

Hermann Giliomee

A LETTER FROM SOUTH AFRICA

In July 1987, a group of Afrikaner dissidents met in Dakar, Senegal, with officials of the African National Congress. Among the Afrikaners attending were Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, former leader of the parliamentary opposition, Beyers Naude, former secretary of the South African Council of Churches, the writers André Brink and Breyten Breytenbach, and the Capetown political scientist, editor of *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, Hermann Giliomee, who wrote the following report for *Dissent*.

History cast a long shadow over a recent meeting in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, between a group of 62 internal South Africans, most of whom were Afrikaners, and a delegation of the African National Congress (ANC), the exiled liberation organization. For a century now, Afrikaner and African nationalism have developed alongside each other. The first Afrikaner political organizations were founded in 1880, just a few years before the African ones appeared. Today both nationalisms vie for political control in an ever more lethal struggle.

None of the Afrikaners in Dakar could claim to represent Afrikanerdom. Many of them write in the Afrikaans press, but none has any real influence in the inner Afrikaner circles. Afrikaner racists branded the Dakar delegates as *volkverraaiers*—national traitors—for conferring with the ANC. The government of President P.W. Botha brands the ANC as communist-dominated terrorists who wage war on peace-loving South Africa.

By sitting down with the ANC delegation in Dakar the group of internal South Africans emphasized that the conflict is rooted in the country's history, one in which violence and atrocities have been committed on all sides. Dakar was an effort to break the attempts by Pretoria and the ANC to demonize each other. This position elicited a crescendo of condemnation in the pro-government press. It reached its peak in attacks by government

spokesmen, particularly the Minister of Defense, General Magnus Malan. When the strongest bomb blast ever in South Africa occurred in Johannesburg a few days after the group's return, Malan declared "conferees with terrorists owe an explanation to those injured in the explosion."

This was deliberately to miss the point. As Peter Gastrow, a member of the South African group, said: "There will always be South Africans determined to investigate all possible avenues out of the cycle of death and destruction in an effort to establish a nonracial democracy."

Compared to the Palestinian Liberation Organization with its quasi-state organization, the ANC is a considerably more modest outfit. In 1983 its approximate budget was \$100 million with a total membership of 10,000. It trains between 5,000 and 7,000 guerrillas, and maintains representatives in world capitals. Estimates of the number of foreign-trained insurgents inside the country range from a figure of thirty according to the South African police to 400 by independent analysts.

The real power of the ANC is not military. It is rooted in the political support it enjoys in the black townships of South Africa as the oldest and most respected organization fighting white domination. In a 1981 poll, 42 percent of black South Africans in the Witwatersrand area expressed the opinion that the ANC leaders were "the real leaders of the black people in South Africa." Only 17 percent opted for Chief Buthelezi, the Zulu leader who has fallen out with the ANC. In the same poll Africans in the KwaZulu and Natal region were asked what would happen if insurgents were to come in secretly and ask people to work with the ANC. Forty-eight percent said "most or many people" would help the ANC, a figure which went up to just below 60 percent among school-going black South Africans.

Only eight percent said that nobody or almost nobody would offer help.

ANC support has undoubtedly increased since the widespread disturbances that have racked the country since September 1984. The ANC and its internal auxiliaries made scores of townships ungovernable by establishing street committees and people's courts as the de facto authority, enforcing school, consumer, and rent boycotts. In May 1986 the government was under concerted international pressure to set Nelson Mandela and other imprisoned ANC leaders free and unban the organization.

Then the wheel turned. The draconian second State of Emergency swept thousands of pro-ANC activists into detention. Considerable resistance appeared among liberal white Africans against the brutal methods some activists used to ensure compliance with the prolonged rent boycotts. While the gruesome "necklace" immolations were used by all parties, possibly including the security forces, most were seen as the work of activists loyal to the ANC. The ANC leadership in exile is ambiguous on this issue. Some of its executive committee have condemned it; others have depicted it as necessary to intimidate or liquidate collaborators with apartheid.

The ANC made a dramatic diplomatic advance in 1986 and early 1987 when its leader, Oliver Tambo, met separately with the political heads of the British and American foreign ministries. However, the organization has a long way to go before reaching the all-important next level—a meeting with Mrs. Thatcher and President Reagan. This year the going has been getting tougher for the ANC. With television coverage of the townships heavily restricted, international interest in South Africa's political drama has dropped. Since the beginning of 1987 state security forces are said to have become less involved in open clashes, with an 80 percent decline in "incidents" in the first six months of 1987, compared with the corresponding period in 1986. London and Washington are toughening their stand against the ANC. In Whitehall the question is again being asked whether the ANC resembles the Irish Republican Army rather than the advance guard of a genuine Africanist movement.

