

# YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION



## South Africa

by Leo Raditsa

Everybody knows somewhere inside him that South Africa, since 1984, and really for a generation, has been a set piece in the bloody farce we call “revolution.” The one-sidedness of the farce betrays our unacknowledged unease: except for a classic article in *Commentary* by Paul Johnson and a few other pieces, not a word has been said for that country. Recently, a reporter for a major TV network told a friend of mine that there has to be another side to the story in South Africa. It had taken him five years—no, probably his whole life—to ask himself that question.

We welcome revolutions because the fear of war is so strong in us that we cannot distinguish just wars from unjust (except in Afghanistan). We take revolutions for change—the French Revolution mistaught us that—but they are actually our word for conquest that will not call itself by its proper name. This is a lesson the war for Europe that followed the French Revolution should have taught us.

Since the Second World War, these masked conquests we call revolutions have sought, first of all, to break the minds of people outside the countries they attack. Totalitarianism rarely conquers a country before it has won the acquiescence of the world outside. Totalitarian conquest works largely through bluff, through the intimidation of people and governments who have little immediate cause for fear. The question the future will ask of the 20th century, if we overcome totalitarianism, is why it took so long for us to call

bullies by their proper names.

In contrast to conquests that wear revolution’s mask, real revolutions—a people’s repudiation of its government without instigation—are rare. After the French Revolution, they have occurred mostly in totalitarian countries; for instance, Poland. They have all been decidedly against violence, for they see the cowardice and weakness of the regimes they oppose, and have a defiance, confidence, and strength barely imaginable in free countries.

Two characteristics mark the reporting on South Africa since 1984: the absence of serious attention to the changes taking place, and suppression of the evidence of a concerted strategy on the part of the South African Communist Party (SACP), the African National Congress (ANC), and its sister organization in South West Africa, the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO), to overthrow the South African government. The reforms taking place since 1978 were only acknowledged after the May 1987 election showed Conservative Party advances that might threaten them. The many documents, trial testimony, and so on, showing the SACP’s strategy, its infiltration of the ANC and SWAPO, and the training of youths, not only in Angola, Zambia, and Tanzania, but in East Germany, Cuba, and the Soviet Union, have been ignored. In the United States, the most striking suppression has been of the testimony of former SWAPO and ANC members before Senator Jeremiah Denton’s Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism in Washington in 1982, printed along with many SWAPO-captured documents in two thick volumes entitled *The Role of the Soviet Union, Cuba, and East Germany in Foment-*

---

*Leo Raditsa is the author of Prisoners of a Dream: The South African Mirage (Prince George Street Press), just published. He teaches at St. John’s.*



ing *Terrorism in Southern Africa*. The ANC's murder of the chief witness on the SACP at the Denton hearings, Bartholomew Hlapane (in Soweto, a few months after he testified), was also ignored by the press in the United States, except for *The Washington Times*.

The suppression of evidence about the ANC, SWAPO, and the SACP, and the disregard of reforms, are connected. The denial of change makes it possible to ignore the strategy that wanted to stop such changes in order to show that violent revolution was the way out.

The more things moved in South Africa and South West Africa, the more the violence and international campaign increased, as Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the Chief Minister of KwaZulu, best understood. In a classic letter to Reverend Leon Sullivan in May 1987 he wrote: "Those who want victories by violence fear democratic developments, and they will scream and protest the loudest on the very eve of victory through negotiation."

Steve Biko had perceived ten years earlier the readiness to change that Buthelezi knows the violence dreads. Biko had called the atmosphere in Vorster's South Africa "vibrant with change": "What I mean here is that both sides—that is now Black and White—see the need for a solution in a sense. Both sides reject the present situation."

Biko had been against violence, demonstrations, and confrontations, and for negotiations, because he knew Africans had to take responsibility for themselves before they could take change. Like Buthelezi, he knew the servility of demonstrations, an idea that is all but incomprehensible to the West today. Biko also knew change could only come *through* the government, not by destroying it. That is not only common sense, but testimony to the Africans' respect for authority, which makes it possible for them to distinguish

between defiance and violence. This is evident in the words of most of the Denton witnesses, especially those of Delphine Nokonono Kave:

I felt really betrayed [when she learned the ANC collaborated with the PLO and other terrorists], and I felt I did not want to be a part of what I did not believe in . . . And I later found that in working together with the PLO and other southern African opposition parties that we are—you know, we are—undermining the stabilizing elected governments in southern Africa, not only, you know, in southern Africa, but northern Africa, and in the independent countries, and I realized I did not want to be a part of international terrorism, and communism.

