

Christian Aptron  
Autumn 66

Through its ranks and its leadership have passed some of the really great political figures of South Africa.

Remembering all this, it is not hard to understand how even a writer of the calibre of Mary Benson should be led by her sympathies to measure all other movements by their effect on the ANC. Her book remains a lively, if harrowing, story, but it loses much of its value as a history of events that are crying out for an impartial recorder.

Peter Hjul

## THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X

(Hutchinson 45/-)

At the age of 15, Malcolm Little told his English teacher that he wanted to be a lawyer. The teacher said: "Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic . . . A lawyer—that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You're good with your hands . . . why don't you plan on carpentry?"

Malcolm left school and started work as a shoe-shine boy in a ballroom. At 17 he was a waiter in Harlem, a hustler among the pimps, peddlars and thieves, carrying a gun and sniffing cocaine. He ran through the whole gamut of ghetto life before he was 21, "steering" white men in search of sexual perversion, peddling dope, thieving and increasingly under the influence of drugs.

In 1946, not yet 21—he had not even started shaving—Malcolm Little was sentenced to 10 years for robbery.

In gaol, a convict stimulated him into studying and reading. When he found too many words he could not understand, Malcolm took a dictionary from the prison library and copied the whole thing out, page by page, starting with "aardvark", and learning each page as he worked. Then he would read until three or four every morning by a light in the prison corridor, hopping back into bed whenever a guard came round.

In gaol, too, he was converted to the Muslim religion as preached by The Honourable Elijah Muhammad.

When he was released after 7 years, Malcolm Little became Malcolm X, a disciple of Elijah Muhammad. "I was his most faithful servant, and I know today that I believed in him more firmly than he believed in himself". For twelve years he preached the doctrine of the Black Muslims, becoming to white Americans a symbol of extremism and hate. But his strong intellect carried him forward. The black nationalist, who had preached with such fiery passion that all whites were devils, wrote to friends in 1946: "I am for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I'm a human being first and foremost, and as such I'm for whoever and whatever benefits humanity *as a whole*". A voyage abroad had opened up for him new insights into the black man's struggle. He told his biographer: "I did many things as a Muslim that I'm sorry for now. I was a zombie then—like all Muslims—I was hypnotized . . . Well, I guess a man's entitled to make a fool of himself if he's ready to pay the cost. It cost me twelve years".

Gradually he began to re-shape his ideas and with it his own image. He was no less angry than he had been in the past, but his anger was less destructive. What he said bit like acid because it had the strong conviction of truth. His observations about hate of the white man, about the dropping of the A-bomb on Japan, about demagogues and democracy—"Why should we die to preserve a democracy that gives a white immigrant of one day more than it gives the

black man with four hundred years of slaving and serving in this country?")—about black immigrants in England, reveal the combination of intellect and emotion that lifted him above others.

He commented on his autobiography that he hoped the objective reader, in following his life—"the life of only one ghetto-created Negro—may gain a better understanding of the black ghettos which are shaping the lives and thinking of almost all of the 22 million Negroes who live in America".

Reviewing the book, I. F. Stone wrote: "Here one may read, in the agony of this brilliant Negro's self-creation, the agony of an entire people in their search for identity . . . I believe there was in Malcolm X a readiness painfully to find and face new truths which might have made him one of the great Negroes, and Americans, of our time".

After reading this stirring, painful and passionately honest story, I believe Malcolm X was a brilliant man, a natural leader with a powerful intellect. His image as a vicious racist and hate-monger was certainly untrue in the final period of his life. He was on the verge of becoming the most dynamic and influential figure in the American Negro's struggle for human rights.

America, in this period of her history, cannot tolerate her own greatest men. Malcolm X was assassinated last year. Had he remained confined within the ideas of narrow racialism, they would have let him live. At least we have left this searing, moving book recording his life, a document that should be studied by all who desire a better understanding of man and his problems—and who wish to understand themselves.

*Hilda Bernstein*

### **THE LATE BOURGEOIS WORLD—A Novel by Nadine Gordimer**

(Gollancz 21/-)

Nadine Gordimer's many admirers have been critical of this latest book. It is too short for a novel many have said, and it is too long for a short story. And the story, such as it is, is too frail to carry the weight of interpretation that a situation like that of South Africa insists upon. Others have questioned whether the subtle corruption, the dehumanisation that infects white South African life has not also been damagingly at work upon this very perceptive writer. Is there not something false in her oblique approach, in her self-appointed detachment, in her stance as a viewer, even a *voyeur* of the society in which she lives? There is no passion here, the critics lament, no tragedy, nothing positive nor constructive, it is all deathly, trivial and hopeless.

There may be something in their objections, but I do not fully share them. Although there are elements in the book that I find unsatisfactory, it is to my mind, a remarkable evocation of the predicament of white South Africa. It is a telling and deadly presentation of the world of the white suburbs; a world that has literally condemned itself to death.

This is the late bourgeois world of the title, which you can interpret as late in time with all the associations of decadance and decay, or simply as "the late", in the sense of someone or something that is already dead. The elegiac quality of the writing suggests the latter interpretation, but the narrator, Liz, is caught in a limbo between life and death, and the pull between the two runs through the book.

The story begins with news of the suicide of Liz's ex-husband, Max—"I

Autumn 68  
Christian  
Hester

## STEPHANIE ON TRIAL by Albie Sachs

(Collins, 35/-)

When Albie Sachs was released after 168 days in solitary confinement in a South African jail he was seized with the need to set down in an alive form exactly what it had been like; how one endured, how one survived. Out of this compulsive effort came his first book, *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*, excellently written and eminently readable, a living journal that carried one to its exhilarating climax.

But there was a sequel, and perhaps it is inevitable that this seems an anti-climax.

Prolonged solitary confinement had robbed him of the boldness needed for clandestine political activity. He lingered on in Cape Town, wanting to leave the country, indecisively waiting for something to force the issue.

Then he became involved in the defence of Stephanie Kemp and Alan Brooks, accused of committing sabotage with the aim of overthrowing the South African Government. He also became personally involved with the beautiful Stephanie, a love affair that grew in consultations in prison, confirmed in a brief period after she was released from prison. Then Albie himself was again arrested.

This is the kind of real-life drama a novelist might hesitate to invent; romance against the grim background of physical and mental assaults, police surveillance, prisons. One wonders, therefore, why this second book seems so much less effective than the first. *The Jail Diary* worked most successfully. *Stephanie on Trial* does not hold together so well.

The trial itself, which had real political significance in South Africa, is the least interesting part of the book, and in some ways the issues become blurred, leaving uncertainty about the strategy of the case and a feeling of ignorance about the others involved, particularly Daniels and de Klerk. The writer, too, becomes blurred, perhaps one prolonged period of solitary confinement is a devastating experience with lasting effects that we have been unable to evaluate properly; and thus his sense of personal defeat began before the second torturing experience.

Yet what does emerge clearly is the shining personality of Stephanie, whose gaiety and positive spirit was not destroyed by physical assault (a member of the Security Police pulled her down by the hair and bashed her head up and down on the floor); nor by attempts to break her purpose and force her to become a state witness; nor by the arid and dehumanising treatment she and other women prisoners endured in Barberton jail. I wish she had contributed a larger section on this.

Perhaps the weakness in the book is that there are two main themes: Albie's time after his first release and his subsequent involvement with Stephanie and her case, followed by his second arrest; and Stephanie's own, quite separate experiences in the hands of the Security Police and later serving her sentence. Although these two people are so closely involved with each other (they are married now, and live in London) their individual experiences do not tie up so neatly in the book, and something of their motivation is lost.

Yet *Stephanie on Trial*, despite this, is in my opinion a valuable contribution to the literature about *Apartheid*. It is the kind of book that people will read and react to positively even though they may be totally ignorant of *Apartheid* and

its laws. Let every single South African who can do so get these personal experiences into print. Such books are adding up to an increasingly noticed and formidable indictment of the consequences of racialism pushed to its illogical conclusions.

And the experiences have a kind of universal validity. Through our efforts to share them, even to a limited extent, with strangers everywhere, we are able to re-discover the fundamental truths that tend to become obscured by our painful realisation of our weaknesses and the infinite darkness and cruelty of which human beings are capable. Albie Sachs has managed to convey something of the lonely uncertainty and disillusion that touches all who undergo similar experiences. We thought we were masters of our fate and could storm the heavens, he writes, but in a prison cell there is no world and no dying for a cause, only trying to survive with some honour. Only some people can be heroes, and then probably only for some of the time, but everyone can be reasonably intelligent and reasonably brave for most of the time. Isolated and seemingly defeated, it is still possible to find ways to fight back.

*Stephanie on Trial*, in spite of its shortcomings, should make people perceive more clearly whole human beings, with all their courage and their cowardice, their fortitude and their weaknesses, their beliefs and their doubts—the humans who cannot tolerate the terrible sickness of racialism and who know that the only way to find fulfilment is through involvement and through struggle. This is something positive that comes from the evil and sorrows of the South African scene; and strengthens our sinews and hardens our determination and purpose.

Hilda Bernstein

**FOR CHRIST AND THE PEOPLE:** *Edited by Maurice B. Reckitt*

(SPCK 30/-)

A popular branch of ecclesiastical mythology is that the Church of England is the Tory Party at Prayer. In more sophisticated circles, this is always rendered as an implication that social prophets in Anglicanism are a rare and uncharacteristic species that content themselves with following trails that others have blazed. This, theologically, displays an ignorance of Anglican incarnationism (“If Lutheranism is the Church of Good Friday”, wrote a Norwegian theologian, “Anglicanism is the Church of Christmas Day”). Historically it reveals an inadequate appreciation of the Christian Socialist tradition in the Church of England and its persistence in such movements as Christian Action. Both these areas of misunderstanding are considerably clarified by this useful new book on four socialist “priests and prophets” of the Church of England between the years 1870 and 1930.