A serious backlash has set in among South African whites, including sympathizers with the black nationalist cause. As a Progressive Federal Party candidate said in Dakar, in 1981 it was still possible for him to get elected while insisting on the ANC's right to be incorporated in the political process; in 1987 he was defeated by an electorate that believed that a PFP victory would mean a short route to an ANC (and communist) dictatorship.

The Dakar discussions stumbled on assessments of the current balance of power. The ANC believed that it is still riding the wave, but some South Africans think that the ANC momentum has been checked for the time being and new strategies are required. Telling comments were made by a member of the South African group with first-hand knowledge of recent developments in the Eastern Cape, traditionally a strong ANC base, where it established virtual control over the townships in the early part of 1986: "I strongly doubt," said the delegate, "that your strategy has been effective. Thousands in the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage area have been put out of work through sanctions and disinvestment without any commensurate gain. The townships are again under rigid control of the police, aided by vigilantes. The ruling class is using more effective methods, particularly house bonds, to co-opt a stratum of black supporters. . . . There is no evidence that you have brought the state closer to negotiation. The whites you managed to hit were local businessmen with little or no influence over national, or even city, politics."

Yet the state did not win conclusively. Most observers believe that once the State of Emergency is lifted, widespread unrest will again occur. A lack of confidence has seeped into the business community, which is holding back on new investments, thus exacerbating the serious unemployment situation. Moderate urban black leaders refuse to talk to the government about a new Constitution while the ANC is banned and Mandela and other leaders are in prison. The ANC cannot challenge the government but it can effectively veto any Constitutional initiatives with respect to blacks. Even the ultraloyalist Botha mouthpiece, *Die Burger*, wrote on July 29, 1987 (after the Dakar conference): "There can be no compromise with [ANC violence]. However, at the same time it is equally true that there is a serious desire for peace. The sparks remain alive that the protagonists of violence will come to their senses and will take a seat at the conference table."

Debating and consorting for a week with some of the senior ANC leaders yielded both pleasant surprises and disappointments. The major surprise was in Thabo Mbeki, 45, son of the ANC leader Govan Mbeki who was in jail for 23 years and was recently set free. In Mbeki the ANC has an heir apparent with outstanding skills. In opening statements at the conference one of Mbeki's codelegates took an intransigent line, projecting an inevitable showdown between the white government and the ANC. He also insisted that the ANC had the right to assume control over all the "democratic" forces inside and outside the country. This seemed to

undercut the rationale of the Dakar talks except as an ANC exercise in public relations. It also left little space for liberals who reject apartheid but refuse to join a revolutionary movement. Moreover, the apparent insistence on hegemonic control during the struggle raised serious doubts about whether the ANC would introduce a multiparty democracy if it won power. In general, the South African delegates at Dakar had no great enthusiasm for replacing a white authoritarian government with a black one. By the end of the first evening several burning questions had been raised, and the ANC delegation requested permission to delay its reply to the next morning.

The reply by Mbeki and other ANC delegates the next morning established a common ground for debate. Violence, they seemed to say, is not inevitable or nonnegotiable. The nonnegotiable issue is the establishment of a nonracial democracy. Once whites clearly accept this principle, and once the government releases the political prisoners and unbans the ANC, the organization would have no problem with negotiations. Armed struggle is not an end in itself but a means toward resolving the conflict.

The principle of a nonracial democracy is attractive. But the question on everyone's lips was how the bulk of the white South Africans could be won to the principle. Furthermore, are the ANC and its strategies bringing the country nearer to accepting this principle? Or is it driving toward multiracial dictatorship, authoritarian, perhaps even fascist?

So the question repeatedly came back to the nature of the ANC. Is it basically interested in power for itself alone? How genuine is its commitment to nonracialism and a multiparty democracy? Obviously no clear-cut answer can be given on the basis of ANC statements at the meeting or, for that matter, Mbeki's considerable personal charisma. The structure of the organization and its own internal dynamics will provide a better indication of its future course. One decisive characteristic of the ANC is the serious tension between what can be called its organizational imperative and its commitment to certain ideals.

