

# Waiting for Mandela

**Nelson Mandela: The Man and the Movement**  
by Mary Benson,  
foreword by Bishop Desmond M. Tutu.  
Norton, 269 pp., \$16.95

**Part of My Soul Went With Him**  
by Winnie Mandela,  
edited by Anne Benjamin,  
adapted by Mary Benson.  
Norton, 164 pp., \$16.95; \$5.95 (paper)

**Winnie Mandela**  
by Nancy Harrison.  
Braziller, 183 pp., \$14.95

**Dispensations: The Future of South Africa as South Africans See It**  
by Richard John Neuhaus.  
Eerdmans, 317 pp., \$16.95

J.M. Coetzee

The recent bid by the South African government to exchange Nelson Mandela for two Soviet dissidents is only one in a long series of efforts it has made to disencumber itself of its most famous political prisoner. As long ago as 1973 Mandela was offered freedom (of a sort) if he would agree to lead a retired life in the Transkei "homeland." He refused. In 1985 he was offered release on the sole condition that he would distance himself from the advocacy of force. "Only free men can negotiate," he responded. "Prisoners cannot enter into contracts." He and the imprisoned senior leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) thus seem to be content, for the time being, to let Pretoria stew in its own juice.

In 1964, in his forty-sixth year, Nelson Mandela, with seven ANC colleagues, was sentenced to life imprisonment after being tried on charges of recruiting and training personnel to conduct revolutionary warfare, and of conspiring to aid foreign powers to invade the Republic. He did not attempt to deny the charges, the first of which was in essence true. He had set up an underground movement, Umkhonto we Sizwe ("The Spear of the Nation"), with the aim of carrying out sabotage attacks; he had toured Africa, raising support for the ANC; he had himself undergone guerrilla training.

In the four-hour statement he read at his trial—the most extended exposition we have of his political philosophy—Mandela took pains to distance himself, on the one hand, from an exclusive black nationalism ("Africa for the Africans"), and, on the other, from international socialism. Citing the ANC's 1955 Freedom Charter, he called for a new constitution for South Africa, leading to a state free of racial divisions and class antagonisms, based on a mixed economy in which there would be a place for private enterprise.

There is no evidence that Mandela himself, or indeed the ANC leadership, has shifted from this position in the last twenty years. Beyond the immediate aim of eliminating the white monopoly of power and wealth, the ANC appears to envisage neither a dictatorship of the proletariat nor some "authentically African" form of social organization in which whites (and perhaps Indians too) will have no place.

If the South African regime had come to terms with the ANC in the 1950s, it would have been coming to terms with a fairly peaceable popular movement under petit-bourgeois, social democratic leadership. Instead it chose to brand the movement as subversive and its leaders as tools of international communism. Now

it finds itself in the ironic position of being unable to find a way of releasing those same leaders without loss of face. Whether it even bought time for itself by proscribing the ANC is questionable. For today it is pitted against a mass movement of far greater insurrectionary power than it had a quarter of a century ago, with an armed wing far better equipped and trained, and with world opinion squarely on its side. Would the ANC's old guard, if liberated tomorrow, be able to control the forces of bitterness and anger that have built up in the black community, and lead the way to the utopia of liberty, equality, fraternity, and prosperity spoken of in the

Under the title *Nelson Mandela: The Man and the Movement* Mary Benson has written a serviceable account of a life interrupted in mid-course. It is based on interviews with Mandela conducted before 1961, on his published writings, and on discussions with the Mandela family and prisoners released from Robben Island. It is a political biography, pretending to no great intimacy with its subject. When it touches on personal matters—for example, the courtship of Mandela with his wife—it does so with more than a little awkwardness. Beyond such statements as that Mandela has "a natural air of authority," that he is "a born mass leader who [cannot] help magnetizing people," and reminders that he

and the main ANC line, it does less than justice to the ideological and political tensions within the movement, thus making it seem more monolithic than it has truly been. I refer principally to tensions associated with the Pan-Africanist and Black Consciousness deviations.