The Editor of this collection, a veteran Anglican social philosopher, has chosen his contributors well in that their style and treatment match the subjects in each case most happily. Stephen Yeo’s thorough and systematic study of Thomas Hancock does justice to a theological foundation builder of Christian Socialism. Kenneth Leech’s lively and anecdotal essay on Stewart Headlam hits off the flamboyant Catholic orthodoxy combined with political radicalism which characterises this great East End parish priest. Maurice Reckitt writes movingly of the saintly and courageous Charles Marson while Robert Woodfield speaks with all the commitment of a friend and disciple when he describes the life and achievements of Conrad Noel.

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**Nadine Gordimer's new novel, out this week, is about white South African Communists. Hugh Hebert talks to her of conflict and commitment**

## Left turn on the freedom road

IN MOST of Nadine Gordimer's earlier novels about South Africa, even the whites who bucked against apartheid were only pale pink. She wrote books that won prizes (and prizes — the James Tait Black and half a Booker). But they never seemed to qualify her to be called, in the small change of politico-literary gossip, one of the committed.

This time, in *Burger's Daughter* (Cape, £5.95), published this week, she is writing about white South African Communists. And before the gossips ask whether Nadine has come out of the closet, let us be clear she was never in it.

To the McCarthy question Are you or have you ever been, she answers a ringing No. Though she is small, and fine-boned, and perches diffidently on the corner of the settee, her voice can ring.

White South African Communists were always a small group who mostly disappeared when the party was banned into exile, prison, or

the middle of the road. No one, says Gordimer, has ever written much about them: "There always seems to have been some feeling of embarrassment among authors, a tendency to blur the fact that many of the bravest fighters in this cause have been Communists."

"However disillusioned one may be about communism as an ideology, one should judge, in one's own country, by the role these people have played there."

She met members of this small band when she was a young woman, a student, apolitical and interested only in literature. She has remained apolitical in the sense that she has never joined a political party, and that as a novelist she is interested in politics "only in so far as they motivate people. I am not interested in expounding a political theory."

So her commitment against apartheid had been made in newspaper articles rather than her novels. What impressed her about the Communists was "the calibre

of these people as human beings, their integrity, the way they worked with blacks without patronage, without the thinnest veil of the kind of superior feelings — about being better educated, for instance — that lingers in so many whites."

Many of them, she says, became Communists because "there was really no other political home that offered a genuine commitment to the blacks. It was only in the 50s that you got the middle of the road progressive parties."

She was fascinated too by what it must be like to be the daughter of a hero. Her own father was more of a victim. He was a Lithuanian watchmaker who left his native land as a boy, when it was a tough place to be a Jew, went to South Africa and married an English girl. He had been brought up by his grandparents because his mother and father were struggling to make a living. Which, she says, is exactly what happens with Africans: the kids are sent back to grandma in the country.

Maybe in one of the Homelands, the 13 per cent of the country's land surface where by Government policy all rural Africans belong. Rural Africans being, for the Government, different from urban Africans. "The Government is being pressed into giving certain limited rights to the urban African, and wants to exclude the rural Africans, as though they were a different people."

Gordimer quotes one of the Soweto leaders, Mthato Motlana, who refused to meet Government officials to discuss changes in the status of Africans — pass laws, labour laws — because he would not recognise any difference in the rights of rural and urban blacks. "He told me that he said to them 'Does a white farmer have a different civil status, different rights, from a white businessman?' And that is the only answer."

Yet any limited "privilege" that might be offered urban blacks over rural blacks would scarcely show on the scale that measures

the privileges of whites both. At one point, she talks of guilt. She says an English person would hardly think twice about buying a second home, though many people might still be clamouring for their first. Conscience stilled perhaps because it is only a matter of money. "But in South Africa, you know that seaside cottage is on land no black could ever buy, if he made a million tomorrow."

She is always asked why she still stays in South Africa — she is 55 — when to stay means compromise; and she clearly does not feel like answering the question again: "I am still there," she says, and her voice is defiant for the first time in an hour's conversation.

But perhaps she had answered it in another context, talking about the profound commitment of her heroes: "That's my definition of fate. If you are born in and committed to a particular place, the most meaningful way of life for you will be in taking up whatever challenges there are in that place."

LIBERATION

313-5 Caledonian Road, N.1

23rd November, 1979

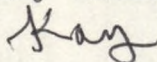
Hilda Bernstein  
5 Rothwell Street  
NW1 8YH

Dear Hilda,

Thanks ever so much for sending the excellent review of  
Gordimer's book so promptly. I found your review very moving  
and I believe it is almost certainly the most penetrating comment  
yet published on the book.

I read the book myself but didn't feel capable of reviewing it  
and am very glad I didn't attempt to do so.

Many thanks



Kay Beauchamp  
Editor Liberation

## BOOKS

## Ordeal under apartheid

117 DAYS, by Ruth First. Stein and Day, New York. 142 pp., \$3.95.

"IT IS STILL a widely held but physiologically untenable dogma that ill-treatment that leaves a man with a whole skin, the use of his limbs and unimpaired sense cannot be construed as duress. . . . The average man, in other words, perfectly understands physical pressure leading to breakdown but imagines that mental pressure is something that he, and therefore everyone else, is quite capable of resisting."

So writes Dr. William Sargant in *Battle for the Mind*. His words are illuminated by the experiences of prisoners held under the 90-day law in South Africa.

The 90-day detention clause, passed in 1963 as part of a whole set of new security measures, was deliberately and openly intended by the Minister of Justice B. J. Vorster to enable the Security Police to apply mind-breaking to political prisoners.

Solitary confinement proved the most effective method. Prisoners were held without books, without paper or pencil, without work or activity of any kind apart from the briefest of exercise and wash periods, denied access to family, friends or lawyers, and deprived of access to the courts. Some detainees broke after only short periods; others were subject to brutal physical torture through electric shock treatment and other methods.

As these methods became more successful, the police were exultant at the powers they possessed; at last their victims were beyond the protection of the courts, so long a thorn in the side of the police. "The courts can't touch us now," gloated Lt. Swanepoel, one of the strong-arm squad of the Special (Security) Branch. The highest court of appeal upheld this view, dismissing the appeal of Mrs. Lesley Schermbrucker, a detainee's wife, who had sought an injunction to stop the police from maltreating her husband. The purpose of the act would be defeated, the court decided, if there were an interruption of detention and interrogation designed to induce the prisoner to speak.

**ALL TOGETHER**, 1,095 people were detained during the 18 months that the 90-day law was in operation. (It was suspended in January, 1965.) Its effects were devastating. Although less than half of the detainees were ever charged or brought to trial, and only about 300 convicted (of various political offenses), their ordeal spread out to embrace their families and political associates. Two detainees hanged themselves in their cells; one drowned himself after release when he thought he was about



RUTH FIRST  
A victory in agony

to be rearrested; one flung himself to death from a seventh-floor window. Many had mental breakdowns and were removed to mental institutions. Others broke morally, "confessed," became collaborators, appeared as state witnesses against their former comrades.

The majority endured and survived, but at unknown cost to themselves. Something of that cost is revealed in Ruth First's book of her detention under the 90-day law; *117 Days*.

Solitary confinement under these conditions, coupled with periods of interrogation by the Security Police, and the terrible uncertainty of it all (victims could be, and were, rearrested after 90 days, and again; some were held in solitary confinement for periods up to a year) does strange things to the mind. Ruth First describes the attempts to "push time on"; the repetition of meaningless tasks that become obsessional; the days measured by a hidden stitch in a lapel; the uncertainty, apprehension and aloneness; a situation producing increasing strain and disorientation, until there began a loss of ability to reason, together with a loss of insight. "Disorientation was calmness itself, without my knowing the full extent of it."

The mind wanders, boundaries of consciousness become indistinct, the real and the imaginary, the true and the false, begin to merge. A former deputy commissioner of the New York Police Department described this process of confusion until the victim is completely trapped: "The torture comes from his own mind, not from outside," he said. Dr. Sargant comments that the confusion of truth and falsehood is in the minds of both the suspect and the examiner.

**YET RUTH FIRST** was no ordinary victim. Politically experienced, intelligent, with a direct and incisive mind, she believed she could outwit her inquisitors.

Her breakdown began when she had lost the power to reason clearly, but was unaware of this: "If only I could have stood outside myself; if only I had not believed that I would always have the strength to do whatever I wanted and that emotional shock was something separate from and subordinate to my reason."

The climax came after a carefully stage-managed release and rearrest on the pavement outside the jail. Through this, and other devices, she lost her ability to drag along with time, she felt impelled to force a move on the part of the Special Branch. She began to make a statement, telling the police only what they already knew, involving people who were beyond their reach. Too late she found herself trapped by her own maneuver, unable to justify herself.

She decided to say no more, but she was persecuted by her feelings of guilt and her belief that what she had already said would be used to turn others against her, that she would be abandoned by her friends because they would think she had betrayed them. "This abandonment I would not be able to face." She tried to commit suicide, failed, and eventually pulled herself back from the abyss. She did not succumb—"In the depth of my agony I had won."

She was released after 117 days, but convinced that "it was not the end, that they would come again," she has since left South Africa and now lives with her husband and three daughters in London. In this, the Special Branch was the victor, as with so many other dedicated fighters against apartheid who were forced to leave the country.

**RUTH FIRST** describes these traumatic experiences in an apparently calm and straightforward way. It is doubtful if it could be written differently, particularly so soon after the events. The situations are so fraught with tensions and emotions that emotional writing might destroy itself. It must also be remembered that the book is in the nature of a public confession, a soul-baring, and to write it at all was an ordeal, requiring searching honesty and high courage.