By "opposition parties" Kave meant terrorist organizations.

With the exception of Hlapane, who gave crucial testimony about the SACP in the 50's, the time Nelson Mandela and an Afrikaner of prominent family, Abraham Fischer, devised the strategy the SACP and the ANC still follow, most of the youths before the Denton Committee testified about South Africa and South West Africa after the upheaval in Soweto in 1976 that led to sporadic defiance and violence throughout South Africa for more than a year.

Before 1976, the SACP and the ANC had assumed there would not be much spontaneous defiance within South Africa, only the parody of it. Fischer made this clear in remarks to the underground SACP's Central Committee in 1963: "The main attack on South Africa will come from the outside. But it is essential that a strong local movement

remains in the country. The task of the local movement is to help direct the outside attack—and also to make it seem to be a local revolution and not a foreign aggression [Italics mine].”

Fischer had good reason not to count on wide popular defiance within South Africa, for until 1976, there had not been much of it. In fact, the SACP and the ANC turned to violence to compel adherence to “mass” demonstrations after the “complete” failure of a stay-at-home campaign held May 29-31, 1961, when South Africa became a republic. This was the testimony given at Mandela’s trial in 1963-1964 by one of the first members of the ANC’s terrorist wing: “The leaders concluded that the main mistake lay in telling the people not to use violence in picketing in order to intimidate those who were inclined to go to work.”

Later in 1961, the SACP imposed terrorism on the ANC without its consent or even knowledge, as Hlapane testified: “The military arm of the ANC, also known as Umkhonto we Sizwe, was the brainchild of the SACP, and after the decision to create it had been taken, Joe Slovo and J.B. Marks were sent by the Central Committee of the SACP to Moscow to organize arms and ammunition and to raise funds for Umkhonto we Sizwe.”

Hlapane also made it clear that in the 50’s the SACP controlled the ANC: “During the period that I served in the ANC and the SACP, no major decisions could be taken by the ANC without the concurrence and approval of the Central Committee of the SACP. Most major developments were in fact initiated by the Central Committee.” As an example of the SACP’s manipulation, not only of the ANC, but of other front groups, Hlapane gave the Freedom Charter, still the programmatic document of the ANC. The Freedom Charter had been drafted by the SACP without the knowledge of the about three thousand delegates who approved it without discussion in 1955.

The ease with which SACP manipulated other organizations also astonished a young South African student who infiltrated the SACP in the early 60’s: “During the months that followed [in 1963] I really did experience at first hand how easily secret Communist Party members on front committees can run non-Communist bodies by good tactical maneuvering on a committee—with the non-Communists never guessing that they are in fact Red puppets.” He also explained SACP dependence on fronts: “The main tactic of Communist organizations, wherever they are sadly outnumbered, is to form a ‘wide front’—a front comprising all the left-wing liberal elements they can persuade to work with them.”

In recent years the ANC and the SACP have manipulated vast fronts, not only to create the appearance of an imminent revolution abroad, but to destroy men and organizations that wanted change but not the overthrow of the government. For instance, the United Democratic Front, recently identified by a South African court as an ANC front, made “No” to reform its defining characteristic, for it opened itself to all, blacks and whites, *except those willing to work within the system*. Buthelezi’s rule of thumb for identifying ANC fronts within South Africa is support for divestment. ANC and SACP fronts have played a crucial role abroad, especially in Great Britain through the Anti-

Apartheid Movement, with well-documented connections with the SACP and the British CP, and in the United States through TransAfrica and many other organizations. The effectiveness of the ANC’s manipulation of its fronts in the United States showed in the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, passed over President Reagan’s veto on October 2, 1986: almost all the provisions of the CAA Act had been made in the ANC’s “Appeal to the World Community,” issued at a conference openly called a “Council of War” in Lusaka, Zambia, from June 15 to 23, 1985.

