

# The Mandelas' Struggle Continues

by Ben Turok

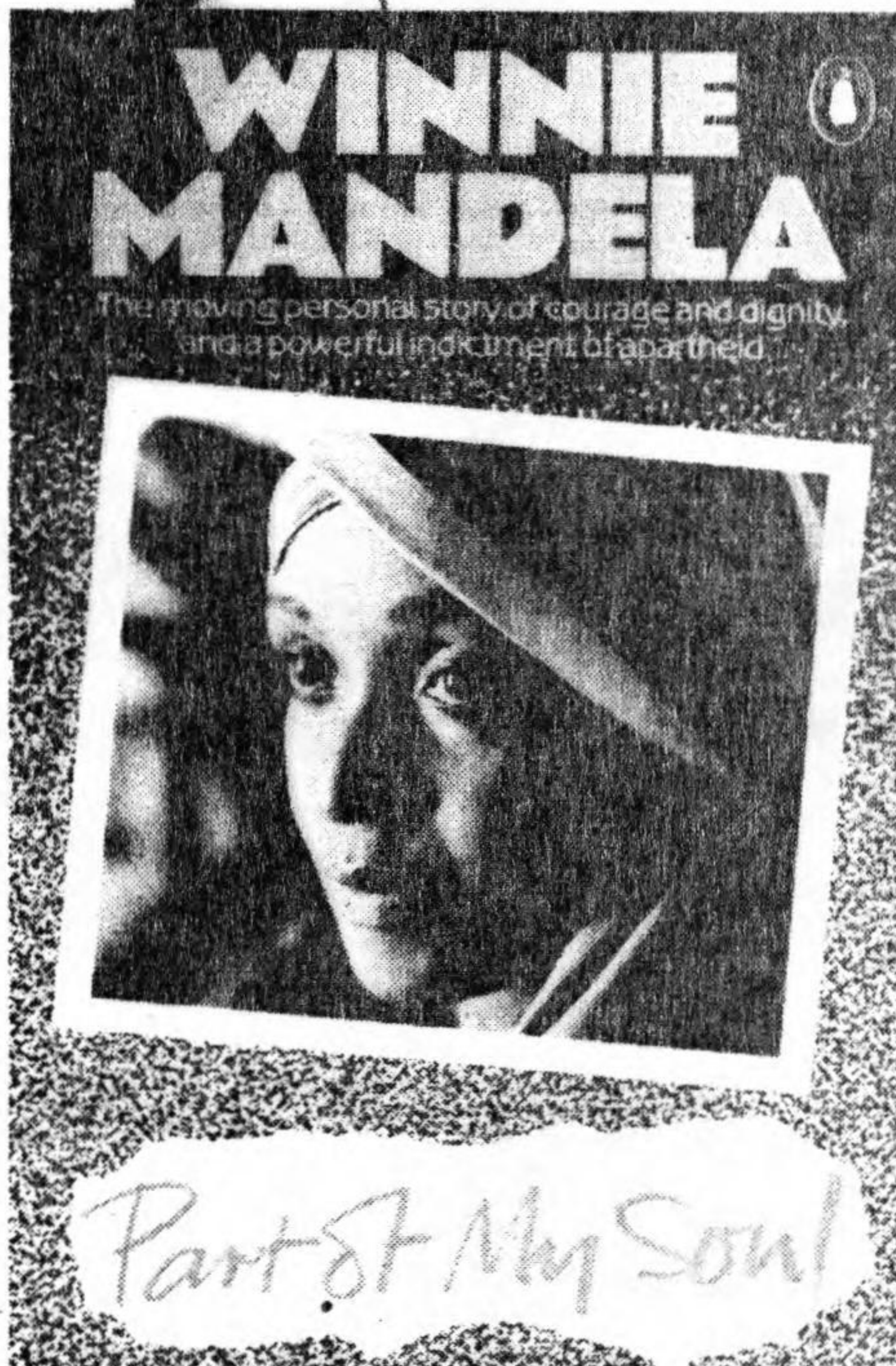
Mary Benson, **Nelson Mandela**. Penguin Books, 1986. 269 pp. £2.50

Anne Benjamin (Editor), **Winnie Mandela, Part Of My Soul**. Penguin Books, 1985. 164 pp. £2.95

The past year has seen a great surge of sentiment throughout the world for the release of Nelson Mandela coupled with a kind of protective admiration for the boldness of Winnie Mandela. While each has acted out a separate political role, sentiment has also focussed on the extraordinary struggle that has gone on before the public eye for this man and woman to maintain their relationship in the face of the rigours of police and prison persecution. Both these books give much scope for the further appreciation of their determination to stand by each other in what must be one of the most heroic stories of our time.

