter of a Zambian father and a South African mother, and that she is now living in South Africa. Mr Mbeje was living with her at the time he was assaulted and abducted in September 1987. (Statement by Siphon Mbeje, 29.12.87) By the time of the assault and abduction of Mr

Mbeje in August 1989 he was no longer living with Esther but with Ms Choobe. It is not possible to guess the exact nature of Esther's feelings towards Mr Mbeje at the time of the state's decision to prosecute him on a charge of having allegedly assaulted her, supposedly in November 1988. But doubt must be thrown on her own desire to prosecute by a letter written by her to Mr Mbeje's brother, Linda, in London on 29.8.89. (The letter is in the collection of documents presented to the British Foreign Office and the Zambian High Commission in London). This letter, written after Esther had seen Mr Mbeje (then in the hands of the Zambian authorities) on Friday 25 August, concludes with the extraordinary words: 'I am prepared to die for him'. She refers to his abductors in the ANC as 'this [these] terrorists' and states that she had approached his lawyer, Mr Banda.

Even had she appeared in court as a witness, doubt would surely have been thrown on her testimony by this letter, written immediately before the decision to prosecute must have been taken. That she apparently was not called as a witness suggests that the alleged assault on her was a mere device by which to keep Mr Mbeje in prison. There is the grave suspicion that she was herself a victim of coercion on the part of unknown parties interested in securing conviction of Mr Mbeje. Taking everything into consideration, I think that Mr Mbeje was the victim of a miscarriage of justice deliberately perpetrated by individuals at a high level in the Zambian state and its judicial system, and that it is essential not only for Mr Mbeje but also for judicial conditions in Zambia that the matter be investigated and the conviction set aside...

Yours sincerely,

*Paul Trewhela*

Co-editor, *Searchlight South Africa*

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## NATIONALISATION: A MATTER OF SLOGANS?

Baruch Hirson

[In 1775, during the great Portuguese earthquake, one confidence trickster was seen selling 'anti-earthquake' pills. When told that his pills would not help the victims he replied: 'What would you put in its place?']

There was no earthquake of significance in Kliptown in 1956 when the Freedom Charter was drafted and accepted amid acclamation. This was the programme on which the Congress movement was to base its claims. Standing high in its demands was the nationalisation of the main sources of wealth of the country. It looked good on print: the demand that the mines, the banks, big business and the land should become the property of the people. There was no earthquake but, when questioned on the feasibility of nationalisation, the answer was obvious: 'What would you put in its place?'

On 28–31 May 1992, at a four-day gathering in Kimberley, the ANC effectively dropped nationalisation, which stood as its central demand for 36 years, as an essential issue in the negotiation process. It is now only an option, to be applied where practicable and to take its place alongside 'a dynamic private sector'.

This departure from the Freedom Charter had been signalled by the leadership for some time, but there were people in the Congress movement who saw no alternative to the call for nationalisation. Keith Coleman, one time 'consultant to trade unions, community and political groups' (whatever that involves) and currently 'consultant in strategic planning', offered to put the subject in perspective in a new book on the subject. This work was originally submitted for the Master's degree in business administration and, in the 'oldest profession' of the academic, Coleman presents his points as an 'objective' investigator. That is, he offers pros and cons for the policy, claiming neutrality in his arguments. Yet, without a doubt, Coleman's conclusions support the view that the only way to achieve justice and the righting of the wrongs of the past is through the nationalisation that the ANC has now put on hold.<sup>1</sup> Nationalisation as a concept has embarrassed members of the ANC and its opponents ever since it was written into the Freedom Charter, at Kliptown, by an over-zealous member of the Communist Party. That person, who was on the drafting committee, was subsequently wrapped over the knuckles by his party leaders for inserting this slogan into the Congress programme.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this anecdote, apparently unknown to Keith Coleman, is that he embarks on a discussion of 'nationalisation' in South Africa in his book, without knowing how or why it originated in the ANC programme.

Even if exonerated for not knowing the origin of that clause in the programme of the ANC, Coleman's reading of the Freedom Charter should have warned him that the eclecticism of the economic programme needed further investigation.