The South African government portrays the ANC as an organization in which African nationalists are manipulated by a small elite of hard-nosed communists. It alleges that twenty-three of the thirty-member ANC executive committee are or were active members or supporters of the Communist party intent on revolutionary warfare.

This view is simplistic. The ANC is much too amorphous to be manipulated by a small elite. Behind the appearance of unity there are major, potentially disastrous, cleavages. There is a genera-

tional cleavage between the young, embittered new recruits who demand instant action, and the older generation of exiles who insist on strategic thinking. There is also a generational cleavage between, on the one hand, people like Mbeki and Pallo Jordan, who are in their forties and emphasize an inclusive nonracialism, and on the other hand, the generation of the leader, Oliver Tambo, who speaks the language of assertive nationalism. There is tension between fervent Communists and someone like Mbeki who in a published article has unambiguously said: "The ANC is not a socialist party—it has never pretended to be one, has never said it was and is not trying to be one." The ANC's Freedom Charter, with its demand for the nationalization of the mining companies and banks, clearly serves as ideological cement. Deviation is not allowed because it would lead to major splits. Yet, one got the impression from what ANC delegates said in public or in private that they will hardly consider the Charter a practical guideline if they do take power.

This ideological diffuseness is a source of ANC strength but also of weakness. To convince itself that victory is certain it has to maintain a forward momentum on all fronts. Instead of choosing one strategy—say, a nonviolent mobilization of the population—it wants to escalate the struggle on every front. It insists on conducting a political struggle that would seek to establish alliances with groups such as businessmen, churches, academics, and students, while also trying to put more bombs and arms inside the country. It seeks to isolate the country diplomatically while also trying to strangle the economy.

Sadly, the ANC is pursuing this multipronged strategy without acknowledging, or—so it appears—admitting to itself that an armed struggle could negate its political strategy. "After all," as an Afrikaner delegate said at a Dakar session, "it will be virtually impossible to persuade your neighbor to admit the ANC as a player in the political process, much less support it, if bombs go off all over the place." This multipronged strategy probably explains a statement by a senior member of the ANC delegation in Dakar: "We want whites as much as possible to join the struggle . . . and if we say that, we cannot conduct an indiscriminate struggle against all whites." At the same time, operatives of the organization were probably planting bombs in the toilets of an airport. The ANC obviously wants to talk *and* escalate the armed struggle.

Here, then, is the reason why the organization refuses to meet P.W. Botha's condition that the

ANC renounce violence before he enters negotiations. First, the ANC believes that with Botha as its head the government has no interest in genuine negotiations. But second, and more important, the ANC is haunted by the fear that even a suspension of violence may rip the organization apart or allow a radical opposition to outflank it, thus nullifying the decades of struggle. Hence, an escalation of all forms of struggle. Suspending violence could break up the organization; getting locked into futile negotiations would do the same. The problem with organizations like the ANC or PLO is not their strength but their insecurity. They are too insecure to take chances. Abandoning the armed struggle could not only wreck the cause but endanger jobs, offices, careers, and financial support from the outside.

History has ambiguous lessons for the ANC. Never before has such a small (white) minority held down such a large (black) majority against its will. On the other hand, no modern industrial state has been overthrown unless its security forces transferred their allegiance to the revolution. And as Gerard Chaliand, author of *Revolution in the Third World*, observed in an interview with *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, there is no record of an exile liberation organization turning itself into a nonviolent legal movement competing with others for power. Asking the ANC to denounce violence is to ask that it take a massive chance with no guarantee of survival.

Several of the South Africans at Dakar suggested that the ANC use available political structures in South Africa, particularly that it participate in regional initiatives such as the KwaZulu-Natal *indaba*, or other interim agreements that genuinely signal a break with apartheid.

During this discussion, ANC delegate Pallo Jordan told a revealing joke. A baboon, heeding the anguished cries of a python that lay pinned down, lifted the rock to set the reptile free. Immediately the python started to strangle the baboon. As they struggled, a fox came by and persuaded the two to accept his mediation. "The only way to solve the conflict," the fox said, "is for the python to assume his original position to see how it all started." The python obliged and the rock was replaced. "What do we do now?" the baboon said. "Let him be, you damn fool," the fox responded. "You know that he will swallow you."

