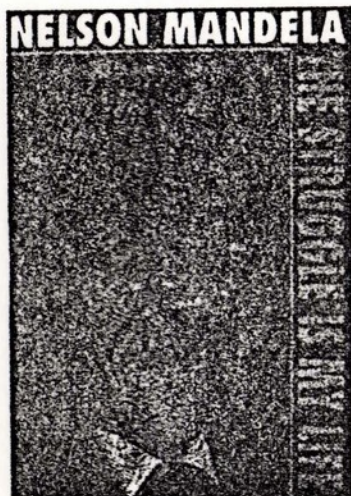


BOOKS

TYRONE AUGUST TAKES A CRITICAL LOOK AT SOME OF THE BOOKS ON POLITICAL PERSONALITIES THAT HAVE COME OUT RECENTLY.



NELSON MANDELA: THE STRUGGLE IS MY LIFE

His speeches and writings
(IDAF Publications — R27,00)

SOBUKWE AND APARTHEID

By Benjamin Pogrund
(Jonathan Ball — R40,99)

STEVE BIKO: I WRITE WHAT I LIKE

A selection of his writings
(Heinemann — R16,95)

NO 46 — STEVE BIKO

By Hilda Bernstein
(IDAF Publications — R17,50)

A small avalanche of books have been published recently which give an insight into the people behind the politicians in the anti-apartheid movement.

Among these publications are ANC leader Nelson Mandela's renowned collection of speeches and writings, *The Struggle is my Life* (first published in 1978).

It is difficult to disentangle the man from his politics. As former ANC leader Mac Maharaj put it, "he is above all a product of the ANC".

The Struggle nevertheless does offer intriguing glimpses here and there of Mandela's profound courage and sincerity.

His friend and fellow ANC leader Oliver Tambo, for instance, describes him in the foreword as "passionate, fearless, impatient, sensitive".

Maharaj also remembers him as

"kind, gentle and warm" in an interview reproduced in *The Struggle*. But, like Tambo, he also refers to Mandela's lack of patience.

"In the early years he gave vent to the anger he felt," he recalls. "In prison he ... got his anger almost totally under control.

"That control has come about through a deliberate effort by Mandela, for political reasons as well as personal."

According to Maharaj, Mandela also likes to keep a certain distance from people. "To get to know him really takes time," he believes.

"When I did get to know him well I realised that initially I hadn't really known him after all; his initial friendliness makes one think one knows him."

It is also clear from *The Struggle* that Mandela never regarded politics as a career in the conventional sense. To him it was always a question of morality.

In his own words, the policy of the ANC appealed to his "deepest inner convictions".

Such glimpses of the man behind the mask are, unfortunately, not the stuff that *The Struggle* is made of. Nor was it intended to; it is no more than a documentary of his political statements.

But it remains a remarkable book, and deserves its revered status in the iconography of the liberation movement.

It shows why Mandela has become, to quote from the introduction, "perhaps the single most vital symbol not only of liberation ..., but of a new way of life in South Africa".

Far more intimate is journalist Benjamin Pogrund's book *Sobukwe and Apartheid*, a biography of the respected PAC leader. It is an affectionate portrait.

But, disappointingly, there are few snippets which go beyond what cannot be gleaned from other published sources.

It mentions, for example, that Sobukwe was once an Eastern Cape

tennis champion, and that he trained the prize-winning choir of a school in Standerton. But such gems are rare.

Even on the political front, the biography is most unsatisfactory: there is little that is new.

This is particularly disappointing if one takes into account that Pogrund's friendship with Sobukwe stretched over more than three decades.

What also bothers is his attempt to do some fancy footwork to distance Sobukwe from some of the PAC's policies. But here, too, unsuccessfully.

On the one hand, he argues that "Sobukwe could not conceivably have been the head of an organisation which was racist".

On the other hand, he concedes that the PAC displayed "a reactive anti-whiteism". How Sobukwe escapes such inferences about the PAC's policies is hard to understand.

And, while Pogrund is always generous about Sobukwe, he is scathing about other PAC leaders.

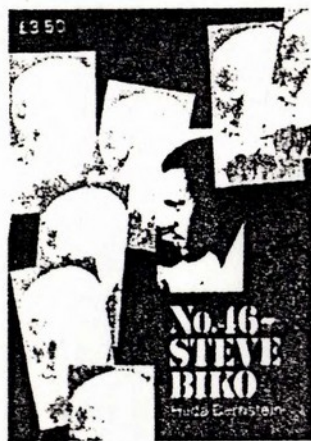
BENJAMIN POGRUND



PK Leballo, for instance, is described as "boastful" and "conceit(ed)", while Jordan Ngubane is portrayed as neglecting his tasks.

Pogrund always seems to be trying to set up buffers between Sobukwe, other PAC leaders and some of its messier policies — making rather uneasy reading.

The result is that the reader is inclined to regard the biography as indeed nothing more than the "personal



view" that Poggrund claims it is.

The intimacy of their personal relationship, it seems, has unduly influenced his approach to his subject.

Poggrund's biography also leaves one feeling that there is so much more to be written about the PAC leader — both as a man and a politician.

The definitive biography of black consciousness leader Steve Biko, who died in detention in 1977, also still has to be written.

But two books re-issued recently, the

selection of his writings *I Write What I Like* and Hilda Bernstein's *No 46* — *Steve Biko*, go a long way towards helping to fill in some of the gaps.

Both pull together political information on this charismatic young leader. But, as with Mandela's *The Struggle*, they also offer fascinating insights into the individual.

Bernstein, for example, refers to him in the introduction as "handsome, fearless, a brilliant thinker", and elsewhere as "the man who had laughed at danger and provocation".

But, of course, her book is about the inquest into Biko's death, and not a memoir of his personal life.

A close reading reveals the web of evasions and lies in court. Compare, for example, "I cannot answer that" (warder), "I can't answer that" (doctor) and "I cannot answer" (another doctor).

Not surprisingly, therefore, Bernstein concludes in despair and anger that "the court is a masquerade".

Like *No 46*, Biko's articles also

"serve to inform ... a little more fully what manner of man he was", to quote Aelred Stubbs, who edited the collection.

They reveal clearly the various influences on his political philosophy: ranging from Aime Cesaire to Franz Fanon, including even Kenneth Kaunda.

They also show his idealism, sometimes verging on naive romanticism. (See especially the article "Some African Cultural Concepts".)

It is nevertheless a privilege to have such material available: to read and reach our own conclusions. However, such books are important as far more than a record of the past.

Now that the ANC, PAC and black consciousness movement have emerged from the shadows of banning orders, they will play increasingly important roles in shaping the future.

Books such as these are therefore invaluable in providing information on their politics and personalities. Thus, whatever their specific limitations, they remain significant.

Robert Sobukwe Papers

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