

MRS MANDELA, 'ENEMY AGENTS!' . . . AND THE ANC WOMEN'S LEAGUE

Paul Trehwela

The Drive to the Right

Mrs Winnie Mandela continues to provide the stuff of comment. She remains a formidable political force, despite her conviction for kidnapping the murdered Stompie Moeketsie Seipei and three other youths, and the scandal concerning her private life.

The Appeal Court judgement on her conviction for kidnapping and assault was a bad omen. No effort was made to bring to court a crucial witness still held without trial in prison in Zambia, Katiza Cebekhulu. He had expressed willingness to give evidence alleging her involvement in the murder of 14-year old Seipei, for which the trainer of her 'football club' has been found guilty. No country has been prepared to offer asylum to Cebekhulu, and he has refused normal repatriation to South Africa on the very likely grounds that he will be killed.

Political expediency reigned. While concurring that Mrs Mandela (the senior figure in the case) was guilty of kidnapping the four youths (including Seipei), Justice M Corbett, the Chief Justice, found that the trial judge had erred in finding her guilty on charges of being an accessory to assault. Her five-year sentence was replaced with a trivial fine, plus a smaller sum in compensation payable to each of the three surviving victims. (The 'Mother of the Nation' got spared from prison, the mother of Seipei . . . nothing).

Mrs Mandela's minion, Mrs Xoliswa Falati, then went to prison for two years (instead of five). From prison, Mrs Falati continues to insist that she lied in the original trial. She has repeated to a Democratic Party MP, Lester Fuchs, that she lied in providing Mrs Mandela with an alibi for the time of the assault, leading to Seipei's murder, 'because I was scared of her'.¹ Her disavowal played no part in the Appeal Court judgement. It was an oddly South African verdict, on a par with the finding of death by misadventure on Imam Haroun, who 'slipped downstairs' in the 1970s while under police interrogation.

Both before and after the Appeal Court decision on 3 June, Mrs Mandela ceaselessly toured the townships and squatter camps taking up issues of poverty, deprivation and oppression, and especially the carnage wreaked by supporters of Inkatha and the police. By default of the national leadership of the ANC and of the tiny handfuls of socialists, she has made herself once again the voice of the dispossessed. On one occasion, with her own hands, she physically freed people unjustly locked up in a police waggon. Time and again, she did and said what a socialist opposition should have done and said: but with a difference.

Long before Mrs Mandela, this journal argued that in pursuing political power through negotiations, the ANC leadership had abandoned the constituency that brought it to the gates of office — workers, the rural poor, the majority of township residents, squatters. The effects of the world recession, the terror in the townships and the absorption of ANC leaders with the white political and business elite presented Mrs Mandela with an obvious role. On the edges of the big cities, the people in the squatter camps, drawn from rural migrants, found in her their charismatic spokesperson. ANC leaders left the way clear for her to confront them again in this new role. Unable to provide jobs, decent housing or any means of defence for communities under assault, they permitted her to rise up before their eyes as an avenging Nemesis, as defender of the downtrodden, and the scourge of corruption and betrayal in high places.

Desperate, tormented, terrorised, effectively leaderless, the people of the squatter camps, with very little experience of urban civic conditions, have given her the means to resume her demagogic role as Evita Peron before *Los Descamisados* — the shirtless ones. The fact that Mrs Mandela was the recipient of unknown sums from dubious unknown figures while her husband was in jail, built a magnificent mansion for herself, gave support to dubious financial deals, received the accolade of *Hello!* magazine and gave warm-hearted encouragement to advocates of a capitalist future for South Africa: all this is beside the point, to these people on the margins.²

With the support of the squatter population at Phola Park on the East Rand and seconded by delegates from rural areas, she was elected chairperson of the southern Transvaal region of the South African National Civic Organisation (Sanco) in June this year, less than a week after the reduction of her sentence. Sanco has a potential constituency of millions of township and squatter camp residents as well as village people. The Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) branch which elected her is the most powerful in the organisation. This was effectively a vote by the countryside, and by recent migrants from the countryside, against representatives of the more settled population of the town. In that sociological sense, its base was not greatly different from that of Inkatha.