But there is another theme which predominates and which sustains the personal drama and that is the outstanding commitment to the struggle displayed by each in their now separate spheres. Nelson in his role of imprisoned leader of the revolution, harassed by the authorities for 23 years, is shown by Mary Benson to have lived a totally dedicated life before his arrest. Winnie, in her subsequent political development, has showed enormous resilience in her constant confrontations with the security police, imprisonment and torture. The saga of commitment and the determination to sustain a posture that is wholly political emerges from every page of both these accounts, even while the details of their personal lives are given full scope. In the end it is hard to say which element most sustains our interest, the political or the human/personal since both are so intertwined, but sustained it is.

Nevertheless it has to be said that Mary Benson's book, the more serious of the two, is not ultimately a biography of Nelson Mandela. The problems of writing about a personality so long removed from continuing contact with the world are



apparent, notwithstanding the author's diligent search of every source, written and oral, for information and insights into her subject. The book is basically the story of the struggle of the ANC over the last 40 years, told in a form that best brings out Mandela's role.

And his role, always substantial, increased steadily until, shortly before his arrest, he had become a heroic figure, the chief representative of the South African revolution in its new bold stage. It should be remembered that the ANC is a national liberation movement, not a

[1986] A marriage (right, 1958) of commitment. Nelson (far right, in Xhosa dress) led a totally dedicated life before his arrest. Winnie (above, at a recent funeral) has since developed enormous resistance to state persecution. Together they symbolise two aspects of struggle: public dedication to a political role, and private determination to maintain decent human relations

party. How natural therefore, that the oppressed people should choose from their number a man who both by virtue of his style and by his actions, represents their aspiration to overthrow white rule and liberate the oppressed Black masses. Mandela's speeches at conferences, in court, and his messages from prison, all bring out the justice of the demand for national liberation, which has won such convincing support for the ANC in the country and legitimacy from world opinion outside it.

Mary Benson's story of the struggle conveys the non-sectarian broad character of the movement. Its policies are clear expressions of African nationalism while, at the same time, going beyond that to principles of non-racialism, equality and social revolution. Given the limited nature of her resources, she





has produced a very worthwhile account, perhaps the best survey yet, on the struggle of the ANC.

Yet there remain some problems of interpretation. Relying heavily on court records and speeches, there are nuances of policy that will have to be corrected in due course. Indeed, so much of the modern history of the struggle has been based on court proceedings that numerous distortions have crept in. Attitudes to guerrilla warfare expressed at the Rivonia Trial ought not to be taken at face value. There are jarring references to views on capitalism and the like which will be corrected in due course. Many other issues have been presented by well-meaning writers which the movement has not been able to clarify. The reader will have to exercise both patience and goodwill until the movement writes its own history when that

becomes possible.

The record of the life of Winnie Mandela provided by Anne Benjamin does not stand up so well. Based on personal interviews, conducted under the most appalling conditions of police harassment and privation, the accounts are somewhat scrappy and disjointed. There is an excessive concern with daily problems without adequate attention to context. Much more could have been made of this story by someone adopting a more political approach, without sacrificing insights into her suffering and courage. After all, Winnie insists throughout that she saw herself at first as Nelson's representative when he could not speak to the people and then as a symbol of resistance when her own consciousness matured. In this book the struggle of the people is sometimes lost from focus.

## NELSON MANDELA

THE AUTHORITATIVE AND MOVING LIFE STORY OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREAT LEADERS - ANTHONY LAWSON



MARY BENSON

Nevertheless it is profoundly stirring to hear from Winnie Mandela herself through the medium of these pages sentiments such as "Can you spend a quarter of your life in prison and still be prepared for the dialogue you called for 20 years ago, before they locked you up?" ■