Therefore the book suggests, rather than exposes, some of the deeply interesting aspects of the war between political activists and their opponents. She suggests, but does not examine, the peculiar relationship she developed with the intelligent inquisitor, Lt. Viktor. She touches on, but does not discuss, the vulnerability of even the strongest among us and our need of others. To break the threads binding us to our brothers is indeed to bring individuals to near-insanity, or suicide.

The unwritten footnote to the book is a new permanent provision of South African law that replaces the 90-day law with a 180-day law. The first victim was recently taken under the new law; others will follow when the struggle in South Africa surges up again, as it inevitably will. Through the individual story told in this book, perhaps people everywhere will understand more clearly the nature of that struggle, and of the South African state today.

—Hilda Bernstein

## NEWSPAPER

4/3/83

# Women's role in the liberation of South Africa



South African demonstrator

WOMEN in struggle have much to learn from each other. In the West there is still an inability to comprehend why women of the Third World apparently reject the primacy of patriarchal oppression — don't these women know that they have to liberate themselves from male domination?

One problem is lack of information about the nature of women's struggles and political activities. These, as Cherryl Walker points out in *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, have been ignored by researchers even when important in scale and time. This neglect is a product of historians' own often unconscious bias against women.

This account of the women's movement in South Africa from 1910 to the early 1960s devotes a major portion to the Federation of South African Women which, during the 1950s, broke new

ground and placed the movement firmly in the struggle for liberation as a whole.

The federation was a pioneering multi-racialist organisation among women, always stressing the need to fight customs and conventions which kept them inferior to men, at the same time conceding priority to the national liberation movement. This book, for the first time, gives recognition to the importance of FSAW.

I was a founder of FSAW and a participant in many of the events related. We had no reservations on the question of women's rights. The charter stated our aims of "striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions, and customs that discriminate against women," but it went on to state that women did not form a society separate from men, that we shared the problems imposed by the nature of that society.

The call clearly was for women's rights, at the same time recognising how intimately they were bound up with the liberation struggle, and giving primacy to that struggle.

Yet we were aware of many contradictions. Racialism, sexism, poverty, and the application of apartheid bind women to the grossest servitude. How is this equated with the fact that black women, in every respect the most disadvantaged, can evince such strength, militancy and positive qualities in their struggles?

Apparent contradictions extend to family and personal relationships. Many men in the movement have an ambivalent attitude, recognising the necessity for women to be organised and participate in the struggles, but resenting personal inconveniences. Thus during two anti-pass campaigns, separated by 45 years, women who had

elected to go to gaol rather than pay fines, had their fines paid by husbands who wanted their wives home again.

The contradiction exists also in the family, yet the right to live as a family unit, remains a primary demand among black women who are denied that right. Migrant labour and pass laws form a repressive system of labour control that together with the imposition of Bantustans undermine and destroy the family pattern.

Migrant labour is the basis of the extreme exploitation and oppression of women, who are pivotal to the system. Women are forced to become heads of households, forced into a painful but real independence, while in law they still remain totally powerless, always under the tutelage of men.

Walker writes of the inaugural conference of the

FSAW as being from all reports "a spirited, festive occasion." Yes, indeed! From that first conference, when the proceedings were constantly interrupted by different delegations, their singing heard distantly down the street, swelling to a chorus as they entered the hall—from that time on the women brought to meetings and conferences a joyful spirit, expressed through songs and banter, irrepressible even in the face of mass arrests, prison, and other hardships.

Walker's is a valuable contribution to South Africa's political history and to women's history; it enriches our understanding of feminism, of racialism, and sexism.

*Women and Resistance in South Africa*, by Cherryl Walker, is published by Onyx Press, £15.95 hardback, £5.95 paperback.

*Quandary*



# BOOK REVIEWS

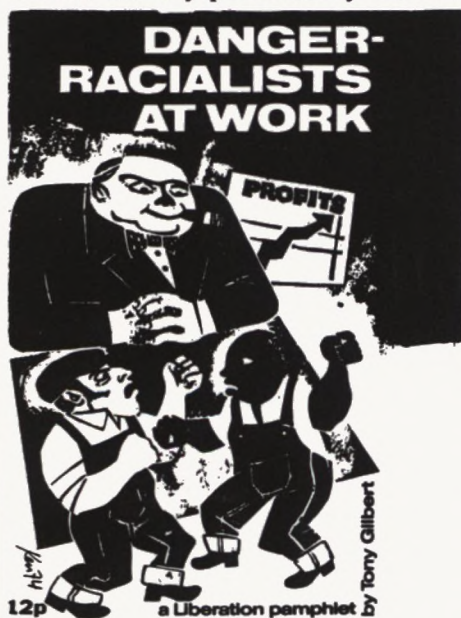
Edited by TAMARA PHILIPS

*TONY BENN: a Political Biography* by Robert Jenkins. (Writers and Readers £6.95)

Tony Benn is a man to be understood. Although to many his personality is pleasing, to others his name equates with the devil himself. None, however, can deny that his clear advocacy of policies has created a public debate about crucial issues which will have profound consequences for the political future of Britain. A "practising politician" — his own description — he has astounded many with his single-minded determination to battle against reactionary traditions and institutions in society and in the labour movement itself.

Some of his close colleagues may criticise his lack of team spirit but all would agree that the power he seeks is not of the personal variety. In the words of his biographer, Robert Jenkins, "Benn's uniqueness among politicians is that he believes that the purpose of winning power is to give it away". In other words Tony Benn wants to give real meaning to the word "democracy".

His consistency in fighting hard for democracy, and defending it when it was under attack, is demonstrated in this book "Tony Benn" by Robert Jenkins recently published by Writers



We still have a few copies left of this pamphlet first published in 1974. It is interesting that the Metropolitan Police have just ordered copies of it. Presumably they are consulting it in relation to the preparation for much more thorough training of recruits in race relations.

and Readers Publishing Co-operative (price £6.95). This is a well written and readable volume by an author who is well outside the ranks of labour, in fact he is a life long conservative, but he shows objectivity and a lack of bias in sharp contrast to the media's treatment of Tony Benn. To supporters of *Liberation* the book as a special interest because of its references to Tony Benn's stand as an internationalist and anti-imperialist. Tony was one of the founders of the Movement for Colonial Freedom and became its first treasurer, alongside Fenner Brockway as chairman, in 1954. "He considered colonialism immoral because it suppressed the desire for freedom common to all people." This principled approach has been in line with his efforts, in general to act in defence of the exploited everywhere.

JACK JONES

*JULY'S PEOPLE* by Nadine Gordimer (Jonathan Cape £5.95)

After the over-long density of *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer gives us a novella set in the near future; in its spareness and the sketchiness of the people portrayed it presents a sharp contrast with her last book.

A key to the book is in the Gramsci quotation at the front: 'The old is dying and the new cannot yet be born; in this interregnum these arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.'

A white liberal family escape the gunned shopping malls and burning houses of the final warfare against the apartheid state by accepting refuge in the remote country village of their servant, July. There is an inevitable role-reversal as they — now July's people — struggle with physical hardships and with the hostility of July's own people: his wife and his mother, dispossessed of her hut to house the whites.

Antagonism grows between July and Maureen Smales who employed him in that other life. Decent and generous as they were to the man who lived for 15 years in their backyard, it is only now that the bitterness of that relationship begins to emerge. ('Used to come and ask for everything. An aspirin. Can I use the phone. Nothing in that house was his.' July's real, African name only becomes known towards the end of the book.)

Despite all they had feared, the Smales are totally unprepared for any shift in their way of life. Despite their liberalism, they are completely unable to relate to July's other people. Yet Gordimer does not hold their enlightened values to ridicule. She simply reveals their total futility in the context of the terrible injustice that is South

Africa today.

This is a bleak, tense and marvellously written book. The author offers no solutions. Hope is contained in the children, who integrate with the young blacks. The little white girl forms a deep friendship with her black friend. The boys adopt African ways; Victor, receiving a gift of fishing line from July, cups his palms, African fashion. As though Gordimer is saying that ultimately only through their acceptance of any integration into the culture of the majority will there be any place for whites in South Africa.

HILDA BERNSTEIN

*THE SUNS OF INDEPENDENCE* by Ahmadou Kourouma. Translated from the French by Adrian Adams. (Heinemann: African Writers Series No. 239. First published by Les Presses de l'Universite de Montreal 1968, 136 pages, paperback.)

The "sun of independence" are the powers now ruling the "Ebony Republic", in succession to the suns of colonial rule and of the tribal dynasties.

Fama, last of his royal line, has lived through all these; he is now reduced to poverty, a figurehead professional mourner for his tribe in the capital city. His wife Salimata cooks porridge to sell to construction workers in the European quarter across the lagoon.

Family pride dominates Fama's life, motherhood Salimata's. Both are denied fulfilment. They live in hope and resignation. Everything they do is ruled by ritual: Muslim prayer reinforced by fetishist sacrifices.

As tribal chief Fama revisits his decaying village in the hinterland, where the surviving elders — praise-singer and sorcerer — scheme to preserve the essential rites in the face of a meaningless new administration. Fatalistically, he returns to the city and disappears into the incomprehensible political machine; surviving finally to reject compromise and fulfil his fate according to his ancestry.

The book succeeds brilliantly, through the characters' own richly aware, non-literate imaginations, in sharing the stoicism, the humour and dignity of their lives.

The language, full of images and colour, was, we are told, renowned for its use of French in an African manner, and seems to have been translated with equal success.