The influence of the urban workers, which expressed itself in the semi-socialist, syndicalist 'workerism' of the 1970s, has been in continuous decline. Dotted throughout the townships, the barracks for migrant workers have become bloody fortresses guarding the stormtroops of Inkatha — outposts of single Zulu men aimed against the family-housing of the township population — while the scrapping of apartheid legislation has brought a mass of hungry country-dwellers into their backyards. To that extent, the workers who principally organised the trade unions in the 1970s and 1980s have been subject to a massive dual assault, by lumpen and brutalised conditions deriving from the countryside. It now becomes apparent how far the hated pass laws functioned under apartheid as a kind of 'trade union' for urban workers, by keeping out the migrants from the countryside. The urban workers now

are plagued both by the continuation of the apartheid labour system (through the migrant workers' barracks, seized by Inkatha) and its abolition. A principle element in the strategy of Mrs Mandela has been to oppose one of these terms (the squatter camps) against the other (the barracks), in such a way that the more settled urban workers undergo a further decline in social influence. She represents a process of general social reaction.

The Return of a Calumny

After her original conviction and the revelations about her private life, Mrs Mandela was forced out of her post last year as director of 'social welfare' in the ANC, made to resign from the ANC National Executive Committee and confronted with suspension of the entire executive committee of the PWV region of the ANC Women's League (ANCWL), which she headed. She now returns to public office as the representative of 'civic' South Africa. It is an indication of how far this country is from any genuine civic conditions. With support from the ANC Youth League, particularly its president, Peter Mokaba, her strength lay in the fact that she 'roamed almost every squatter community on the Reef' whenever there was a conflict and was 'the most vocal' in calling for a militant response to attacks on township residents by police and Inkatha.³ It was a victory won by the incapacity and neglect of others.

In a major sense, her triumph over her enemies in the ANC — especially the secretary general, Cyril Ramaphosa — was a further outcome of the strategy of destabilisation of the ANC through massive terror pursued by Military Intelligence, Inkatha and the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging, and serves similar ends. By comparison, Nelson Mandela and other leaders appear increasingly remote from the most pressing daily needs. In the slaughter on the Rand they merely 'play Florence Nightingale'. Like President de Klerk, they visit the survivors in hospital but have 'no more power to stop the next slaughter (today? tomorrow?) than the nurses and doctors'.⁴

By contrast, her ally Peter Mokaba not only raised the chant 'Kill the farmer, kill the Boer' — the very Boers with whom Nelson Mandela is attempting to negotiate — but called on blacks to shoot the police in order to drive them out of the townships.⁵ Mokaba's rhetoric relates to an already existing state of war in the Sharpeville-Sebokeng area, where the Azanian People's Liberation Army (Apla) — the military wing of the Pan-Africanist Congress — has led township youths in shooting ambushes of police, leading to several police deaths, as well as to murders of white farmers in outlying areas. More indirectly, the call to arms relates subliminally to the massacre of innocent white civilians at a golf club at King Williams Town and in a church at Kenilworth in the western Cape.⁶

Under conditions of accelerating social disintegration, Mrs Mandela articulates a nationalist populism hostile to the 'centre' of ANC leaders grouped together with the De Klerk government. Angry and disappointed at

their miserable conditions of life after their return from exile, a grouping of MK officers has demanded that she be reinstated in the NEC. They complain that the current leaders have 'become bourgeois'.⁷ Jeremy Cronin, an SACP leader and NEC member, relates the story of a young black truck driver who told him that the real Nelson Mandela was killed in prison. Today's Mandela is a lookalike. 'He was trained for years by the Boers and finally presented to the public in 1990. The mission of this lookalike is to pretend to be against the system. But in reality he is working for it . . .'⁸

As a focus for this discontent, Mrs Mandela gives expression to conditions of serious social disorder, of a 'low-intensity civil war' in which considerations of justice and humanity count for very little. Bitter struggles within the ANC Women's League concerning her political fate provide further proof. One of her most prominent supporters has directed the charge 'enemy agents!' — a license to murder and brutality in the ANC camps in exile, and in the townships — against the national general secretary of the League, Ms Baleka Kgositsile. It is vital for democratic life that this kind of language and behaviour be understood and rejected.