In 1959 Robert Sobukwe, a young academic and political activist, led a breakaway from the ANC on the grounds that it was too hospitable to whites and Indians and had become a tool of the white-controlled South African Communist party. Sobukwe founded the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), which he saw as a vanguard leading the masses to nationwide antiwhite insurrection and the overthrow of white power. Benson acknowledges the appeal of the PAC's populist insurrectionism, particularly among the *Lumpenproletariat*. The subsequent history of the movement, routed within South Africa, dwindling in exile under incompetent leadership, certainly seems to prove that it had grossly miscalculated the realities of power. Yet the PAC and its spiritual heir, the Azanian People's Organization, deserve more than the brief page Benson gives them. They stand for a strain of anti-Westernism within the black resistance movement in South Africa, a strain which the ANC leadership has never sanctioned but with which it has clearly had to find some *modus vivendi* during the current uprisings. One may deplore the PAC as one deplores Khomeini's brigades in Iran, but both belong to a xenophobic current within third-world revolutions that cannot be dismissed.

As for Black Consciousness, this was more an intellectual than a political movement in its beginnings, with debts to the Negritude writers, to Frantz Fanon, and to Afro-American Black Power, addressing itself to the psychological liberation of black people, to the assertion of an autonomous black identity and black culture. Under the leadership of Steve Biko, Black Consciousness gained a strong foothold in black high schools and colleges. It was the animating force behind the Soweto uprising of 1976, and, insofar as the current unrest centers on the schools, continues to be a potent force. Again, Benson's brief account does not do justice to the extent of ideological and strategic rivalry between Black Consciousness and the ANC.

*Part of My Soul Went with Him*, though presented under the authorship of Winnie Mandela, is in fact a biography of Winnie Mandela written by Anne Benjamin, making liberal use of interviews with Mrs. Mandela.

Used at first as a stand-in for her husband, Winnie Mandela has over the years grown in political stature, and is now a redoubtable public figure in her own right. As her international reputation has increased, she has proved more and more of an embarrassment to the authorities, who have clearly been at their wits' end about how to treat a woman who flouts the restrictions they place on her and dares them to react.

Winnie Mandela was born the daughter of a minor chief who, when the South African government set up the black "homelands," chose the way of collaboration (but later, it would appear, had a change of heart). After training as a social worker, she met and married Nelson Mandela, then practicing law in Johannesburg and some eighteen years her senior. As the wife of a convicted enemy of the state, she has been persecuted by the authorities in a characteristically small-minded and vindictive way.



Nelson Mandela in 1961

Freedom Charter? Would it even want to, after being incarcerated for decades under dismal and at times punitive conditions?

The answer to this somewhat hypothetical question depends to an inordinate degree on the personality, and even on the image, the personality as publicly constructed, of Nelson Mandela himself. There is no doubt that the imprisonment of Mandela failed entirely to erase him from popular awareness in South Africa. By 1980 "the concept 'Mandela on Robben Island'... had reached almost mythic proportions," writes Mary Benson; it was in part to nullify the myth that the authorities removed him from the island ("Mandela University") to a prison on the mainland. His face, on posters and T-shirts, was everywhere to be seen in the uprisings of 1985; the slogan "Free Mandela" was daubed on the walls of power. Yet the great majority of the young people who took to the streets in his name had never seen him in the flesh, never heard his voice.

descends from tribal chiefs, Benson does little to investigate the hold Mandela has on the South African masses. This is a pity. No doubt the phenomenon of the leader is always hard to explain; but in Mandela's case it is unusually important that we understand how someone in a position of simultaneous absence and presence interacts with an essentially Messianic myth in the imagination of a subject people.