C.E.WARD

*DYNAMICS OF EUROPEAN NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT* by Alva Myrdal, Ken Coates and others (Spokesman Books: £5.50)

A book reviewer is not supposed to

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# BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by  
**Tamara Philipps**

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**THE APARTHEID HANDBOOK**  
by Roger Omond  
Penguin £3.95

This is the second edition of Roger Omond's 'Guide to South Africa's Everyday Racial Policies', and brings it as up to date as it is possible in a changing situation.

It is an essential handbook for everybody, as useful for those who think they know all about apartheid as it is for those who are ignorant but curious. For all active anti-apartheid campaigners, it is indispensable.

Its great merit is its accessibility. The facts about South Africa are set out clearly and simply in question and answer form, and under headings that cover every aspect of political, legal, social and cultural life. To choose his section headings at random: Housing, Removals, Transport, Beach Apartheid, Crime, Police, National and Local Government; these give some idea of the wide range covered. Keep this book in your pocket or bag, refer to it often. Highly recommended.

Hilda Bernstein

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**HAITI: Family Business**  
Rod Prince & Jean Jacques Honorat  
Latin America Bureau  
1 Amwell St, EC1R 1UL. £3.50

The saying that there is nothing so old as yesterday's news may be applied as well to a dictator whose rule has just been overthrown: he recedes rapidly into history, like dusty newsprint, as the new day shines.

That has been the case in Haiti, where the oppressive regime of President "Baby Doc" Jean Claude Duvalier, ousted early in February of this year, is now a fading nightmare for the Haitian people.

This is a book to remind us, however, that history and its experiences must never be ignored or forgotten. A concentrated study of Haiti, it

was written several months before "Baby Doc" was hastily flown out of the country in a US airforce plane to evade the development of a full fledged revolution against him.

Despite the change that has taken place since it was published, this little volume has no dust upon it; it remains very useful and informative, providing historically an excellent background for present events in Haiti.

If any country deserved a chance at genuine freedom, it is this small Caribbean nation, half an island in size. Its people, mostly black slaves transported from Africa and their descendents, staged one of the first colonial revolutions nearly 200 years ago, in 1771, against French rule, ending slavery and establishing the world's first independent black republic. Their leader, Toussaint l'Ouverture, a political and military genius, was one of the great revolutionaries.

It took three decades of very bloody revolution, counter revolution, civil war and French-British invasion before Haiti's independence was finally recognised by France. Generations of rule by rapacious despots followed, each looting the treasury. US Marines then occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934. In 1957 Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier took power, ruling until his death in 1971 through wholesale terror that caused the death of at least 50,000 people. He passed Haiti, the "family business", on to his son, "Baby Doc".

Under the Duvaliers, Haiti was developed as a neo-colonial preserve for US corporations, which pay a daily wage of about US\$3,00. According to the authors of the present book, "90% of the population live in conditions of destitution and squalor." That is why, despite the terror squads of the Tonton Macoutes, popular resistance to the Duvalier regime mounted until the US flew out "Baby Doc" and eased in his replacement. Now installed is a regime of the ruling groups that have backed, and thrived under dictators, leaving real freedom and democracy still to be attained by the long suffering Haitian people, as they consign the Duvaliers to the dust.

Besides giving a graphic portrayal of Haiti's tragic history, this study is packed

with factual and statistical material on economic and social conditions and on Haiti's international relations.

Bill Pomeroy

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**DISARMAMENT AND WORLD HUNGER** A call for action.  
Willy Brandt  
Victor Gollancz. £4.75

Willy Brandt, winner of the Nobel peace Prize, and one of the truly respected statesmen of Europe, urgently warns us what humanity is at great speed drifting into unless positive, drastic, intelligent action is taken quickly, by all the nations of the world co-operatively getting together and sorting things out.

We are in a dangerous and mad world. Appallingly dangerous situations are building up every day the nations of the world are spending £2 millions on armaments, yet every minute some 30 children under the age of 6 are dying from lack of food, and one fifth of the whole population of the world suffers from malnutrition. That population increases by one million every 5 days, nine tenths of which is in the 3rd world countries.

We are living in a period of wide ranging upheavals, in science, technology, economics, international relations. There is no question of just drifting back to what was previously considered normal. We will continue to face radical change, and we must cooperate collectively to find adequate solutions, to provide increased productivity and jobs, to diminish east/west tension and rivalry with its crazy suicidal armaments build up. We must grasp the fact that to help the developing world generously helps the developed world's industrial problems as well.

This book is an urgent plea for action now and quickly by a great European statesman. If we neglect the tasks and problems of the of the present, and fail to invest in the future, we may arm ourselves to death without actually waging a major war, bringing our economies to total collapse.

Wogan Milford

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criminologists/theologists of Marxist bent, this is certainly not the book. What is regrettable is the missed opportunity of developing some of his themes such as the struggle for social justice and the transition to socialism. These would have been of special interest to those concerned with those parts of the developing world where socialism and new legal systems are being established.

What does become clear in *Class, State and Crime* is that criminal justice is the characteristic form of control in advanced capitalist society. What Nigel Walker, author of *Punishment, Danger and Stigma* would make of that I can only hazard a guess. His book is subtitled *The Morality of Criminal Justice* and explores the principles of sentencing in modern systems of law enforcement. The book makes no pretence of having a socialist perspective, which should appease all those judges who are convinced that criminologists like sociologists are Marxist to a man and even a woman. The main subject of the book is the justification, whether explicit or implicit, for what is done to people who contravene criminal codes. What should be a judge's aim in sentencing? Retributive punishment, protecting society from danger, or applying the community's stigma of disapprobation? Although the author

plumps for a somewhat eclectic approach the sentencing, even taking the view that some sentences are justifiable as retributive punishment, the book provides some very interesting insights into the ethics of sentencing as well as an instructive chapter on why and how certain conduct has become criminalised. Mr Walker has sensibly restricted the ambit of his book and despite the uninspiring conclusions it is an interesting work.

HELENA KENNEDY

*NAMIBIA THE FACTS (International Defence & Aid Fund for Southern Africa £1.50)*

A young man with the curious name of Herman ja Toivo stood up in a court twelve years ago to make a last statement. His speech has the same poetry and potency of that Vanzetti speech of long ago.

'We find ourselves in a foreign country,' he said, '... we are far away from our homes; not a single member of our families has come to visit us, never mind be present at our trial ... We have been cut off from our people and the world...

'The Government has again shown its strength by detaining us for as long as it pleased ... by passing an Act

especially for us and having it made retrospective. It has even chosen an ugly name to call us by. One's own are called patriots, or at least rebels; your opponents are called terrorists...'

Herman ja Toivo is a Namibian, sentenced to life imprisonment by South Africa in a Pretoria court. His beautiful speech is in an appendix to this new IDAF book, which gives, in 100 pages, a splendidly compressed outline of facts and figures, history, South African powers and policies, the economy and labour force, the press, church and political groupings in Namibia; as well as an explanation of the alternative strategies (e.g. the Turnhalle proposals) and the liberation struggle.

This is your easy guide to a complex situation, very up to date and making it possible to chart your way through otherwise incomprehensible news reports. Did you know, for instance, that only 1% of black Namibian children go to secondary school; that two multinational corporations control 90% of all mining production; that South Africa has over 60,000 troops in Namibia?

If you are prepared to read this review, there is no doubt that you should read the book.

HILDA BERNSTEIN

# THE GULF

*INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND PEOPLES OF THE GULF AGAINST IMPERIALISM*

*Nicosia, Cyprus, 28th - 30th October 1980*

*Organised by the International Secretariat in Solidarity with the Arab People and its Central Cause Palestine, the Permanent Secretariat of the Pan Arab Peoples' Congress and the Permanent Secretariat of AAPSO.*

I would like to thank Liberation and the organisers of the Conference very much indeed for the opportunity of attending this most important and interesting meeting. Unfortunately shortage of space only allows me a very brief report but Liberation is following this up with its own Con-

ference with CARDRI on the Gulf in the Spring.

The Cyprus Conference had been planned long before the tragic outbreak of the Iraq/Iran war. One assumes we would have had an Agenda discussing ways and means of consolidating and furthering solidarity and unity among progressive forces in the Middle East, Africa and the neighbouring island of Cyprus in their bid to rid themselves of the vice-like stranglehold of international finance capital. As it was the Conference devoted itself to maintaining rigid solidarity amongst delegates as being the overriding priority in the face of the horrific implications of the Iran/Iraq conflict. Both sides were roundly condemned for having fallen into a trap from which the only winner would be their common enemy. It was often and strenuously repeated that, whatever happened, Arab unity and solidarity must not be divided into camps for or against Iraq or Iran since this would patently further the aims of imperialism against them.

Unfortunately, there were no immediate proposals on how to reconcile the two parties and there was very grave concern about the likelihood of serious further escalation. The hurried re-entry of Greece into NATO was

noted. The present political situation in Turkey obviously was greatly in NATO's interest and the conclusion was drawn that before long Cyprus would become an important NATO base which would be difficult to prevent given the divided nature of that country and the 100 square miles still owned by Britain. We were warned that this meant an immediate prelude to an assault on the Gulf. Britain was condemned for allowing Diego Garcia to be used as a base for American hostilities and I feel that we must call on our supporters to make every effort to prevent Cyprus becoming a military base and we should demand the demilitarization of our "land holdings" in the Indian Ocean as an immediate priority in lessening the tension and dangerous threat to world peace as a result of the situation in the Middle East.

The Conference resolved to unmask imperialist treachery in the region, to support national liberation struggles, to agitate for the release of detainees and to advertise and publicise the dangers threatening the whole world as a result of past and present colonial and imperialist policies and activities.

Sandra Hodgson

# The man who cast a shadow

**Freedom for my people: the autobiography of Z. K. Matthews** (Rex Collings, London; David Philip, Cape Town) £12.50 h/b.