The episode followed Mrs Mandela's victory in the civic elections. Immediately afterwards, the suspended executive committee of the PWV region of the ANCWL demanded to be reinstated, with her as chairperson.⁹ In July the ANCWL national executive decided to lift its suspension, with the exception of Mrs Mandela and four close supporters. These were barred for a further year, with effect from July 18. That would exclude Mrs Mandela from leadership of the Women's League until after the national elections, scheduled for 27 April next year.

It was one of these four, Ms Nompumelelo Madlala, who raised the charge 'enemy agents!' against the national leadership of the Women's League and by implication, against the ANC leadership itself. Attacking Ms Kgositsile as one of 'those exiles', she said:

We want her and her clique in the ANCWL to know that no-one will be allowed to prosecute the constitution of the ANC . . .

We are not fooled by the timing of the announcement. It is typical of the agents of the State within the organisation. This is a clear sign of how infiltrated the organisation is.¹⁰

Irrespective of the manner in which the PWV executive was suspended, the resurrection by Ms Madlala of the charge 'enemy agent' against political rivals is an appalling degradation of political life. This was the means by which loyal ANC members were tortured, murdered and imprisoned in exile, and atrocities committed in the townships. The charge that was used by leaders in exile to silence their own members, and by Imbokodo officers to force schoolgirls into sexual relations, has now come full circle to plague the executive of the Women's League.

Women can of course play the demagogue as evilly as men. In order to create humane and sensible conditions for political activity in South Africa, the ANCWL is obliged — in its own interests — to investigate the conditions

in which the charge 'enemy agents!' was used to coerce defenceless young women in exile and to suppress those who, to their honour, tried to protect them. Women were the first to stand up against Mrs Mandela and the terror of her football club in Soweto. They were often the most humane of the ANC leaders in exile.¹¹ It may well be women who first call a halt to this semi-fascist method of political control.

There is no lack of 'politically correct' confusion on the issue. A striking example is a long, illustrated, two page article on Mrs Mandela in the *Weekly Journal*, a newspaper circulating mainly among black people in Britain, written by a South African journalist, Nokwanda Sithole.¹² Ms Sithole's interview is conducted and written entirely from Mrs Mandela's point of view. It was published under the title: 'Wiping the tears of a Nation. Is this the future leader of South Africa? Defiant, beautiful and unbroken, Winnie Mandela remains one of the most powerful activists in the world'.

The proven charge of kidnapping is dismissed by the writer as mere 'allegations'. Speaking of members of the 'Football Club', whom she boarded in her house, Mrs Mandela is approvingly quoted:

If they [the boys in the Club] robbed and raped it was not because Winnie Mandela was on a campaign to harass the community; it was because of who they were before they came to my house.

Another ugly South African myth is being invented. Rape, murder and the kidnapping of young people are to become non-issues, if the politics of nationalist populism requires it. Instead of the interests of women, of workers, of township dwellers and the rural poor being taken up and articulated within an ethos of humanism and respect for basic cultural values, the murder of a teenager at the hands of the major domo of an international political celebrity becomes excusable. An MK commander calls for Mrs Mandela's return to the NEC on the grounds that 'there are people in the ANC, indeed in most parties, who have authorised killings. . .'.¹³ So that's all right then! While Mrs Mandela celebrates the reduction in her sentence with champagne, the mother of the murdered Stompie Seipei is banned from speaking to the press by the ANC deputy regional secretary in the little town where she lives. This was even though she had previously agreed to comment.¹⁴ Some women are apparently more equal than others.