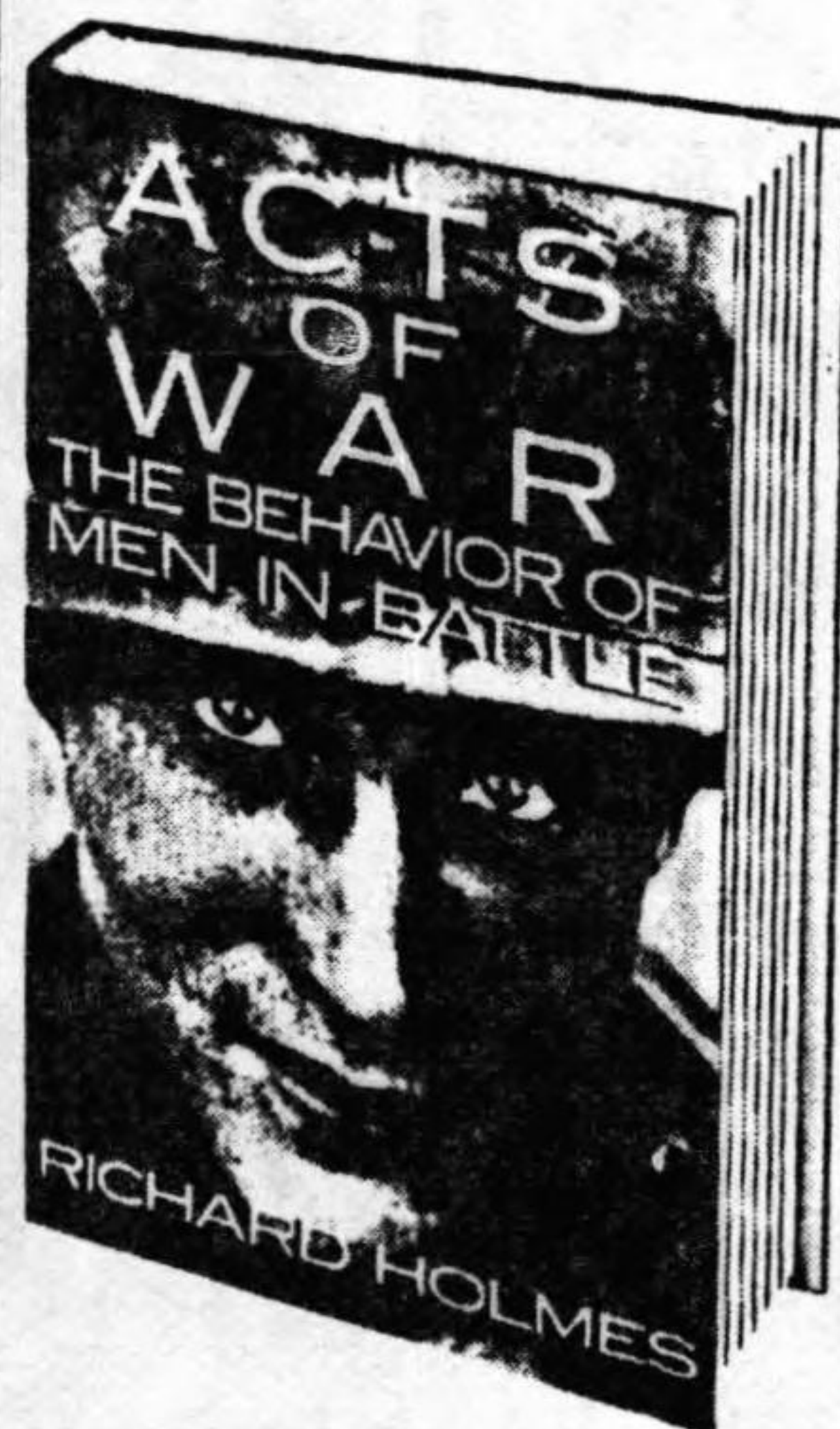
The main virtue of Benson's book is that it presents Mandela in the historical context of the ANC as it grows step by step from a middle-class black pressure group to a revolutionary mass movement, taking each step in measured response to escalating state violence. The book is stronger (as we might expect) on the pre-1964 period than on the years since Mandela was removed from the public eye: for the last twenty years it does little more than touch base at the historical high points. Its main weakness as a political history is one of oversimplification. Concentrating on Mandela

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New York Review of Books



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She has been subjected to banning orders that have made family and social life extremely difficult, to campaigns of slander, and to raids and attacks on her home. She spent a year and a half in detention, largely in solitary confinement, on charges that were eventually thrown out by the courts. In 1977 she was banished to the small country town of Brandfort, to be kept under surveillance by the local constabulary. After the terms of her banishment were relaxed, she fought a long (and ultimately successful) battle with the law over her right to return to the Mandela home in Soweto.

Persecution, far from breaking Mrs. Mandela, as it has undoubtedly been intended to do, has turned her into a formidable and far from temperate antagonist (from one tussle with her a policeman emerged with a broken neck). "I have ceased a long time ago to exist as an individual," she observes. "My private self doesn't exist. Whatever they do to me, they do to the people of this country.... When they send me into exile, it's not me as an individual they are sending.... What I stand for is what they want to banish."

Some of the most interesting pages of Anne Benjamin's book chronicle the impact Winnie Mandela had on Brandfort. Flouting small-town custom, she fostered a new self-assertiveness among the town's blacks. Whites, bemused by the stream of famous visitors beating a track to her door, drew back, veiling their hostility. With funds from abroad she ran a soup kitchen and a clinic, bringing some relief to a depressed rural district.