Writing about the Freedom Charter in 1985, two leading communists (and supporters of the ANC) inside South Africa said:

...the Charter has been attacked as bourgeois or petit-bourgeois...Alternatively, it has sometimes been defended as a socialist document. Our view is that the Charter is a people's document...<sup>3</sup>

This then, like so many things out of Africa, is something new: not capitalist and not socialist, but a people's, yes...a people's document. This strange document, transmuted into an economy and parroting the abortive 'people's democracies' of eastern Europe, was to be the basis of the new South Africa. Obviously, in line with Stalinist policy, these authors added two riders to this non-socialist/non-capitalist document: it was 'anti monopoly-capital' and 'anti-imperialist'.<sup>4</sup> What nobody is told, as nobody was told in Eastern Europe, was: Which class would control this new state with a people's document: capitalist or worker? One or other class must take control of the state and, if it is the capitalists, then the class control is obvious. Unless, that is, the Stalinists intend taking control and installing their own *nomenklatura* to control the country.

Perhaps Coleman did not do his homework, and did not read this explanation of the Charter, but he might have found it out for himself if he had studied his subject more carefully. The first section on the economy was a mix of nationalisation and the right to a place inside a capitalist framework. It stated:

*The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!*

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people;

The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole;

All other industries and trades shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people;

All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and enter all trades, crafts and professions.

Precisely what kind of a state this was to be is unclear. Who are 'the people'? How are they to own the wealth? What is the 'control' that will assist 'the people'? How does this fit with the right to trade, to manufacture, and so on? This catch-all set of provisions says everything, and says nothing. It barely scratches at the surface of South Africa's economic problems, yet, such is the smokescreen around the Charter, that it was never subjected to scrutiny, never criticised, and nevertheless held up as the basis of the struggle for 'freedom'.

Before becoming further embroiled in the details of the Freedom Charter, I want to return to Coleman's comments on nationalisation historically. Coleman is aware of the need to provide such a background and starts by quoting a short passage from a work in which, Coleman says, Lenin put 'the classical socialist position on nationalisation', namely,

The struggle of the working class against the capitalist class...can only end in the passage of political power into the hands of the working class, the transfer

of political power into the hands of the working class, the transfer of all the land, instruments, factories, machines and mines to the whole of society for the organisation of socialist production.<sup>5</sup>

This is not the sum total of Lenin's ideas. He had more to say on the control of production by the working class, and in this case a working class that was untrained, uncultured and not used to the work place. I will return to Lenin's solutions below. What is important is that Lenin was stating a general socialist position and not discussing a the mechanisms of establishing socialist production. That had to be elucidated and tested against reality, and had to be evaluated in terms of international pressures on the state. This was a task that Preobrazhensky and Trotsky undertook in the 1920s. Their contributions to the debate was concealed for decades because of the ban on their publications inside Russia. The left opposition, to which they belonged, discussed the difficulties faced by a state in which 'planning' would have to compete with and overcome the 'free market'. That is: 'either planning defeats the market, or the market wins. If neither wins there would be only degenerate forms of both'.<sup>6</sup> Whether they were correct in their arguments can be debated (and they differed in the way they tackled the problem), but they cannot be ignored in any discussion of the problems of production in Russia. To quote this passage by Lenin, without elaboration, is palpably absurd.

However, in line with Joe Slovo's pamphlet *Has Socialism failed?* and the South African Communist Party, Coleman discovered that:

Variations of classical (*sic*) socialism have recently emerged, led by Gorbachev and his *perestroika*, and following the collapse of the Eastern European economies. 'New socialism' distinguishes between central planning and command economies, both of which are based upon nationalised economies, but which operate according to different impulses. While the top-heavy state planning of the command economy is characterised by top-down orders for production, central planning allows greater flexibility for nationalised industries to respond to market forces, while always sticking to an overall economic plan. (p 7)

There is little sense in this last passage. There was no 'classical' socialism, and the 'new socialism', if that is meant to designate Gorbachev's nightmare, was speedily overtaken by events. Lest there be any confusion, let me reiterate: socialism does not operate through nationalised economies but on the basis of socialised production; planning under socialism is ultimately opposed to market forces, both internally and internationally, until socialism is established on a global plane; responsibility for planning must be devolved and the working class must dissolve itself as a class.

It must be stressed that Lenin and the Bolshevik Party were concerned about the nature of the economy inside a state in which they had set out to establish a socialist system of production (as indicated in Coleman's quotation). Not the hybrid 'people's document' (or 'peoples' democracies) of Suttner and Cronin. There was no discussion of nationalisation in a capitalist society in the Bolshevik literature.