The Chameleon of Fascist Ideology

Mrs Mandela and her supporters are not fascists, as the brutes of the AWB certainly are. But 'liberation' nationalism, with its multiple variants in the post-war period, moves across a spectrum reaching at one extreme towards fascism of the populist type from the early days of Mussolini, when Italy was projected as the 'proletarian nation' exploited and deprived by the 'decadent plutocracies'. It operates within an ensemble of discourses that has been described by Ernesto Laclau, following the Italian stalinist leader Palmiro Togliatti, as the 'chameleon' of fascist ideology. The English sociologist Colin

Mercer has reworked Laclau's argument. He writes that fascism in Italy operated

not at the level of *class* struggle but rather in the area of *popular-democratic* struggle. Thus by virtue of its active 'anti-nature' — anti-liberal, anti-democratic, anti-pacifist, anti-communist, anti-compromise, but above all *anti-power bloc* nature — fascism was able to articulate to its own discourses an ensemble of radical, jacobin and popular positions, and mobilise them against the 'power bloc' of an exhausted and over-compromised liberal regime.¹⁵

Anyone who imagines that Laclau's and Mercer's thoughts concerning fascism are utterly remote from the consensus being developed in South Africa around Mrs Mandela does not understand the radical, plebeian appeal of Mussolini in Italy, or Peronism in Argentina. The Italian historian Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi has noted, in particular, that there has been 'no State demagogy so successful as Fascism in getting women into the streets as a mobilised political force',¹⁶ and that women played a very prominent role in attacks on socialist and communist organisations in the early days of fascism. With the memory of the 'Football Club' never far away, Mrs Mandela's endorsement of the occupation of ANC offices by women from the squatter camps and her supporter's use of the term 'enemy agent' suggest a sinister logic.

This makes clear that women's organisations in South Africa cannot avoid the issues of the ANC camps in exile. While a few young women have become 'political princesses' under the new dispensation (Mrs Mandela's daughter Zinzi among them), the great majority of women in South Africa are in the same hardship as before: more often, in worse. There can only be ominous results if women's organisations fudge the issues in the trial of Mrs Mandela and the sexual abuse of young women in exile. If they shut their eyes to these matters, they will fail to defend women's interests in other ways as well.

The issues of the exile — the history of that charge, 'enemy agent!' — must be placed before the Women's League.

References

1. *Independent*, 16 June 1993.
2. Mrs Mandela's purely bourgeois 'hope for a shattered nation' was examined in *Searchlight South Africa* No 2 in February 1989, pp 3-4.
3. *New Nation*, 18 June 1993.
4. John Carlin, *Independent*, 3 August 1993.
5. *Guardian*, 13 August 1993.
6. Whether these atrocities were carried out by Apla or the destabilisation strategists of Military Intelligence seems almost beside the point.
7. *City Press*, 27 June 1993.
8. *Guardian Weekly*, 23 April 1993.

9. The suspension by the national leadership came about in May last year — for disloyalty, and disruptive behaviour — because of Mrs Mandela's sponsorship of a takeover of offices at ANC headquarters by a group of women from the squatter camps.
10. *Sowetan*, 19 July 1993.
11. It was Mrs Gertrude Shope, not Chris Hani, who relieved the suffering of prisoners at Pango camp in Angola, after the mutiny.
12. 1 July 1993.
13. *City Press*, 27 June 1993.
14. *Star*, 3 June 1993.
15. Mercer, p 214.
16. Quoted in Mercer, p 232.

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- Colin Mercer, 'Fascist Ideology' (1985), in James Donald and Stuart Hall (eds), *Politics and Ideology*, Open University Press, 1986.
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WOMEN AND SWAPO

INSTITUTIONALISED RAPE IN SWAPO'S PRISONS

Paul Trehwela

If unacceptable treatment of women was the norm in the ANC in exile, even more atrocious behaviour took place in the Namibian nationalist organisation Swapo, and was ignored by its international supporters. Literally hundreds of exiled Swapo members were imprisoned by its security department in pits in the ground at Lubango in southern Angola, sometimes for up to nine years. Scores of women shared this experience.

The story is told by two twin sisters, Panduleni and Ndamona Kali, in an interview in *Searchlight South Africa* No 4 (February 1990). What the editors did not fully realise at the time was that women members of Swapo imprisoned in the pits at Lubango were sexually at the mercy of their male guards. There was often no way to secure minimal needs without the guards having sex with their prisoners, and the women were subject to constant threats. The Swapo prison system, about which the churches and the United Nations kept silent, was an institutionalised form of rape. When they arrived back in Namibia, women prisoners were often too ashamed to speak of the degradation to which they had been subjected.

When some of these women became pregnant it was worse. They gave birth to the children of their guards at the bottom of the pits. And then the