

South Africa's Most Unlikely Ambassador

The Anti-Apartheid Harry Schwarz, Joining the de Klerk Ranks

By David B. Ottaway
Washington Post Foreign Service

JOHANNESBURG—Ambassador Harry Schwarz. Harry Schwarz, diplomat.

The Honorable Harry Schwarz of South Africa.

So it doesn't exactly trip elegantly off the tongue.

The new South African ambassador to the United States isn't conventional in other ways, either.

He has let it be known that he intends to avoid cocktail parties and dinner parties and other forms of schmoozing. Not his style.

He isn't always . . . well, diplomatic. His most ardent supporters call him contentious, arrogant, abrasive, quick-tempered. One of his favorite debating techniques, which he wields with skill and abandon, is ridicule.

He has spent his career opposing the policies of the government he will be representing in Washington.

He is often described as a loose cannon, a reputation he does not entirely disavow and seems rather to enjoy.

There has seldom been as canny or as risky a diplomatic appointment as that of Harry Schwarz, 66. He arrives in Washington today to begin the formidable task of persuading the United States to curtail its economic sanctions against his country, replacing retiring Ambassador Piet Koornhof, the aloof patrician whose politics were associated with racial separatism.

Schwarz is fervently anti-apartheid. Politicians here regard his appointment as a public relations masterstroke by President Frederik W. de Klerk, whose efforts to end sanctions will hinge on his ability to convince Americans that the political reforms he has instituted represent a "new South Africa" and not merely a face lift for apartheid. There may be no other white person in South Africa with better credentials to argue that case.

A lifelong liberal, Schwarz walked with a torch in hand through the streets of Johannesburg in 1956 to protest the government's removal of brown-skinned coloreds, or those of racially mixed parentage, from the white voters' roll. As a leader of the opposition Democratic Party, he has been an outspoken critic, and nettle in the side, of de Klerk's ruling National Party all of his adult life.

Over the past decade, he has seen the "Nats" moved ideologically closer to the liberal Democrats; it has reached the point, he says, where he can happily represent the current administration.

"It's not that I've joined them, they've joined us," he says. "They've come around."

Today, Schwarz has nothing but kudos for de Klerk. His farewell speech in Parliament in early February,

which he titled "Look After My Country While I Am Gone," began with effusive praise for the president, who just happened to be sitting below the speaker's podium to his right.

And that is the heart of the controversy likely to surround Schwarz from the moment he steps off the plane in Washington. Whose man is he?

Harry Schwarz's, says Harry Schwarz. His only agenda, he says, is that of a humanitarian—"a human rights person, utterly opposed to any form of discrimination based on race, color, language or sex."

But Randall Robinson, executive director of the lobbying organization TransAfrica, sees in Schwarz's appointment a hint of the hypocrisy he says has characterized the South African government's posturing over apartheid.

"De Klerk," he says, "wants to purchase support from the West with as small a price as possible, and to some extent he has done that with charm more than substantive change in South Africa."

A liberal such as Schwarz, Robinson says, "could be more dangerous to efforts to end apartheid than a conservative." He says he also fears that Schwarz, who is Jewish, will be used to divide American Jews and American blacks, who have traditionally been strong allies against apartheid.

Was there cynicism in the selection?

De Klerk, says Robinson, "can't be unaware of the probable effect of it—no savvy politician would be. Whether this is cynical is left to any observer to decide."

Schwarz says the argument he will bring to America is that apartheid is on its way out, and that continuing sanctions would merely punish a government struggling to do its best—punishing, in the process, majority blacks as much as minority whites.

To which Robinson responds: "No one in his right mind believes the government is going to continue to make progress without pressure. You end the pressure, you end the progress."

Standing Up for His Rights

Colleagues on Harry Schwarz:

"He's a brilliant debater who goes for the jugular rather more quickly than most," says Democratic Party leader Zach de Beer.

"He's a prickly guy," says party spokesman Peter Soal.

"He's got the sensitivity of a Jew but the arrogance of a German," says another colleague, an admirer.

Says Harry Schwarz: "Prickly—let me tell you, I make no secret of it. I don't allow anybody to walk over me." Tall, thin and balding, he has a rather formal presence about him, reinforced by a perpetually grave expression. His conversation is all mouth—no gestures, no body language. His taste in clothing is impeccable.

"I have grown up as a youngster with a philosophy in life that if I don't stand up for my rights, nobody else is going to do it. I'm a believer in that old saying: 'If I'm not for myself, who will be for me? But if I'm for myself alone, who am I?'"

Schwarz was born in Cologne, Germany; he might well have grown up in America had his father, Fritz, been able to get a visa to go there when he fled the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany in late 1933. As it turned out, the Schwarz family was turned down for immigration in both Britain and the United States. So when an unknown South African Jew offered to put up the 100-pound guarantee necessary for a South African visa in those days, his father grabbed the opportunity.