Nor could there be. There have been few societies in which there was no nationalisation, and that economic strategy has never been an instrument for *socialising* production. It also has never been used for redistributing wealth. Members of the British Labour Party, who believed that nationalisation would improve the lot of the working class, found that this was not the case. Yet, the 'redistribution of wealth' is central to Coleman's arguments, and in his two interviews (with Mr Joe Slovo and Mr Kennedy Maxwell, past President of the Chamber of Mines, reproduced in the book), it appears as the essential issue.

If nationalisation has ever led to the redistribution and equalization of wealth in a capitalist economy, Coleman has still to adduce proof. If it does not, then much of Coleman's argument falls away. That is, this book does not provide a well reasoned argument for nationalisation. Rather, it seems that its objective is to provide a propaganda leverage for those who still believe, with the problematical Freedom Charter, that this was a viable economic strategy for a non-apartheid society. Yet neither the economic or the political structure of that non-apartheid state is defined. Given the determination of the de Klerk government to maintain a 'free market' economy (one of the points that was stressed in the whites-only referendum in 1992, so avidly supported by the ANC), the possibility of the government and its white electorate accepting nationalisation is questionable. This is not discussed and leaves the entire argument in the air.

The question of nationalisation in South Africa during the past 80 years is obviously relevant in the discussion. Aware of this, Coleman quotes D F Malan (later Prime Minister of South Africa) as saying in 1943 that the state would have to intervene 'to help the Afrikaner achieve his rightful share of South Africa's economic cake'. (p 3) Much of the economy was nationalised before 1943, and more was to follow, leading to a state sector of about 40 per cent in both employment and Gross Domestic Product. Afrikaner capital expanded and many more jobs were secured for whites. However, the share in the economic cake went mainly to the new rich (including Afrikaners who sought a place for themselves in the economy) and the white workers secured little benefit from the nationalised sector of the economy.<sup>7</sup> Now, said Coleman, the Mass Democratic Movement had called in 1989 for the nationalisation of another 40 per cent of the economy.

Without examining all the projected areas in which nationalisation was to be effected, two sectors will be examined, because of their centrality to the economy and because of popular clamour. The first, and probably the most difficult question, is that of land nationalisation. Here is the clause from the Freedom Charter:

**The Land Shall be Shared by those who Work it!**

Restriction of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided among those who work it, to banish famine and land hunger:

The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams to save the soil and assist the tillers;

Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land;

All should have the right to occupy the land wherever they choose;

People shall not be robbed of their cattle, and forced labour and farm prisons shall be abolished.

After promising to re-divide all the land, the drafters of this section inserted the last clause to meet some of the problems confronted by peasants and farm labourers in the 1950s. The demands were vague and provided no direction for people locked in conflict with the authorities. However even if the clause had been more carefully drafted this provided no blueprint for a land programme.

Coleman appears to be as neutral on this subject as he is elsewhere. Yet, once again, in line with the Freedom Charter, he seeks radical measures to solve the land question. The issue at hand here, he says, is different from that of industries or mining, because those occupations came after conquest: in the case of land, justice can only be done by returning the land to those who were dispossessed.

Coleman's discussion of the problem (pp 65–67) reduces the subject to that of confiscation in favour of those who had been dispossessed during the apartheid years. This refers, in Coleman's discussion, to 'land occupied by white farmers after black resettlement, black spot land, or land owned by absentee landowners'. Quite where the boundaries of this repossession stop is not clear, but what is proposed falls far short of the main demand of the Freedom Charter. It is not my purpose to argue that the Charter's clause was correct; only to note that this has been considerably reduced in scope. But that is only part of the problem, whether the confiscation is with or without compensation. Returning this land might be equitable, but it hardly fits the definition of nationalisation. Nobody can doubt the difficulty of responding to demands that expropriated land be returned, but that is a different question to the problem posed by nationalisation, even if the state is the instrument for such return.