**T**he life of Prof Z. K. Matthews — the black South African academic and reluctant politician who died in 1978 — was permeated by a powerful sense of identity, which gave strength and assurance to everything he did. He was, as Monica Wilson writes in the introduction to this autobiography, “a man with a shadow — *nesithunzi* in Xhosa: that is, a man of dignity and authority. The man who loses his identity casts no shadow, he has no force.”

The achievements of Z.K. — as he was universally called — were outstanding. From a background as poor and deprived as any other black child, he rose in an academic career that was a trail-blazer.

He was the first: in 1923, the first African to graduate in South Africa (a handful had managed to get overseas for higher education, but Z.K. graduated from Fort Hare in the Cape.) He was the first black headmaster at Adams College, a high school for blacks. In 1930 he was the first African to obtain an LL.B degree with the right to practise law as an attorney or at the bar.

For 20 years he followed an impeccable career. He took part in many church conferences, was an elected member of the Native Representative Council, served on commissions concerned with education, became Professor of African Studies at Fort Hare, the leading black university; was awarded a bursary for Yale University, and subsequently studied anthropology at the LSE. From head of his department at Fort Hare he rose to Acting Principal, resigning when new education laws changed Fort Hare's functions.

Such a man, spoken of at his funeral as one of the greatest men not just of Africa but of the world, could have occupied any office to which he might be called. Yet he spent the last years of his life in exile, and died in Washington where he was serving as Ambassador for



Botswana. South Africa — that is, white, ruling South Africa — needed such a man, but wanted him compliant.

As a scholar he was exemplary. As a man of his people he was arrested in 1956 in the notorious Treason Trial that lasted four years, and was detained without trial for 135 days in 1960 following the Sharpeville shootings. His home and his offices were many times raided and searched, his papers taken. He himself once travelled to prison on a train, handcuffed to a white warder.

Z.K.'s mother's early teaching — that he must do something for his people — was woven into

and related to his academic achievements. There was no real division between his personal career and his public service. He joined the African National Congress in 1940 and thereafter played a key role. It was Z.K. who first proposed the calling of a Congress of the People, representative of South Africans of all races, that subsequently drew up the Freedom Charter which remains the guiding aim and policy of the ANC. The memorandum that he drafted for the Congress subsequently became the first item of evidence at the Treason Trial, where he gave evidence “imperturbable, urbane, affable” and deeply

impressed the judges. In Congress he had the rare capacity to work together with people of often very diverse views.

Z.K. was one of two remarkable men who left an indelible imprint on the ANC, both in their lifetime and subsequently. Z.K. and Chief Luthuli — they were close friends — were both men of deeply-felt Christian beliefs who valued all people as such, totally free from racial overtones. Their influence probably more than anything else has given the ANC its multi-racial outlook, its total rejection of tribal and racial divisions. Z.K. recognised the inevitable course that forced the ANC to change policy: his paper, “The Road from Non-Violence to Violence”, was delivered at a crucial meeting sponsored by the World Council of Churches in 1964. As a man of peace, like Luthuli, he still showed clearly that Christians would have to reconsider their attitude towards violence.

By nature Z.K. was not a fiery revolutionary. In another society he might well have remained a man supreme in the academic field. But South Africa demands more. There is no single individual in South Africa who can stand aside from politics. To the great demands Z.K. made an unfailing response. He was a gentle, quiet, steadfast man whose loyalty to his cause was immovable. “He flew all over the world but always with his feet on the ground.”

This autobiography was incomplete when Z.K. died. It has been edited and annotated by a close friend, Professor Monica Wilson. This, together with his own reticence, contributes to uneven writing and there are some passages with catalogues of names that will be of interest only to South Africans.

One day there will be a full biography of Z.K., but this autobiography is a valuable addition to contemporary history and to an understanding of how apartheid has destroyed its “men of reconciliation”, making inevitable an armed struggle.

The last words are Professor Wilson's: “Here was a statesman and a great South African. What is wrong with South Africa that she continues to drive out, imprison, or destroy such sons?”

Hilda Bernstein

# BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by TAMARA PHILIPS

**THE HIDDEN FACE OF EVE**  
by Nawal el Saadawi (ZED Press, £16.95 hb £5.95 pb)

The author, an Arab Moslem doctor, has written an angry book about the fate of women through the ages, and Arab and Muslim women in particular. Her anger is justified because of the subjugation of women in the interests of successive social and economic conditions has been overlooked for too long.

In this book Dr. el Saadawi shows the richness of intellect and her thorough understanding and acceptance of Marxism and Socialism as the only way to the abolition of this crime. It is therefore a pity that she allows her feminist passion to concentrate the blame repeatedly and almost entirely on the patriarchal society, thus giving the impression (no doubt unwittingly) that through the ages no Arab or Moslem woman was ever loved or cherished for herself, but only for the sexual satisfaction of men or as an un-paid worker.

However, the book is very well written and should be read for its wealth of information and historical facts about Islam in general and its liberating influence on women, and the abuse of the teachings of the Koran by successive Caliphs and religious leaders to suit whatever the prevalent social and economic situation happened to be.

The "Preface to the English Edition" by itself, referring to the recent Iranian revolution, would make a very useful pamphlet.

Dina Aldridge

**ISLAND IN CHAINS** Ten Years on Robben Island by Prisoner 885/633 as told by Indres Naidoo to Albie Sachs (Penguin Books £1.95)

Once I worked in the same office as Indres Naidoo, a young South African Indian from a very politically active family. We shared the same views, but never discussed our own activities; the early 1960's were dangerous years.

Indres joined the new militant wing of the African National Congress (Umkhonto we Sizwe) and with two others was arrested in an act of sabotage set up by a police agent. He served ten years on Robben Island.

Albie Sachs, South African lawyer and author of several books, spent months talking to Indres about life on Robben Island. This book is the outcome. Buy it and read it. It is not an unrelieved account of brutality and the horrors of that penal island, although they are there; you will also read of marvellous courage, fortitude and triumphs. There is no submission, only a struggle against apartheid that continues even under the harshest conditions. You will understand why the name 'Mandela', signifying that resistance, is now world-renowned.

In this small space it is not possible to say more than: you will be inspired and uplifted; and you will understand why the African National Congress has, over the long years of struggle, become the potent expression of the South African struggle for liberation.

Hilda Bernstein



## Liberation

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**"THREAT FROM THE EAST?"** by Fred Halliday (Pelican £1.75)

This slim book opens with a quotation from President Ronald Reagan:-

"Let's not delude ourselves. The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on . . .

The author examines this assertion in relation to Soviet involvement in the Middle East. In particular he looks at the recent history of Afghanistan, Iran, Ethiopia and S. Yemen.

Fred Halliday, of course, is well qualified to write about this part of the world, since he knows it intimately. A journalist of some standing, he is a Fellow of the Transnational Institute, an editorial associate of the *New Left Review* and (I think) a member of Labour's Middle East Council.

He quickly demolishes the myth about Soviet 'expansionism', and at the same time exposes the USSR's many blunders in supporting Middle East regimes which not only turned against the Left in their own countries, but after accepting considerable aid (like Egypt) developed a special relationship with the United States.

This mistaken strategy, he maintains, is due to the basic conservatism of the Soviet leadership whose main aim is the defence of their social system rather than the spread of revolution.

Having some knowledge of Afghanistan, I was interested in his explanation of Soviet involvement in that country. He rightly avoids the use of the term 'invasion', saying that their troops were virtually sucked into the internal conflict which developed during the period after the 1978 Revolution, when Hafizullah Amin took over. This, he suggests, and I agree with him, was a reluctant decision by the Soviets to support a regime with whom they had treat obligations.

While Halliday is critical of some aspects of Soviet policy, he is also aware of U.S. activity in the Middle East. He in fact goes into detail about American policy for the area, helping us to understand where the real dangers to world peace come from.

If I have any criticism of the book, it's that its scope is too limited, since it basically concentrates on just four countries. But this is perhaps unfair. At £1.75 it is a handy paperback for Socialists. Buy it.

Ron Brown (M.P. Leith)

**NO FIST IS BIG ENOUGH TO HIDE THE SKY,** The Liberation of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde by Basil Davidson. (ZED Press, £16.95 hb)

First published in 1969 as "The Liberation of Guinea" the original two-thirds of the book seems to me to have hardly changed—a sign of the thoroughness of Basil Davidson's analysis of the earlier period.

Under Amilcar Cabral, the PAIGC did not take an ideology of Liberation from any other country; they studied their own situation and came up with their own answers. Who were the revolutionary forces? How to win over the peasantry to struggle in areas where direct, visible exploitation was not obvious? They stressed the overriding importance of honesty and discussion, with participation in decision-making among all, peasants, guerillas, cadres. "Tell no lies . . . claim no easy victories"—and avoid "big words".

A prolonged war was envisaged and even welcomed—time was needed to train cadres, technicians, teachers, doctors but half the country was liberated by 1969 and by the time of the assassination of Amilcar Cabral, that gifted leader, in January 1973, victory was already assured.

The additional last four chapters give a fascinating account of the actual take-over of power in 1974 when, although some of the Portuguese army at home and in Guinea wanted to fight to the end, the temporary truce suddenly snowballed and the army finally "left almost cheerfully" without a life being lost; an account of the very different yet closely linked movement in Cape Verde Islands and a discussion of the problems and achievements of the post independence period.

Now, as Luiz Cabral said in the heady days of 1974, "the most difficult part will begin, less hard but more difficult." The coup of November 1980, which killed Luiz Cabral, replacing him with his old comrade in arms Nono Vieira, amid a maze of accusations and rumours, showed that in addition to the country's objective social and economic difficulties, the PAIGC itself contained contradictions and corruption.