The same life history is told in Nancy Harrison's *Winnie Mandela*, at greater length, in more detail, but heavily over-written, as though for fifteen-year-old readers:

The children peered enviously through the Town Hall windows, watching bleakly as the beautifully dressed white children and their parents feasted lavishly, the sounds of merriment mingling with the rousing music of a band.

"Aaaih," bemoaned the elders, shaking their heads in dismay at Columbus, "the poor man has completely lost his daughter."

Week after week, month after month, she languished in her cold concrete cell.

While it is inevitable that Mrs. Mandela should be named Winnie throughout, it is not clear why her father, Columbus Madikizela, should be called Columbus, or the Transkei leader Kaiser Matanzima, Kaiser. It is unlikely that Dr. Nthato Motlana ever prescribed an "anti-hermetic drug" for Mrs. Mandela, that Mrs. Mandela has a "phobia for cleanliness," or that the university hospital in Bloemfontein is called Universitas Boere Hospital.

There are two reigning perceptions of the designs of the present South African regime. One is that it will use whatever combination of force and limited political reform it finds necessary to maintain Afrikaner power (or "self-determination") from day to day, having no more detailed master plan for the future. The other is that, following an agenda hidden from its electorate, it is leading the way toward a "consociational" dispensation in which power will be shared among four oligarchies—black, white, Coloured, and Indian—whose common interest in managing the resources of the state will outweigh their interest in precipitating a

destructive struggle for a monopoly of power.

The hidden-agenda school of thought—which includes, presumably, the Reagan and Thatcher administrations—argues that the stronger the South African economy the greater will be President Botha's capacity to bring about a new dispensation. The opposing school of thought concludes that only when South Africa is isolated and brought under military and economic pressure will the Afrikaner be drawn to negotiate.

Those who take Botha to be a true reformer argue that he can get his reforms past a fearful white electorate only by deceiving it—by wearing a mask of intransigence while negotiating power sharing behind the scenes. Those who read him as simply the latest in a line of truculent Afrikaner nationalists point to the gap between his promises—grandiose but evasive—and the insignificance of his performance to date. Both readings pre-

for black South African Christians, and suggests that the South African Council of Churches, in which Tutu has been a major force, might be a more marginal organization than it appears to be. He recounts in detail the financial scandals of the SACC under Tutu's leadership. In his presentation of Tutu and Rev. Allan Boesak he adds personalizing touches that seem to betray distinct dislike of both men (Boesak, for example, speaks in "a high-pitched voice that tends to squeak when he becomes impassioned").

Over against Tutu, Neuhaus sets the figure of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, "a man of high principle forced to be a man of fast footwork... thoughtful, humane, and determined." Neuhaus makes it clear that in his view South Africa is more a society of communities than a society of individuals, and that these communities are ethnic ("tribal") as much as they are racial. Buthelezi is underestimated in the West,



Winnie and Nelson Mandela, 1959

sent him as a public liar. In the first reading it is the broad South African public he must deceive, so that it will remain orderly while reform is achieved over its head and behind its back; in the second, it is world opinion that must be fooled.

Richard John Neuhaus's *Dispensations* is subtitled "The Future of South Africa as South Africans See It." The South Africans he refers to are not men and women in the street but a cross section of the intelligentsia—academics, churchmen, journalists—together with businessmen, labor leaders, and political figures. Most of them are white. The questions he asks them are intelligent, the reports he makes are full. A Lutheran pastor from New York, he does not pretend to neutrality. He is clearly unresponsive to the "mix of bellicosity and self-pity" to which he is treated by Afrikaner right-wingers. On the other hand, he does not take dogooder white liberals seriously. He advocates a "lively skepticism" about the claims of Bishop Desmond Tutu—or indeed any other single person—to speak

Neuhaus suggests, only because he is "un-fashionably tribal"; the day will come when Buthelezi, as leader of the Zulus, and Botha, as leader of the Afrikaner tribe, will emerge as the two principal actors on the political stage.

Neuhaus's reading of the South African situation is thus a politically conservative one (though he would likely prefer to call it a reading founded on realities of power). He seems to accept the ethnicist argument that what we have in South Africa is as much a struggle for dominance by rival tribes (Zulu, Xhosa, English, Afrikaner, ...) as a black-white conflict (or indeed a proletarian revolution). He regards the African National Congress as, if not a communist front organization, at least open to direction from Moscow. For the ANC's views he chooses to go to the head of its mission to the United Nations, John Makatini, from whom he quotes some particularly ill-considered remarks—for example, "If there were only 4 million of us left after the revolution, that would be better than the present situation" (the population of South Africa is about thirty million).