A more radical approach from within Congress ranks came from Tessa Marcus, in her book *Modernising Super-Exploitation*. There she called for 'agrarian transformation...[which requires] changes in both land ownership and production relations on the land,' and for this 'the state will have a key role to play...in a newly liberated, democratic South Africa.'<sup>8</sup>

When turning to the key question, that of the gold mines, Coleman does not discuss the problems that must be faced in the light of the falling profitability, or even bankruptcy of the marginal mines, as mentioned by Mr Maxwell. This must be one of the greatest challenges facing a new South Africa and I will return to it below. As for the problems of administration, or the personnel able to manage nationalised mines, Coleman avoids the issue. Instead, he turns to the strange notion that nationalisation, in which the state takes control, can be the first step to socialisation. That must rest on the assumption that capitalism has been overthrown, otherwise it has to be explained how a capitalist state, even if governed by a black majority, will agree to a socialist transformation.

Despite its 'popular-style' presentation, Coleman does not even approach the most fundamental problem. Who is going to effect the nationalisation? From that will follow the issue of implementation. In the absence of a working class able to

overthrow the state and take possession of the means of production, all economic relations must remain in the hands of the capitalist class. Those who control the new state might erect a social welfare system, providing a modicum of benefit for the inhabitants: that at least will be better than the present system, as long as it lasts, but it does not ensure control of the commanding heights of the economy by the workers. It also means that the operation of such welfare will only remain in place as long as the capitalists feel insecure, to be whittled away as the political and social climate alters. This I take to be the ABC of political economy.

The only consequence of nationalisation, if this is implemented under the control of capitalists, or by the nationalist movement(s), will be to tie the workers, on the land, the mines and in manufacturing, to the state. It does not provide any further benefits for the workers. Because this must be obvious, the removal of nationalisation from the ANC programme can only be welcomed. It ends the illusion that the wealth of the country will be in the hands of the workers or peasants.

Whatever else might be said about the Bolsheviks in 1917, they intended that the nationalisation of the means of production should be placed in the hands of those who actually did the work. They also believed that the programme of nationalisation would be introduced by the workers and peasants seizing the factories and the land. The process was more complex at that time. The owners of factories had abandoned their plants and it was essential, if goods were to be made available to the people, that the workers take control so that production should be resumed. In like fashion many landowners fled and the land had to be worked by the peasants who were left behind. These factors, together with the civil war that followed, led to massive economic dislocation. In the period that followed workers stripped the factories and stores of all consumable or saleable materials. The situation on the land was a thousand fold worse: after a period of requisitioning to keep the army and urban population alive, peasants retaliated by withholding their grain and livestock. The Bolsheviks retaliated by issuing draconic regulations. These were acts of desperation which, in turn, led to proposals that were profoundly anti-socialist. In the absence of production, and the rejection of his proposal that the party allow the introduction of a market, Trotsky urged that the trade unions be used to regiment the workers. At a later date, Lenin urged that Taylorism be used in the factories to impose discipline on the workers.<sup>9</sup>

However, the basic concept remained: the workers, once they had acquired the necessary ability, had to take over control of production. That is not what the Freedom Charter envisaged, and that was not what the ANC proposed. If and when the workers do take control of the wealth of the country it will be for them to decide how the factories, or mines, or land, should be worked. It will be for socialists to offer plans for the better running of these concerns. Once again this is the ABC of change, but this was not what was envisaged in the Freedom Charter.

All that Coleman says (p 133) is that:

...a key to the success of nationalisation depends, at the outset, on workers being accorded far more power to participate in key decision-making

processes than they have at present, and management and government accepting that this should be the case. Success also depends on workers' acceptance that management's function is specialised, and that responsibility and authority must be delegated to management to carry out that function.

After this it can only be asked whether anybody knows where those anti-earthquake pills can be bought.

*The State of the Economy: The Economy of the State*

After the 'theorising' is over (and that is pathetically thin in the books that are currently available) the issues have to be discussed in the context of the economy of the country, both in general terms and in looking at specific sectors of the economy. I confine myself here to the local economy. When set against the depression that has overwhelmed the world economy, a factor that concerns every economic survey of the country, the situation is even bleaker.

When viewed over the past decade, the South African economy is grim. In a recent research paper Terrence Moll, a South African economist, now at Cambridge, began on the following note:

We know the blunt facts. Real GDP per capita has fallen to early 1970s levels, whites enjoy incomes many times that of Africans, only one in eight work seekers find a formal sector job, malnutrition and measles prey on children from poor rural families. The apartheid economy is in a mess. Can it be restructured during the next decade or so, to achieve sustained recovery while facilitating the democratisation of society?