The Schwarz family settled in Cape Town, but Harry went to high school in Johannesburg, signing up to fight in World War II even before he got to continued on page 6

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college. He served as a navigator on bombers in North Africa and Italy. His war experience apparently left an indelible impression on him because throughout his political career Harry Schwarz has been known as a strong supporter of the South African military.

"If believing in law and order is hawkish, then I'm a hawk," he says. "But as I've said in Parliament, I'm actually a hawk with a heart, I'm dove because I'm also a peace-loving person."

As a student, he belonged to the United Party of Prime Minister Jan Smuts, which lost to the segregationist Afrikaner National Party in the history-making 1948 election. It was that party that imposed the rigid apartheid system that made South Africa a pariah in the world of nations. And it is the same party that now, under de Klerk's leadership, is dismantling the system, law by law.

Throughout his 16 years in Parliament, Schwarz was the uncontested representative of the heavily Jewish and artsy middle-class Johannesburg suburb of Yeoville, which sits on the hills overlooking the city. But he and his wife, Annette, live miles away in an English cottage-style home in the northern, upper-middle-class suburb of Craighall Park.

Schwarz's specialty is economics and finance; he's an ardent advocate these days of what he calls "the social market system," which he describes as similar to what underlies West Germany's successful economic policies.

This means, he explains, reliance on private entrepreneurship as the basis of economic growth, but also a strong dose of social consciousness toward the needy and deprived.

His last contribution to the Democratic Party was to get the "social market" approach adopted as its economic policy at last summer's Congress. "Until recently, they were old-fashioned-style capitalist in their outlook," he says.

He retains one significant disagreement with the ruling party, over the issue of security laws such as Section 29 of the Internal Security Act—which allows the police to hold people in detention indefinitely without trial.

Fighting for the right of habeas corpus has been "fundamental to my existence," he says, so he's highly critical of the government's decision to hold on to the infamous Section 29 in the midst of other reforms—such as enactment of a law legalizing black labor unions and the repeal of a law requiring blacks, whites and coloreds to live in different neighborhoods.

He isn't resigning from the Demo-

cratic Party, and de Klerk hasn't asked him to. His party, he says, will still have a role to play even in a post-apartheid society.

"There will always be a necessity for people to stand up and talk about human rights and infringement of rights," he says.

Belief in the Irreversible

There's no need for sanctions anymore, Schwarz argues, because the reform process is "irreversible," a description of events here that Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) is hotly contesting.

"The whole argument about sanctions depends on whether you accept the irreversibility of the process. If you accept the irreversibility of the process, then the reason why anybody should suffer [from sanctions], why anybody should be unemployed, in fact falls away.

"I don't have to convince anybody because I think it speaks for itself. It's not the word of the state president that makes it irreversible, it's the facts," he says.

"Nobody can tell me that you can now reintroduce 'influx control.' Nobody can tell me that you can make people—nonwhites—carry passes. Nobody can tell me that you can reverse the labor legislation. Nobody can tell me that you can go back and say, 'I'm going to reimpose the Group Areas Act.' That's just not conceivable," he says. "So once the process got to the stage where it had its own momentum, it's no longer in the hands of anybody to stop it. Not even the [white opposition] Conservative Party can stop the process."

Influx control, scrapped in 1986, kept blacks out of the 87 percent of South Africa reserved for whites and required them to carry passes showing they had a "temporary" right to be in white areas as workers.

The Group Areas Act of 1966, a pillar of apartheid, has produced the rigid segregation of housing and living according to race and color. De Klerk announced Feb. 1 that the act would be repealed in this session of Parliament, which ends in June.

Much has been done; much has yet to be done. Blacks in South Africa still do not have equal voting rights. Nelson Mandela's release notwithstanding, the jails still hold black political prisoners; and many politically active blacks remain in exile elsewhere.

Schwarz begins to sound like the diplomat he is soon to be when he addresses the issue of "community rights," the new government buzzword that blacks widely regard as white code language for maintaining racial privileges in a post-apartheid so-

ciety. Schwarz dismisses the whole debate as largely one of semantics.

He says there is need for a clear distinction between "rights" and "privileges" and that he's "utterly opposed to any form of privilege for any individual or any group."

But, he says, "if you have 'individual rights,' then you can also have 'community rights.'"

"If a Catholic community wants to have a Catholic school, it should be allowed to, so long as the state provides schooling for everybody on an equal basis," he says.

"If a community wants to do something on its own, it must be allowed to do so. I can't see any problem with that taking place," he says.

Could that extend to all-white schools? All-white restaurants? Separate but equal?

Schwarz does not elaborate.

Representing All the People

To be an ambassador in a time of such momentous political upheaval, he says, "is not to be an ordinary ambassador."

"You're got to now recognize that there are 37 million people in South Africa, you've got a duty to 37 million people, and you must in fact go there [to Washington] seeking to look after 37 million people's interest. That's been the mission that I've set myself."

How does he represent the interests of "all South Africans" when the ANC, which has a huge following among blacks, is totally opposed to the lifting of sanctions?