It is a pity that this book was already in press when this crisis happened so that no more than a brief account of it could be inserted.

Elizabeth Hodgkin

## Women on the frontline: their triumphs and their tears

**Women & resistance in South Africa**  
by Cheryl Walker (Onyx Press,  
London) £12.95 h/b, £4.95 p/b.

It is difficult for women of the western world to understand why women's movements in countries like South Africa reject the primacy of the feminist struggle. The subordinate position of women remains a basic fact of our century. Acceptance of change is slow and uneven and many feminists see female exploitation and subjection as the fundamental contradiction in society. Their prime objective is to alter laws, economic conditions and social customs affecting the position of women.

Why do those South African women who claim to be feminists reject this as their basic objective?

They have always been ready to challenge the hegemony of the men — yet do not see their own struggle as separate from the whole struggle for liberation. Their fight is for the restructuring of a whole society rather than for the privilege of being exploited equally with the men.

The apartheid system corrodes the lives of the whole black population, and it is the women who are most affected. Women are relegated to a shadowy position, subject to extremes of exploitation and oppression — they are discriminated against as women, as blacks, and as workers. Yet, astonishingly, these women, bearing their triple burden of exploitation and lacking any legal powers, have emerged as forceful challengers of apartheid and primary catalysts for change.

Women joined the national struggle to the fight for their personal liberation. The charter adopted at the founding conference of the Federation of South African Women in 1954 states in its preamble: *We, the women of South Africa . . . hereby declare our aim of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against us as women . . . It states firmly that we women do not form a society separate from the men.*

The federation brought to the political scene an organisation that was to initiate spectacular campaigns by organising and uniting women to make them a new force in the liberation struggle. The whole history of the development of that struggle from 1913 — the year of the first militant pass law protests by women — until the

1960s, has been meticulously researched by Cheryl Walker. This book acknowledges the importance of the women's role in raising basic issues and involving large sections in the struggle against apartheid — a role that has gone largely unrecognised. As Walker remarks, this lack of recognition reflects the subordinate position women occupy

in society as well as the unconscious bias against women in written history.

The two unique features of FSAW were its joint commitment to the emancipation of women and the national liberation movement, and its multiracialism, bringing to the women's movement unity in action, which is today the keynote

of the liberation struggle.

The women also brought a natural vitality and ebullience that marked many conferences and campaigns. They sang and indulged in jokes and banter at the expense of the police, even as they climbed into the vans that would take them to jail. They concealed their worry and heartbreak over children left



Generations of servitude: domestic worker in South Africa displaying the employers who were once her charges.

without care — their motherhood gave them added persistency and determination.

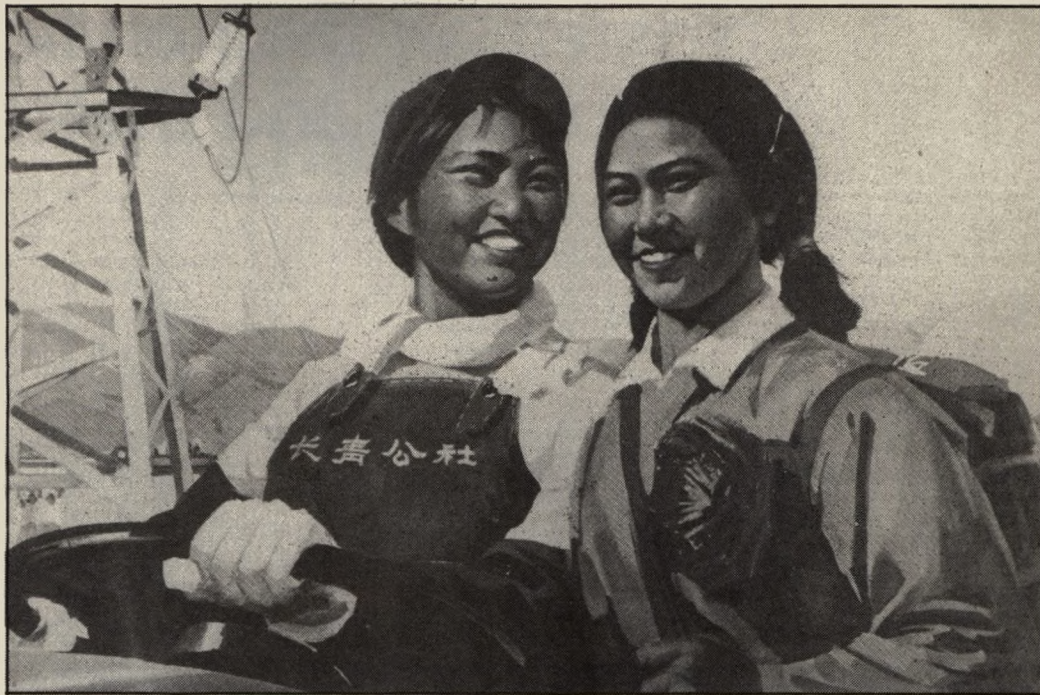
They recognised their legal powerlessness in the web of destructive laws that codified tribal conditions retained by the colonial intrusion, and left the women permanently under the tutelage of the men. Yet at the same time they saw themselves as equal to or stronger than the men. They saw how pass laws and migrant labour destroyed all hope of a normal family life. The right to live with their husbands, the right to family life, became a focal point, even as women became, through necessity, the heads of households and achieved a difficult and bitter independence.

To have been involved with that struggle, as one who helped found the FSAW and took part in its conferences and activities, now seems to me a gift, an extraordinary enrichment of my own life. These were our women: women who walked 18 miles a day for six weeks rather than pay an extra penny on their bus fares; women who made homes in squatter camps, feeding and caring for their families under conditions of almost indescribable hardship; women who elected to go to jail in protest against the pass laws rather than pay fines; and in more recent times, young women with upraised arms in the vanguard massed ranks of young people in revolt in 1976.

These are our women, our feminists. Much of their rich history is now contained in Walker's book. It is a valuable contribution to the history of resistance in South Africa, but it is also a book that will enlighten and educate women of other countries who see feminist issues in differing contexts — and it will help men. It is not easy for them to appreciate the anger of the women, nor is it easy for them to face the abrogation of their own power.

Men understand the necessity for the women to be organised, while often having ambivalent feelings about women's initiatives. To obtain the objectives of the liberation struggle, the full participation of women is needed. This the women will give, demanding at the same time the right to participate in every aspect of that struggle, the right to fight, to carry arms, to be seen in the leadership. For, while our women have a clear recognition of what is in fact the essence of feminism — that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex — for the women of South Africa the issue is not simply about women, but about liberation itself.

Hilda Bernstein



Chinese poster, 1976: female emancipation serving the nation's needs

## An order of priority

**Women of China: Imperialism and Women's Resistance 1900-1949** by Bobby Siu (Zed Press, London) £12.95 h/b, £5.95 p/b.

Since its founding in 1921, the Communist Party of China has consistently adopted a number of policies to redefine the role of women. The legal, economic and political programmes of the past 60 years have resulted in an improvement in the conditions in which Chinese women live and work — a view held not just by Western analysts but by Chinese women themselves.

Yet despite this degree of success, there has been open recognition, in China and abroad, that many of the policies designed to benefit women have not reached their full potential.

Only recently has the considerable research and debate previously accorded to the role of peasant and labour movements and their relation to nationalism, the anti-Japanese war and the victory of the Communist Party of China (CPC) been extended to include women. The history of women's movements and their specific contribution to the events leading to 1949 was not taken up until about a decade ago and then,

mainly by feminists in Europe and North America. Bobby Siu's book, *Women in China: Imperialism and Women's Resistance*, is confined to the period before 1949 and aims to show the links between imperialism and the Chinese women's struggle.

In the early 20th century, as Bobby Siu meticulously documents, it was anti-imperialist, nationalist and patriotic concerns, rather than women's rights, which brought women of all ages and classes out on the streets and into organised movements for resistance. Initially, the main concern of women protestors was for the fate of China, demonstrating and taking up arms to "rid the nation of all her shame", or "to regain the land with their own hands", striking at the economic foundations of the imperialist presence. In the process, women soon sought to acquire new rights and to improve the conditions of their own lives, but it seemed to most that the fight for self-determination had to take priority.

As Siu shows, it was also a priority adopted and fostered by the CPC when, to its credit, it recognised and mobilised women in support of national, class and feminist goals.

Here Siu's analysis stops short. He applauds the action of the Communist Party of China in mobilising women and in taking up the cause of class rather than feminism. His interpretation reflects a view widespread within nationalist and socialist movements, where it is frequently argued that

nationalist and class interests should take priority over feminist demands, at least in the short-term. Commonly, policies to do with women are perceived as derivative of broader struggles and it is assumed that women will automatically and equally benefit from the political and socio-economic reforms.

Recent studies on the participation of women in movements of resistance and post-revolutionary societies have shown that although women have benefited from the new political and socio-economic conditions achieved by revolution, they have not done so equally. Moreover they reveal that the relationship between class and feminist interests is a very complex one, and feminist analysts are rightly critical of studies, and of the movements themselves, which fail to take into account the complexity of the relationship. It is no longer sufficient to assume that the class struggle can easily incorporate women's specific demands. Such a reductionist view belies the degree of tension and conflict expressed by women who have attempted to resolve practically the competing claims on their identity.

The debate on the relationship between the feminist and class struggles has so far thrown up more questions than answers, and even though Siu's book does not directly address these issues, it is in this context that it should be judged.