The choice of economic indicators in Moll's passage can be questioned. The rural economy has all but collapsed in large parts of the country, the trek from the land has become an almighty rush, the work force on the goldmines has been almost halved, unemployment is endemic, inflation is rampant and there is no housing for millions who camp in shantytowns on the outskirts of the townships. The social structures of society are breaking down, evident in the crime wave raging through the society; the health facilities are under severe strain or collapsing; education in many regions has broken down; and the law of the jungle reigns in many townships. But the drift of Moll's statement captures the drama of the collapse. If nothing is done, the horrors of places like Rio de Janeiro will be eclipsed by the situation across South Africa. In Rio children without homes can live in sewers, in South African townships there are not even such outlets.

The solution to the political problem of this country, which has emerged from apartheid but has not solved the social issues, are as much political as economic. There can be no solution to the problems confronting the economy if there is no equitable political solution, and political stability will depend on what is achieved in the economies of Southern Africa — and this includes Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana, and some of the surrounding 'frontline' states. Although

South Africa has built up an advanced technological base over the past 60 years, this cannot hide two important facts:

1) Although it is capable, in good years, of producing much of its own food requirements, it is not good agricultural country. After the drought of the past two years it cannot feed more than a small part of the population and its export earnings from agriculture have dried up.

2) Its initial economy, built on the mining of gold, led to a disproportionate reliance on this one commodity. That was a crucial industry in securing foreign exchange and providing state revenue — but the fall in the price of gold, after the sharp rise in the 1970s, has had a severe effect on the country's economy. This has been compounded by the steep decline in profitability of the so-called marginal mines, constituting approximately one quarter of the total.

The poor state of the country's land was obvious during the 1930s. Among the debilitating conditions listed by the Department of Agriculture report of 1943 were: the low and extremely variable rainfall; the denudation of soil following drought, dust storms and torrential rains; a lack of internal waterways; stock and malignant plant diseases; uneconomic subdivision of land; poor farming methods; the dearth of state agricultural services; and unsatisfactory marketing and distribution services. Even more serious, less than six per cent of all land was under cultivation and less than fifteen per cent could ever be cultivated...and that desert conditions were encroaching on land through overstocking or land exhaustion.

When that report was compiled the estimated population of South Africa was ten million. One third of the two million whites lived in the rural areas and over three quarters of the seven million Africans. The population of South Africa has expanded since then to nearly 40 million, the percentage living (or subsisting) on the land has decreased but the absolute number (until 1990, when families fled the rural areas) has risen to alarming proportions, and desert conditions or land denudation have advanced considerably.

Even if allowance is made for exaggeration on the part of the report and its failure to note that the nature of land holding was detrimental to substantial advances, these facts must be the starting point in any consideration of agricultural prospects, past or future. The land problem requires an estimation, not only of its present productivity, but also of the possibility of social transformation to meet the demands, not only of those who live and work on the land but of a population that has outstripped the productive potential of current agricultural technology.

Looking at mechanisation (mainly the use of tractors) on farms, Marcus noted the worsening conditions of the black labour force since the war, of greater exploitation and of the use of convict and casual labour (and 'bound' female and child labour) as capital intensive methods increased. Like so much of her work there are grave errors. There are vastly different problems facing different segments of the agricultural economy. In 1987, Jeremy Krikler highlighted the differences between the economies of sheep rearing, viticulture, sugar cane and fruit farming, which were relatively healthy — as compared with that of maize and

wheat which rely on heavy government subsidies. Although Marcus does mention the huge sums owed by the (white) farmers, she does not make it clear that this debt is almost exclusively a maize debt. That does not negate her conclusion that the land problem will not be solved by mechanical innovations or by the use of more casual (or convict) labour.

The situation in the gold fields, although not as intractable as stated by the mineowners, presents a problem that the ANC and its allies do not seem to have addressed. Many of the marginal mines can only be kept open (to earn vital foreign exchange) if run at an operational loss. If these are taken over by a new government, with compensation paid to the current owners (to be determined by the courts, according to ANC policy papers), the result will be disastrous. Only outright expropriation will bring dividends, and the current strength of the contending forces in South Africa make this impossible. This case highlights the general problem of advance in the country. Whether they are successful or not, the negotiations under way are being conducted on the one hand, by a government which has the power of coercion firmly in its hands, as opposed to movements which can mobilize popular forces, but lack the ability, or the will, to overthrow the existing state. And if it cannot succeed in its claims against the mines, the ANC cannot bring the other large corporations to their knees.