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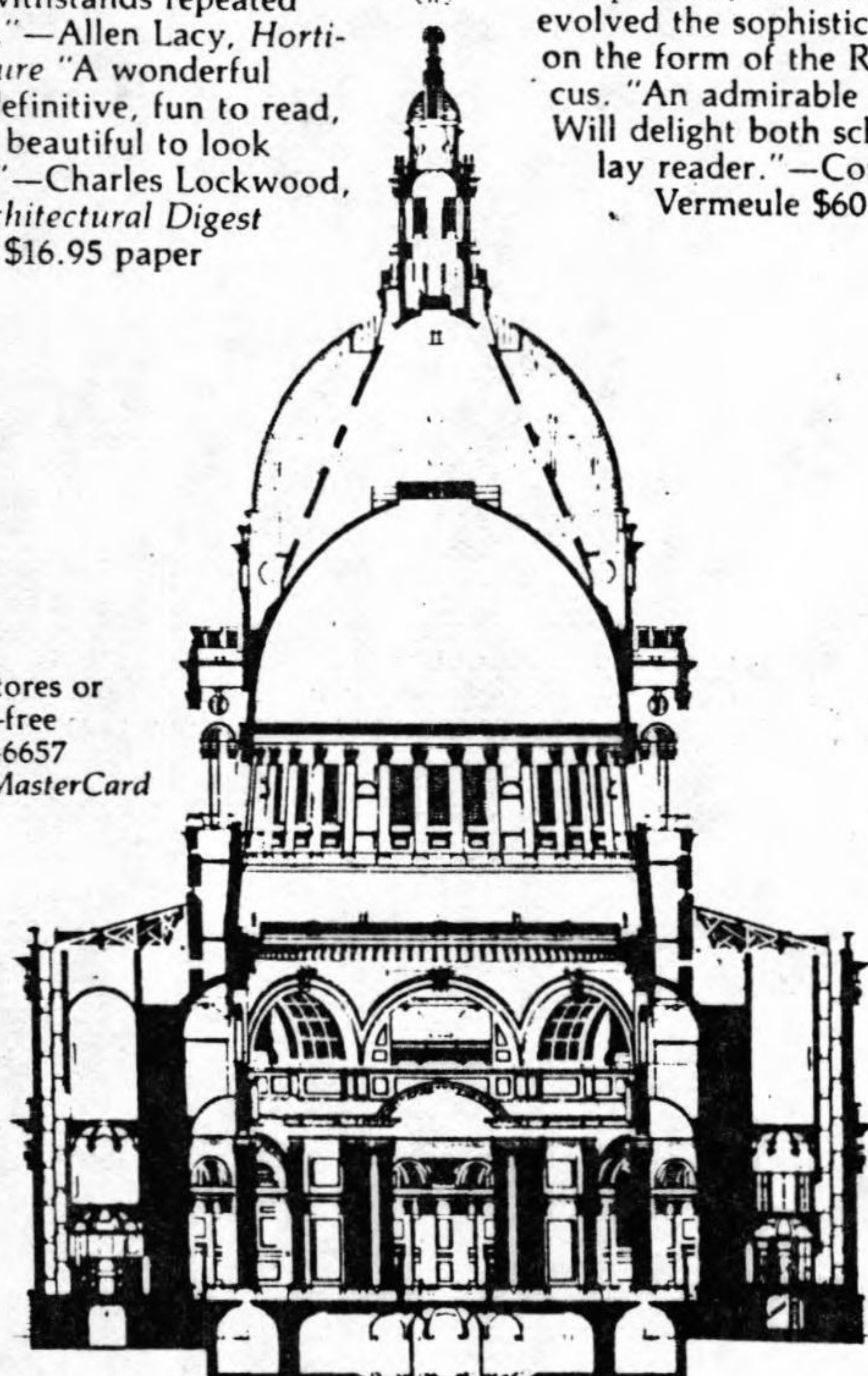
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Complementing "South Africa as South Africans see it" we therefore have a very definite account of South Africa as Neuhaus sees it. The premises on which this account is based are clear, and I will not discuss them further. In two respects, however, Neuhaus's conclusions appear to be open to serious doubt.