Elizabeth Croll

# From the heart of the country to the bowels of the earth

**Black Gold: the Mozambican miner, proletarian and peasant** by Ruth First (*The Harvester Press*), £35.00 h/b.

In her introduction to this important book, Ruth First writes: "The life and experience of the Mozambican migrant miner, and the condition of the rural economy from which he was drawn, is part of the reality of contemporary struggle not only in southern Africa but in the world for our time."

John Berger, who has described emigration across national frontiers as the quintessential experience of our time, wrote in the *Seventh Man* about European countries in which one in seven manual workers is an immigrant. In the South African mining industry in the early 1970s the foreign migrant workers were not one in seven, but three out of four; and Mozambique was the most important supplier of this labour. Today, a quarter of those employed by the South African Chamber of Mines are Mozambicans.

Coming just over a year after Ruth First's assassination in Maputo, *Black Gold* is her triumphant testament. She directed the research and her incisive mind and special experience were crucial. The study is a culmination of her political militancy and life-long struggle against apartheid.

A study of the Mozambican miner throws light not only on the country from which the migrant came, but also on the nature and the power exercised by South Africa over a sub-continent. For South Africa, migrant labour to supplement its own internal 'migrant' labour force, is not a temporary phenomenon but a permanent necessity.

Migrant labour became part of the penetration of the money economy into rural Mozambique, and social progress came second to the spread of capitalism. The coercion of the colonial state undermined the reproductive base of the rural economy and penetrated every corner of agricultural production.

From the time of South Africa's mining revolution it was not Portuguese capital but South African mining capital that dominated southern Mozambique. There has been no process that has generated more exploitation of African labour and more distortion and under-development of the economy as a whole. The flow of



A long way from home: off-shift gold miners, Transvaal

migrant labour became the cause and the result of this rural disruption.

Capital accumulation in the highly industrialised South African economy was based on labour extracted from peasant societies. The South African economy commanded labour forces from a dozen territories beyond its frontiers. Cycles of peasant production were largely destroyed and peasant households became dependent on the migrants' cash remittances for their livelihood.

As South African profits were based on cheap migrant labour from peasant communities in Mozambique, so these communities became increasingly dependent on wage remittances. It was a vicious cycle which distorted rural society.

Eight decades entrenched the system. Then came the defeat of Portuguese colonialism, and the ending of the subordination of the Mozambique economy to South African capitalism became a primary task. As this meant ending the migrant labour system, within two years of its assumption of power Frelimo commissioned the Centre of African Studies at the Eduardo Mondlane University to assist in finding a socialist alternative to this grossly exploitive labour system.

An analysis of the system of using migrant labour would contribute to the fight against colonialism, restructuring the

Mozambique economy and transforming production. It also reveals the enormity of the problems facing newly independent African countries. The governments inherited nations suffering not only from the more obvious effects of colonialism — underdevelopment, subordination of agricultural production to export markets, illiteracy — but also economies and social structures deeply distorted, requiring long periods of readjustments and education for a socialist framework.

Frelimo cannot combat migrant

labour by passing a prohibitive law, or appealing to the patriotism of the migrant, as though the system arose through the free will of the migrant and had no repercussions on the political economy of his community. "It's poverty that forced us to go to Joni (Johannesburg)," says a miner.

The study concentrated on two principal aspects: one comprising the life and work of the migrant up to 1977 (especially in the later years), and the second an investigation into aspects of the peasant economy from which the migrant was recruited.

It is both a political analysis and a human document, embellished with case-histories and interviews with miners and their wives, a revelation of the work history of miners and the hardships of the deprived peasant households. The worksongs of the miners, with repeated one-line choruses like sea-shanties ("Oh! Pull down engineer's boys, pull down! . . . The small foolish white man. . . The white men of Joni have got me/Lasher, mechanical shovel") are deeply revealing. The women's songs are as evocative: "On the flat, bare place — Stay there! Remain there!" The interviews give vivid pictures of the bewilderment of peasant recruits, advised by older miners to keep away from mines where there are too many stretchers (accidents).

This book is invaluable, both as a contribution to the changing of Mozambique society and also to the understanding of colonialism and the nature of the struggle in southern Africa.

Hilda Bernstein

## Tests of character

**Death is Part of the Process** by Hilda Bernstein (*Sinclair Browne*), £7.95 h/b.

When peaceful protest is met by violence, the protesters are forced either to the security of a seat on the fence — or to committing their lives to their cause. It is the latter course that is followed by the characters in Hilda Bernstein's novel, which won the Sinclair Prize. In response to the ever-growing repression in post-Sharpeville South Africa, Bernstein's Human Rights Group

reformed as a sabotage unit.

The book is gripping. But it is a lot more than a thriller, for Bernstein, herself a South African exile long involved in the freedom struggle, brings great insight to her characters as they respond to the tensions of underground action and the brutality of police interrogation. In particular, her accounts of how Dick, a university lecturer, cracks and retreats into a pathetic sense of order in prison, and his wife, Margie, grows from a simple 'wife and mother' to a strong and rounded woman, provide marvellous studies of people under stress. This is not the first book about the sabotage campaign of the early 1960s — but it is certainly the best.

John Paterson



# Blots on the map of history

**Afghanistan under Soviet  
Domination, 1964-83** by Anthony  
Hyman (Macmillan) £7.95 h/b.

In a postscript to the second edition of this study, Hyman takes his version of events up to the middle of 1983 and argues that the guerrillas resisting the Soviet-backed government have become organised and effective enough to provide a possible basis for a nationally based reform.

He details what he sees as the weaknesses of the Soviet and Afghan communist positions, and provides an unusually illuminating account of the impact of the Afghan guerrillas and refugees on neighbouring Pakistan.

Hyman clings to the view that the Soviet Union can withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

The book provides a comprehensive introduction to the modern history and society of that country. He gives considerable attention to the breakdown of the old order in the decades between the Second World War and the Saur Revolution of 1978, and in doing so offers a deft combination of political and economic factors. He is not romantic about the old Afghanistan, but is fiercely critical of those who seized power in 1978 and set about reforming it in an abrupt and arbitrary manner.

In the post-1978 period his analysis, and sympathies, lie with the guerrilla opposition to the Kabul government and their Soviet allies. He provides a detailed account of the various guerrilla groups, and he tries, within the limits of the information available, to relate the guerrilla military actions to the broader changes which 1978 and its aftermath have brought to the Afghan countryside. The impact of the war on the tribes, on agriculture and on the many nationalities that make up Afghanistan are given attention.

Coherent and well-researched as Hyman's book is, it leaves a number of questions unanswered. First, the title: it is not only an extraordinary exaggeration to say that Afghanistan has been under Soviet domination since 1964 - 14 years before the communists came to power - but also one that simply occludes the ways in which the Soviet Union did become involved in 1978 and 1979. By postulating a wild cold war myth, the historian blots out history. This is true for the history of Soviet policy - which was restrained and muddled on Afghanistan - and also the history of Afghan society itself.



Clinging to a portable set of traditions: Afghan refugee tribesmen

For the central fact about the recent conflict in Afghanistan, one obscured by the Soviet intervention, is that the root of the problem lies in the tensions of Afghanistan itself. The central conflict has been between a small group of impatient modernisers and a mass of reluctant tribespeople who do not want or understand this modernisation. It was the folly of the Afghan communists to stoke up opposition to themselves by provoking a mass resistance in 1978-9; and the crime of more than one outside state that, for reasons that had nothing to do with Afghanistan, they then stepped in to further inflame the situation. The Afghan war remains a civil war, one later internationalised, not the result of some creeping Soviet takeover.

This mistaken focus in Hyman's work, as in most other recent books on Afghanistan, is coupled to another problem: his assessment of the current situation. He fails to make a serious analysis of what Soviet intentions and policy are, and greatly underestimates both Soviet determination to stay in Afghanistan and the prospects of its consolidating a reasonably friendly regime there. Soviet troops will leave Afghanistan - but only when Moscow feels confident the regime can defend itself. The purpose of the UN negotiations on Afghanistan is not to provide a face-saving way for the USSR to leave, it is to see how far the other

states involved, and particularly Pakistan, are willing to negotiate an agreement under which the People's Democratic Party government can be recognised.

In common with other commentators who support the guerrillas, Hyman provides many examples, some no doubt true, of the disarray, weakness and divisions within government ranks. A lot of this is Peshawar gossip and fiction, all too eagerly relayed and embroidered by frivolous diplomats and the press. The fact is that if the Afghan regime - party, state, army - were as weak as these reports say it is, then no amount of Soviet aid could have shored it up. The few independent assessments available - by Asian diplomats or observers who visit Kabul - suggests a rather different story: that while much of the countryside is still in rebel hands, the population is tiring of the war; that the regime is able to set up neutral or cooperative peasant groups in parts of the countryside; that the security situation in the cities and provinces north of the Hindu Kush has improved; and that the size and effectiveness of the Afghan army and the PDPA have greatly increased. In other words: the USSR and its allies are winning.

In the postscript, Hyman states: "Guerrillas win if they do not lose, and conventional armies lose if they do not win." This is far from being the case. The Soviet and Afghan forces need not be too

worried if guerrillas, and foreign TV crews, wander around the southern mountains for years to come. What matters is who has power at the centre, who has the stamina to last the longest. The evidence suggests that the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan is here to stay. □

Fred Halliday

## Father of the struggle

**Sol Plaatje - South African  
Nationalist 1876-1932** by Brian  
Willan (Heinemann) £8.95 h/b.

The long entanglement of Britain with the machinery of apartheid is not properly recognised, although it is accepted that it was the British Act of Union that laid the foundations for today's regime. In 1909, protests against the colour-bar clauses in the draft South Africa Act culminated in a South African Native Convention in Bloemfontein, where 60 delegates called on the British imperial government to intervene on behalf of the black people of South Africa, pressing for safeguards to protect their franchise in the Cape, asking for its extension throughout the proposed union, and demanding the removal of the colour bar in the union parliament.