Despite the inability of capitalism to solve the problems of the working class — and that includes the white workers who prefer to side with the capitalists — there is no initiative to transform the nature of the struggle. At this stage in history, where the international forces of socialism are in disarray and there is little possibility of a speedy change in the political climate, this leaves the main body of workers in limbo. Their task in the coming period will be to protect the autonomy of their organizations, break with nationalist politics, and to make their claims to better working and living conditions. Above all, for more technical education so that they can prepare for a future in which they can find the strength to resume the fight with capitalism and have the necessary skills to take over the running of production.

The response of the ANC leaders to the economic situation has been supine. They were tied into a set of slogans that bore no necessary relation to their position as nationalists, removed from the workers and peasants. In making a 'correction' they have shown that their interests are not related to those of this vast constituency.<sup>10</sup> The leaders of the trade union federation, Cosatu, have not been any better. Jay Naidoo, the general secretary who master-minded Cosatu's accord with the ANC, appealed to businessmen and investors:

We are not scared to say that we are socialists. Business must understand that our members are attracted to socialism out of their daily experience and suffering. We are asking investors to discuss this with us for a compromise to be reached so that we can all be satisfied...

Our history shows we are able to compromise, reach agreements and honour these agreements. This is a lesson government must still learn. Government might be friendlier but it is still determined to impose white

domination politically and economically. It is unilaterally restructuring and refusing to negotiate this. So the problem is not on our side.

The message is clear. Only let the Cosatu leaders negotiate. They are 'able to compromise'. Then they can turn to the workers and sell the new deal, as a victory of the workers' movement.<sup>11</sup>

## References

1. Keith Coleman, *passim*.
2. I was told this story by the person who drafted the economic clause. He was subsequently expelled from the SACP, but for other reasons. He prefers to remain unnamed.
3. Suttner and Cronin, p 129.
4. *ibid*, pp 129-30.
5. *On Workers Control and the Nationalisation of Industry*, quoted by Coleman, p 7. The evolution of Lenin's thoughts on worker's control and socialism is far more complex than Coleman's brief citation would suggest. An examination of this matter would require another extended essay.
6. H H Ticktin, 'Trotsky's Political Economic Analysis of the USSR: 1929-1940', *Searchlight South Africa*, No 8, 1992.
7. White workers had certain jobs reserved for them under legislation or regulations.. However these were in occupations that were not necessarily in nationalised industries.
8. p 192. There is nothing in the text to sustain this conclusion except for the passage in the acknowledgement in which Marcus says that her book 'would not have been possible without the people of South Africa and the African National Congress, the revolutionary Vanguard of the South African national liberation movement...who provided me with an understanding of the South African social formation and the means by which to go about changing it.' That is, Marcus' book was part of another agenda for which the unsuspecting reader had not been prepared. The proposals for radical change were spelt out more fully in the ANC journal *Sechaba*, March 1990. It reported that at a seminar on the land question, in November 1989, Marcus called for the 'breaking [of] white monopoly' and a 'serious consideration to nationalisation of all the land.' Presumably the book was used as background reading to her paper — although this was not stated in the book or in the published paper.
9. By laying down strict criteria for the times required of each working operation, through 'time and motion' studies, Taylorism imposed methods of working practices on workers. Socialists outside the USSR condemned the working regimes that this entailed.
10. When Nelson Mandela addressed the World Economic Forum in Davos in February it was noted by business interests that he left out all the statements on nationalisation, and all attacks on the big conglomerates, that had been made public in the pre-Forum publication of his intended speech.
11. Quoted in *Finance Week*, 9-15 April 1992.

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## BENEATH THE BOULDER

Paul Trehwela

Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile*, James Currey, 1992.

### *A Culture of Secrecy*

The 'new South Africa' emerging from the reforms of President FW de Klerk and the constitutional negotiations – suspended in mid-year in favour of a renewal of contestation – continues to be shaped on both sides by a culture of secrecy.