First, Neuhaus may be more gullible than he concedes it is possible he may be. I refer here not so much to the fact that he seems to take seriously the familiar apologia to which Afrikaners of a certain stripe, quite cynically, I believe, treat foreigners—that the Great Trek and the Boer War have left scars on their psyches that explain and excuse all their bad behavior—as to the story of Botha's secret agenda. In Neuhaus's narrative, Denis Worrall, the South African ambassador in London, drops him a heavy hint that, if he really wants to know what the South African government is up to, he should read a certain paper by Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard University. Assuming Worrall to be privy to the government's innermost councils (a large assumption, I believe), Neuhaus reads Huntington and discovers there why "it is of the essence of the reformer [in a multi-ethnic society] that he must employ ambiguity, concealment, and deception concerning his goals." In Huntington he thus locates the master strategy he seems to believe the Botha government to be following: a strategy of veiled reform, every two steps forward matched by one step back, intended to lead eventually to "a political order that approximates our democratic idea of justice."

As a statement of Botha's putative intent (or the intent of his Cabinet, if that Cabinet can ever be said to speak with a single voice) this is not open to question. South Africa is at present in a state of more or less violent instability. That instability may continue indefinitely, or a new stability may be reached either through the violent overthrow of the present order or through something like the share-out of power Neuhaus foresees. Given a choice among these options, the present government would no doubt ideally prefer the third. In that limited sense it may be said to intend to achieve it.

What Neuhaus does not stress, however, is that by its every word and deed the same government indicates that it intends to retain control over the process of change toward any new order, no matter how long the process takes, and at whatever cost. Yet if the process of change is to be as long drawn out as Botha seems to envisage, what is the effective difference between white control of power

and white control of the process of change; and is this not precisely why the ANC refuses to negotiate under the conditions Botha proposes?

There are internal signs, in fact, that Neuhaus's conclusions were formed, and his book largely written, in rosier days, when it was still possible to believe that Botha had it in his power to control the pace and direction of change, and the political cost of that control would be affordable—that is to say, in 1984. Neuhaus has revised his conclusions in the light of the events of 1985, which revealed the powerlessness of the government to guard its protégés within the various black communities from violence to their persons, but has not revised his text correspondingly. Instead, he has added paragraphs here and there tempering his earlier optimism.

In the process—and this is the second criticism one might make of him—he has been decidedly unfair to his informants, for they are given no equivalent opportunity to revise their judgments. A prominent white business leader, Basil Hersov, is quoted as saying he is "very encouraged by Botha." "I have respect for Botha. . . I respect him for his courage" is the "privately expressed view" of Bishop Tutu. In neither case is a date given for the interview. Would either Hersov or Tutu stand by his words in 1986? "Boesak is aware that coloureds might very well refuse his politics of refusal and take part in the new dispensation proposed by the government." Coloureds have in fact overwhelmingly followed the politics of refusal. Is Boesak therefore entirely out of touch with his Coloured constituency? No: in Neuhaus's convenient present tense of narration, "Boesak is aware" means "Boesak was aware, when this interview took place" (no date given).

Whatever it may have been in 1984, Neuhaus's book is a most unreliable guide to the political dynamics of 1986, for the dynamics have been drastically altered by the events of 1985. Even as a guide to the political thinking of the ruling Afrikaners, Neuhaus is not dependable: he treats the myths of the right with due caution, but does not have the kind of acquaintance with the history of the Afrikaners—which, in its official version, is riddled with silences, gaps, and evasions—that would enable him to deconstruct them. The best parts of his book—and these parts are substantial—comprise his discussions with churchmen from both sides of the divide about the theology of destiny and the theology of liberation, discussions conducted with rigor and penetration, in a true spirit of inquiry. □

## SRI LANKA

Being nearly heart-shaped made me seem a ham  
On early spice trade navigators' charts  
Tinctured with cinnamon, peppered with forts,  
To be eaten up under a strong brand name  
Like Taprobane, Serendib, Tenarisim—  
Copper-palmed lotus island slave resorts—  
And I succumbed to lordly polished arts  
That cut me down to seem a white king's gem,  
A star sapphire tear-drop India shed  
On old school maps, a lighthouse of retorts  
Flashing from head to head. My leonine blood  
Throbbled wildly when resplendent freedom came  
Mouthing pearl tropes with Pali counterparts,  
Exalted, flawed; and made me seem as I am.

—Richard Murphy