Plaatje as orator, 1926; right, portrait in 1932; year of his death

The convention was a fully representative meeting of black South Africans, but little notice was taken of it either in South Africa or Britain. It represented a new-found sense of political unity, and delegates resolved to set up a permanent organisation. This was achieved with the formation of the South African Native National Congress in January 1912 (later renamed the African National Congress) the first non-tribal nationalist movement on the continent, and today – despite being made illegal in 1960 – its activities and policies deeply reflect the aspirations of the majority of South Africans.

Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje, a gifted journalist, writer, political leader and spokesman for his people, was its first secretary, and participated in two delegations to Britain seeking intervention against the 1913 Native Land Act, foundation of the dispossession of black South Africans of their land. It turned peasants into labourers or homeless wanderers, and remains as the basis for the regime's bantustan policies.

By "introducing the principle of segregation, (the Act) was in the best interests of the African population," declared Edward Dower, Secretary for Native Affairs, and he advised the people to do one of three things: become servants; move into the "reserves"; or sell their stock for cash. Some MPs during a debate in the House of Commons in 1919, did pass strictures on the Act, but the government replied that it was bound to a policy of non-interference in the affairs of a responsible government: the words echo down the years to this very day.

Sol Plaatje made a unique contribution to these events, combining his abilities as spokesman and organiser of his people with his gifts as a writer and journalist, while his intense personal involvement took him on journeys throughout South Africa. His observations were recorded in a political book, *Native Life in*

*South Africa*. Brian Willan comments that this stands as one of the most powerful polemics written about South Africa.

Willan's meticulously researched and lucid biography of Sol Plaatje brings to life an historical perspective which is essential for an understanding of today's apartheid politics. As he notes, South Africa has a capacity to obscure and distort its own past, to neglect the lives of those whose aspirations have been in conflict with official orthodoxies.

The book is full of fascinating and often astonishing information, even relaying in two secret letters from the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, to General Jan Smuts when he was South Africa's Prime Minister. It includes an assessment of Plaatje's novel *Mhudi*, the first by a black South African. This was, says Willan, the outcome of an attempt to marry two different cultural traditions: African oral forms – particularly those of the Barolong – and the written traditions and forms of English literature. The novel bears testimony to the women who gave Plaatje support in London when he was writing it, and from whom he derived a keen insight into the parallels between racial and sexual discrimination.

But the political ideal of a society free of discrimination, which sustained Plaatje in a lifetime of struggle, has still to be realised. The terminology has changed, but the realities are the same. Were Plaatje to return to South Africa today, Willan writes, he would have little difficulty in recognising in the "homelands" and "independent black states" the logical outcome of the policies against which he had fought so hard. "And yet those ideals for which he stood, which he did so much to keep alive, are far from dead and buried. The memory of his life of commitment to the African political struggle may yet contribute to their realisation." □

Hilda Bernstein

## Miners v. the mafia

**Rebellion in the Veins: Political struggle in Bolivia 1952-1982** by James Dunkerley. Verso Editions, 1984.

Take one remote, high country in the centre of a continent. Cut off its direct access to the sea. Strip it of its mineral wealth. Add some deep racial differences, and a large pinch of cocaine. The name of this recipe for disaster is a country called Bolivia.

As Dunkerley points out in the foreword to his book, Bolivia has a "reputation". Despite his painstaking efforts to give a detailed narrative account of its society and history over the past 30 years – the book effectively starting with the disastrous Chaco war in 1932 – the dubious reputation still seems justified.

Dunkerley is clear as to where he would lay the blame for it. Over the past century, Bolivian society has been dominated primarily by the *Rosca*, the three tin-mining families who built huge fortunes out of the country's main export, while contributing as little as they could to their nation's well being. The richest of them, the Patiño family, is reported to have paid just US\$415 in taxes in 1951. Second only to the mine-owners in their greed, Dunkerley identifies the large landowners, eight of whom owned 10 per cent of all the agricultural land in 1938. The book also traces the degeneration of the Bolivian armed forces to the bunch of gangsters who took over the country in the late 1970s to conduct their lucrative cocaine smuggling with greater impunity, prompting the famous remark from a US State Department

official that this was "the first time the mafia has bought itself a government."

Not that the US government is entirely blameless. The author traces how the US control of tin stocks and the world tin price since the Second World War has kept Bolivia in poverty, and is critical of the capitalist system's fostering of underdevelopment.

Dunkerley is plain as to how Bolivia should and could have progressed. What he has intended as the central focus of the work – somewhat stifled in the detailed analysis of the rest of the period covered – is the 1952 revolution. In 18 months, the MNR (Nationalist Revolutionary Movement) managed to nationalise the mines, initiate a far-reaching reform of land ownership, and introduce universal suffrage. After this period however, the revolution became increasingly conservative, and could not harness the strength of the popular union movement.

The author sees this syndicalist tradition in Bolivia, mainly expressed through the COB (the Central Workers' Union) as ensuring the failure of a succession of military rulers to impose a stable authoritarian government – and as the reason why Che Guevara's guerrilla adventure in the Bolivian highlands was a sad irrelevance. It also provides him with a hopeful conclusion to the book since he sees in it evidence that Bolivia has created "a mass political movement for socialism (which) has acquired exceptionally strong roots and remains a vital possibility." □

Nick Caistor

Policing the great divide: unionist march, La Paz





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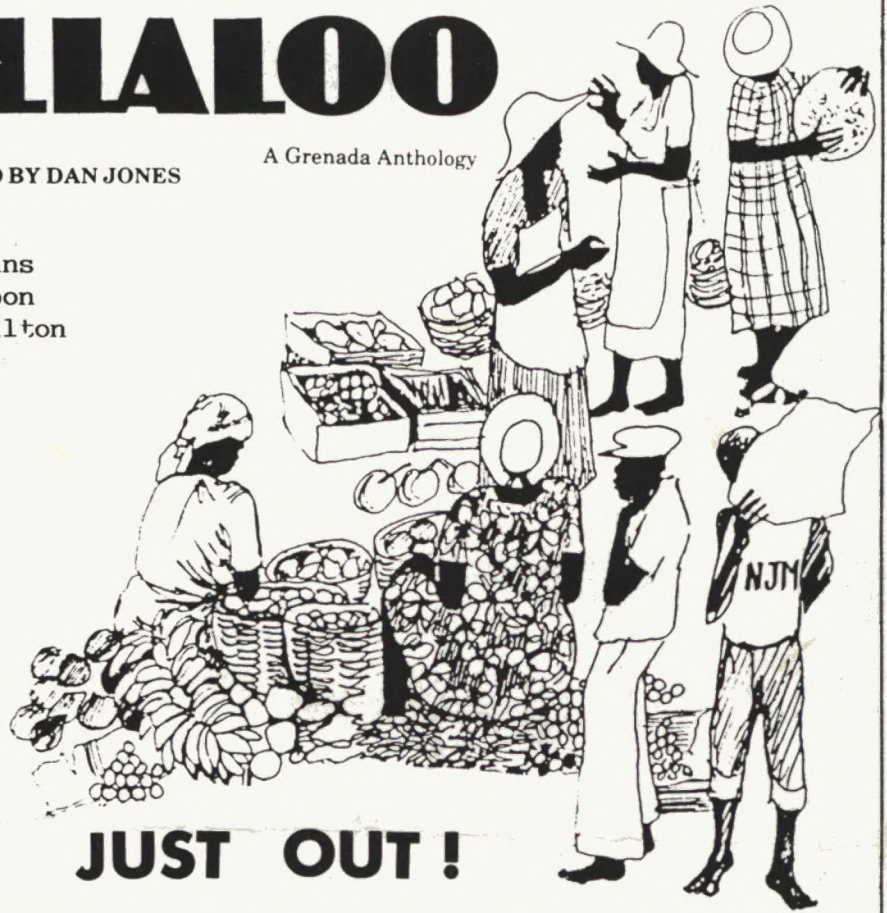
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## Diary

*If you wish your forthcoming event to be included in our Diary, without charge, please contact us with*

*your dates. We need to know about Sept/Oct events by August 22nd.*

### JUNE

Wed 27th. 7.30pm. Women in Cuba, discussion forum, BCRC Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Rd, NW1.

Wed 27th. 1.00pm. Support the Miners, March & Rally, SERTUC & NUM. Tower Hill, EC3 to Jubilee Gardens, SE1

Thurs 28th. 6.30pm. Equal rights for migrants, immigrants and refugees in Europe, Meeting, European Immigrant Lobby Steering Cttee County Hall SE1, Room 118

Sat 30th. 12.00 - 12.00. London Against Racism, Rally, GLC. County Hall/Jubilee Gardens, SE1.

### JULY

Sun 1st. 12.00 - 6.00pm. Rally and Festival, LDCP. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square WC1.

Tues 3rd. 7.00pm. Economic Summit. What was left out? London Area Council Liberation. House of Commons Cttee Room 11/Booked by Sid Bidwell MP.

Sat 7th. 12.00 - 6.00pm. 'One Finsbury Park', Summer Festival, Finsbury Park Action Group. Finsbury Park N4.

Sun 8th. All Day. Brighter Islington Summer Festival. Highbury Fields.

Wed 11th. Black People in Cuba. discussion forum, BCRC Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Rd, NW1.

Thurs - Sat. 19th - 21st. Namibia Symposium, Namibia Support Cttee. Institute for Commonwealth Studies

Wed 25th. 7.30pm. Education in Cuba, discussion forum, BCRC. Cock Tavern, 23 Phonix Road, NW1.

### AUGUST

Wed 8th. 7.30pm. Health in Cuba, discussion forum, BCRC Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Rd, NW1.

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