The banning of the Communist Party in 1950, then of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress in 1960, followed by attempts to overthrow the regime by violence beginning in 1961, set in motion this cultivation of secrecy both by the state and its major antagonists. At the time of the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, the state and the ANC in exile were governed in the last resort by security organisations accountable to no public representative body. On neither side was there any deeply grounded process of democratic accountability.

The hidden reefs of the real government of South Africa during the 1980s have come to light over the past two years. In press reports in journals such as the *Weekly Mail* and the *New Nation* in South Africa, and the *Independent* and the *Guardian* in Britain, the outline has taken shape of a monstrous military camarilla regulating the whole society. Its means have ranged from indiscriminate massacres of train passengers to selective assassination of individuals; manipulation of the mass media; training, funding and arming of hit-squads; the running of political parties; and promotion (against its opponents) of revelations of human rights abuses.

At the apex of this secret state, whose thinking embraced a 'total strategy' of political, social and military objectives, was the Directorate of Military Intelligence, the real government of South Africa during the 1980s and a vast sado-bureaucratic complex of many parts. At the height of its influence, the DMI ran the State Security Council whose decisions determined subsequent sessions of the Cabinet; entered into secret arrangements with US and British intelligence under the Reagan and Thatcher administrations; controlled the state's official death squad, the Civil Cooperation Bureau; laid waste to neighbouring Mozambique through the terror organisation Renamo, which it inherited from the former Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation; directed paramilitary formations serving to destabilise other neighbouring states such as Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and even the Seychelle islands; supervised war in Angola (one of the main theatres in the cold war globally) on behalf of the US, against Cuban troops and

Soviet advisers; controlled hit-squads from the Zulu nationalist organisation, Inkatha; and comprehensively infiltrated the ANC in exile.

The scope of its infiltration of the ANC emerges from a new book written by Stephen Ellis, director of the African Studies Centre at the University of Leiden, and Tsepo Sechaba, the pseudonym of a current member of the ANC and the SACP. Their book, *Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile*, for the first time makes available the beginnings of a reliable history of the ANC in exile.

After acquiring a doctorate at Oxford, Ellis (who is British) was editor of the London-based newsheet *Africa Confidential* from 1986 to 1991. During this time he became acquainted with Sechaba, who provided him with first-hand information about the real life of the ANC in exile. It was the kind of information that otherwise became available only to the world's intelligence agencies. During Ellis's tenure *Africa Confidential* became the most informed and unprejudiced source of public information about major developments within the ANC, especially involving human rights abuses.

By far the most important of the events concerning South Africa reported in *Africa Confidential* — some years after it had taken place — was the mutiny in Angola in 1984 of as many as 90 per cent of the ANC's trained troops, most of them from the generation of the 1976 school students' revolt. Angola was at this time the only country in which the ANC was involved in combat in any strength, and the main base of its army, Umkhonto we Sizwe. Acquiring information was exceptionally difficult. The ANC, the SACP and the PAC had been smashed within South Africa in the early 1960s by means of torture, indefinite detention and police infiltration. Out of this experience of defeat, and of the ruthlessness of the state, there developed a cult of secrecy in the ANC, supervised by a security department modelled largely on the KGB and the Stasi. Within the ANC this secret police force acquired the grim nickname Mbokodo, 'the boulder that crushes'. Members of the ANC who felt the harsh breath of the security department estimate that about 75 per cent of what was published in *Africa Confidential* about such matters was accurate: a very high rate, given the difficulties of reportage.

The main impetus in the formation and activity of the security department is located by Ellis and Sechaba in the need to secure the ANC's guerrilla forays into South Africa and to combat infiltration and assassination abroad. A further element, however, was the central role inside the ANC abroad of its ally, the SACP, which had a substantial secret membership within the ANC, especially in Umkhonto and still more so in the security department. Ellis and Sechaba provide detailed information on how the SACP through its secret membership was able to control important military committees, as well as the most important general conference of the ANC before its unbanning (at Kabwe, in Zambia, in 1985). The ANC in exile was subject to a strenuous attempt to enforce a very narrow ideological orthodoxy. In this, Mbokodo played a sinister part. Through its manipulation of secrecy, the hard work and dedication of its members, and its role as conduit for

Soviet arms, funds and training, the SACP became the backbone of the ANC in exile. Along with this came its role in supervising a string of prisons across the sub-continent, in Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania, Angola and Uganda: a parallel network to the prison system of the South African state.