"I don't pretend that I represent the ANC. I say that I must look after the interest of all the people," he says. "Therefore, I must know what the views of the ANC are, I must know what their objectives are ... but I'm not the spokesman for the ANC." He contends the ANC does not represent the position of all South African blacks, or even most South African blacks.

Convincing himself that he's the spokesman for "all 37 million South Africans" enables Schwarz to dismiss the whole sanctions debate as simply unimportant and an old hat he doesn't have to wear. "The real debate," he argues, "is about what happens to South Africa after apartheid, so why spend a lot of energy arguing over sanctions?"

The "real debate," he says, is what the U.S. attitude toward South Africa is going to be after apartheid. Is it going to take South Africa "off the agenda" and disengage even further or will it throw its weight into the struggle to

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Rebels Launch Attacks In Ethiopian Provinces

Government Urges Defense of Nation's 'Unity'

By Jennifer Parmelee
Special to The Washington Post

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia, Feb. 26—Rebel forces have launched an offensive in a northwestern region of this nation torn by 30 years of civil strife.

The government of President Mengistu Haile Mariam has responded by accusing the guerrillas of seeking to "dismantle the country." It called on Ethiopians to take up arms to defend the "unity of the country."

The attacks were launched Saturday by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Forces, an umbrella organization encompassing six anti-government groups including the Tigray People's Liberation Front. The hard-line Marxist Tigray front, based in northern Tigray province, has long sought to overthrow the government.

The offensive came on the heels of an opening round of negotiations between the government and separatist guerrillas in Washington last week. Some analysts suggested that the rebel attacks may be aimed at pressing the government to make concessions at the bargaining table.

The government also has faced growing domestic pressure from severe fuel shortages that have aggravated economic problems. Residents here stocked up on food today amid government warnings that the capital might soon be cut off from northern parts of the country.

Intense fighting between government and guerrilla forces was reported around Bahir Dar, a city on the Blue Nile about 200 miles northwest of the capital.

Rebels announced in a radio broadcast that they had taken the city—a claim supported by reports from Western observers—and it appeared that a strategic bridge over the Nile also had been seized by guerrillas. The fate of a major government air force base outside Bahir Dar remained uncertain, according to conflicting accounts trickling out today.

Farther south, the rebels occupied Djen, a small town about 100 miles from Addis Ababa, according to government and rebel sources. Its fall was reported to have blocked two main roads leading to Bahir Dar and to have complicated efforts by government forces to reach the besieged area.

The government's response also appeared to have been hampered by heavy cloud cover resulting from the rainy season that began this month.

The rebel statement said the offensive was aimed at "liberating" Gojam and Gonder provinces northwest of the capital.

In a statement Monday night, the government suggested that two other main roads to Addis Ababa, including a key route linking the capital with the Red Sea port of Aseb, were in danger of being cut off by rebel attacks.

Relief officials and diplomats said there was no sign, however, that the road to Aseb was threatened. Such a development could hinder badly needed supplies of fuel and food. An Addis Ababa resident said he had returned from Aseb this evening and had seen no sign of fighting.

Some Western and Ethiopian observers said the government's statement may have been intended to rally support from Ethiopians and deflect attention from economic problems. At the same time, a Western diplomat noted, "it could reflect a genuine concern that they are really in trouble."

Nevertheless, Mengistu left the capital today on a tour of the southern countryside, a move viewed as offsetting mounting tension among government officials.

The talks in Washington centered on rebel demands in the northern province of Eritrea, where the Eritrean People's Liberation Front has long battled for independence. Although the Tigrayan and Eritrean rebel groups have expressed differing views, the two insurgent forces have cooperated extensively in the past.

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see that there is "a true democratic government here" and "an economic system which is acceptable in the Western world and capable of dealing with the problems of South Africa?"

Part of gearing up for that debate, he says, is revamping South Africa's embassy in Washington "to project the new South Africa." He's been trying to recruit more blacks and other non-whites, but says it hasn't been easy.

"Many people want to be part of the action here" in South Africa, he says.

As to what kind of ambassador he thinks he's going to be, Schwarz says he doesn't intend "to hide away and pretend I'm not there," but neither does he intend to be an active member of Washington's diplomatic cocktail set.

His preference, he said, is for tete-a-tete conversations with those who matter politically in America to project the situation "accurately, sometimes warts and all."

"I don't intend to be aggressive toward the American public, far from it," he says. "But I'd like them to understand that there is a change."

The transformation he sees includes a "complete mind-set change" among South African whites toward the prospect of sharing power with the black majority. The press and television have it all wrong, he says, when they relate stories of white right-wing extremists beating up black kids and barring them from white swimming pools.

Such incidents are "as little white South Africa as the Ku Klux Klan is the United States," he says.

But the change in black attitudes is just as profound, according to Schwarz.

"Black South Africans have come to accept that the new age is about to come. It's not in 20 years' time or 10 years' time, it's around the corner. That's a very real change that's happened in South Africa. ... That's where irreversibility comes in. ... I think black South Africans accept that it's completely irreversible."