◆

**We welcome revolutions because  
the fear of war is so strong in us that  
we cannot distinguish just wars from  
unjust (except in Afghanistan). We take  
revolutions for change, but they are  
actually our word for conquest that will  
not call itself by its proper name.**

◆

In contrast to Hlapane, other witnesses had known a time when there was defiance in South Africa and also South West Africa, the defiance the ANC and the SACP fronts seek to exploit and crush. Here people had rebelled on their own, on nobody’s instructions. After the upheavals in Soweto and elsewhere in South Africa in 1976, people had wandered out of South West Africa and South Africa to Botswana and Angola. Abroad they had been forced or enticed into SWAPO and the ANC, often with promises of training and education. Before they knew it, they were caught in terrorist training camps in Zambia or Angola or Tanzania, and some of them were shipped to the Soviet Union or Cuba or East Germany—not the education they expected. At first impressed by Marxism-Leninism, they began to see through its rigidity, especially when they were kept from worship or forbidden friendships or forced to break with their girlfriends. Their defiance made the difference between murder and the fight for change plain to them. They were not about to be turned into killers, and they knew they were being used.

These people were the first to know the struggle between violence against change and change that has gripped South Africa since 1984: escape from ANC or SWAPO camps meant risking death. So did criticism. Kave, the most eloquent of them, and the one who suffered most, summed up this struggle in a sentence that one day may tell the history of the West: “Now I believe that people are blackmailed to be Communists.” By blackmail she meant not only the attempts to force her generation to turn Communist, but also the internationalization of the struggle against South Africa that 20 years before Fischer had called the “attack from the outside.” “The worst thing that I could not reconcile with was working with other known terrorist organizations. They may be fighting maybe for a just cause in their countries, but I do not have the facts about the history of those countries.” How many people anywhere know enough to know the difference between what they know and do not know? ◇

# Israel

by Don Feder



There is a revolution underway in Israel—an upheaval that has nothing to do with rioting Palestinians, a burgeoning Arab birthrate, or Islamic fundamentalism.

Like the movement that gave birth to the United States, this is a revolution in the name of tradition. Perhaps counterrevolution would be a more precise term. Its leaders are orthodox rabbis whose bearded, Talmud-quoting followers have brought to Israeli politics a fervor associated with Hasidic prayer.

The revolution's opening guns reverberated in the results of last fall's national elections. Four religious parties achieved significant gains in the November balloting. But after weeks of intensive negotiations, a new Likud-Labor coalition formed, and the Haredi (literally, "fearful ones"—those who fear God—as Orthodox Jews in Israel are called) were relegated to junior partner status.

Still, their electoral advances are an indication of growing influence. In 1984, religious parties polled 206,501 votes, less than 10 percent of the total. In 1988, their vote swelled to 334,442, or 15 percent. Their combined representation in the Knesset increased from 12 to 18 seats.

They emerged from the 1988 election with the swing vote in the Knesset, enough to give either of the evenly-divided big parties a parliamentary majority. They bargained for power—too much, some would say—and lost. In negotiations with Likud, the Haredi demanded control of the influential ministries of Education, Labor, and Housing, as well as support for their agenda.

Finally, frustrated by these exorbitant demands and anxious to demonstrate national unity in the face of the PLO's latest challenge, Shamir turned to Labor for another

right-left coalition, similar to the one that governed the nation from 1984 to 1988. The now-dispensable religious parties were awarded minor cabinet positions as consolation prizes.

Despite this setback, the rise of religious parties will have a profound impact on the country. Typically, the US media reacted with the disdain characteristic of its treatment of traditional religion, at home and abroad. Haredi leaders were branded wild-eyed fanatics, budding theocrats, kosher Khomeinies. Reflecting establishment incredulity at the election's outcome, *US News* voiced shocked dismay that the next Israeli government might actually be selected by "a handful of tiny religious parties more concerned with Biblical injunctions than with the Mideast peace process." We all know what weird sorts concern themselves with the Bible.

*The New York Times* assured its readers that "by far the vast majority of Israelis are non-observant." This coupled with the contention that the "ultra-Orthodox" (what the press disdains, it often designates "ultra," with the obvious implication of extremism) represent only 15 percent of the population leads to the erroneous conclusion that most Israelis are antireligious. Actually, Orthodox and completely secularized Jews are probably the same proportion of the population. The majority of Israelis fall somewhere in between.

Indeed, the religious parties drew substantial support from the non-Orthodox electorate, such as Sephardic Jews who might go to soccer matches on Saturday afternoon, but experience pangs of conscience over the lapse and listen to their rabbis on political matters. On the other hand, some Orthodox probably voted for Likud or one of the smaller nationalist parties, putting the land question ahead of

---

*Don Feder is a columnist for The Boston Herald.*