Fear prevented any mention of the repressions of Mbokodo to outsiders, as well as a natural reluctance to reveal anything that could aid the South African state. A central demand of the mutiny in 1984, as related by Ellis and Sechaba, was for the suspension and investigation of the security department, and in particular for an inquiry into the operation of its most dreaded prison, Quatro, in northern Angola. The mutineers also demanded convening of a democratic conference of the whole ANC (the last such conference had been held 15 years previously) and their transfer to fight in South Africa instead of in Angola.

### *The Insecurity of Security*

Ellis and Sechaba argue that having adopted the methods and mentality of their opponents, the Securocrats of the ANC in their own way helped to undermine the military campaign. Loyal and able members who could think for themselves were branded as 'enemy agents', and imprisoned, killed or barred from responsible posts. There was another result too. The climate of rigid orthodoxy, in which separation of public and private thoughts became the rule, was an ideal culture for the rise to senior positions of real South African government agents, especially in Mbokodo itself. So too was the presence within Mbokodo structures during the 1980s of a sub-continental criminal network, engaged in the smuggling of drugs and gems from Angola through Zambia into southern Africa and the reverse flow of traffic in stolen cars 'liberated' in South Africa itself. (Expensive German models were especially favoured, the so-called 'German take-aways').

Sechaba and Ellis give details of the careers of several individuals believed to have been real South African state moles within the ANC. They do not, however, draw together a number of threads in their book to show that this is a legacy which has now returned to South Africa, with the end of exile. They report the violent death of Zakithi Dlamini (a member of the security department) in Zambia in 1989, and say that this was suspected to have been an 'inside job to silence him'. They state that Dlamini's own investigations at the time of his death were believed to have pointed 'towards the higher echelons'. (p 192)

The death of Dlamini, however, was one of a number of violent deaths in Zambia on the eve of Mandela's release, frequently involving members of the security department. These followed the arrest and debriefing of a former senior Umkhonto commander known as 'Comrade Cyril', who was discovered by ANC security to have been a career South African policeman. As well as this supposed real 'enemy agent', a number of Mbokodo interrogators responsible for Cyril's debriefing were then murdered in Zambia, one after the other, frequently by use of a poison

employed previously by the former Rhodesian security forces and the DMI. Oliver Tambo, the ANC president in exile, is believed to have ordered a halt to the investigation into Cyril's allegations, as the only way to stop the killings. In the minds of ANC members in exile, the purpose of the killings was to prevent leakage of information about highly placed state agents, probably senior figures in Mbokodo itself.<sup>1</sup>

This chain of deaths, on the eve of the unbanning of the ANC, raises the possibility that among the returned heroes of the exile might be at least one senior official who served as a real agent for South African military intelligence. The spectre of the DMI sits over the shoulders of both sides at the conference table.

The authors of *Comrades Against Apartheid* make plain that theirs is a provisional account, given the paucity of accessible sources for their subject. The book provides a wealth of detail on the inner life of the ANC and the SACP in exile, greatly more than was previously available. Chapters on the early history of both organisations do not purport to give anything but a general historical overview, and there is scope for disagreement of interpretation. The section dealing with the mutiny in Umkhonto and the character of the ANC prison system rests heavily on the article by participants in the mutiny appearing in *Searchlight South Africa* No 5.

The many factual errors in the earlier section of the book indicate that the authors have not been rigorous in their investigations of the earlier period of the Communist Party's existence. How far this applies to the more recent period is uncertain. Without having party documents this cannot yet be ascertained. Nonetheless there is more than sufficient material in the book to keep the reader's attention, and to allow for an appraisal of what South Africa might look like if it ever fell into the hands of an unrestrained ANC, or ANC-SACP alliance.

As such the book helps erode an enduring myth, and permits access to important real knowledge. For those interested in the history of the ANC and SACP in exile, it makes essential reading.

## Note

1. A more detailed account of the climate of tension in Lusaka, the ANC headquarters in exile on the eve of the unbanning of the ANC, can be found in this issue of *Searchlight South Africa* in 'A Can of Worms in Lusaka: The Imprisonment of Hubert Siphho Mbeje'.

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