In private conversations ANC representatives revealed how deeply suspicious they were of being swallowed by the "python" of interim arrangements in which they are not assured of control. The ANC's bitter experience with Chief Buthelezi obviously had a searing impact. According to several ANC delegates, the organization in the early 1970s

decided to send Buthelezi to take over the KwaZulu government and establish an internal ANC political base. Buthelezi played along, they claimed, until he was strong enough to establish his own base. Since 1979 Buthelezi and his Inkatha movement have been the ANC's most formidable black adversary. Similarly, the ANC's promising relationship with the Colored leadership in the Labor party in the late 1970s turned sour, with the Labor party promptly accepting representation in the Tricameral Parliament the ANC hates.

Accordingly, the ANC's immediate instinct is to reject all interim arrangements and to insist on a position of authority over all the movements that oppose apartheid. But the demand that internal institutions such as universities submit to the "progressive forces" and sacrifice their principles threatens to destroy the middle ground. As one social scientist warned, it threatens to drive liberals on English campuses into the government trench. Mbeki again offered a more flexible interpretation. The ANC, he said, understood there were organizations which acknowledged the political leadership of the ANC, but that others wanted to retain their independence. The big challenge, then, was to achieve coordination among organizations about how the struggle for a nonracial democracy could be advanced.

Growing numbers of whites are prepared to divest themselves of racial privileges, but they hope to retain some control over their destiny, and therefore want to elect their own group representatives. But it was exactly this demand for white group representation that the ANC saw as apartheid in a new, more sophisticated guise. An ANC delegate remarked that the organization was prepared to promote a multi-party state but it would practice a "liberatory intolerance" toward those who propagate racism and even those who stand for ethnic group representation. On this, the possibility of a compromise stands or falls.

The South African group came home realizing that the ANC will escalate the armed struggle. It could not be argued with certainty that continued violence by the ANC was destined to fail. The ANC is not so naïve as to believe that it can take on the military might of the South African state. Its strategy is more subtle. Continued pressure, including violence, would, it believes, make white South Africa crack wide open. Put succinctly: The ANC pins its hopes on the white right wing as a "growing ulcer" in white society. Increasing ANC violence will make the right wing surge ahead until it

paralyzes the government electorally and splits the unified police and military command in two. The ANC believes that upper-class whites would then turn to the ANC as the only basis for stable government.

This strategy should not be dismissed summarily. The ultra-racist Conservative party can no longer be considered a mere fringe party. Some serious analysts believe that it could paralyze the state if the Botha government in years to come turns into a nervous and fractious band. There is also a chance that increasing ANC pressure will bring into power a fascist regime that will stop at nothing. If that happens, the blacks who one day will inherit South Africa could well be some fascistic generals and colonels rather than the ANC, which has at least a history stretching back to 1912 of fighting for democratic rights. □

Mitchell Cohen

THE BUTCHER'S COMPANY

Did Klaus Barbie receive the defense he deserved? Before his trial in Lyon last summer for war crimes fades entirely into history, the question ought to be posed.

One imagines that the cynical old Nazi was aware that his acquittal was unlikely from the start. He even declined attendance at the proceedings; what right had French courts to try such a man as he? But surely the ex-SS chief must have enjoyed the attempt by his lawyers to shift attention from his deeds to the violence of colonialism, and especially their strenuous effort to accuse Israel of crimes against humanity. Presumably this was to show that those devilish Zionists are as bad as the Nazis.

The architect of this immorality play was Barbie's chief counsel. Jacques Vergès's clients have now ranged from the "Butcher of Lyon," as Barbie is called, to ultraleftist fanatics and Arab terrorists. It is difficult to discern if Vergès himself is an extremist of the left, an extremist of the right, or both at the same time. According to an article on "Europe's New Fascists" by Martin A. Lee and Kevin Coogan in the May 1987 *Mother Jones*, Vergès's role was a product of his collaboration with François Genoud, "a shadowy Swiss banker who loves Adolf Hitler," who is something of a godfather to European neofascists, and has had past links to the PLO to boot. In August the French weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* linked Genoud to Wahid Gordji, an Iranian official who was holed up in his country's

embassy in the French capital to avoid police questioning about bomb attacks there (and who returned to Tehran in November in a trade for French hostages in Lebanon); it seems Gordji also paid for the publication of a neo-Nazi mail-order catalogue for a Paris book store. According to the *International Herald Tribune*, among the gems advertised are defenses of Marshal Pétain and books by "revisionist" historians who claim the Holocaust never happened, including Robert Faurisson (of Noam Chomsky fame). The blurb describing one Wilhelm Stäglich's *The Myth of Auschwitz* asks: "Did you know that the Jewish community of the town of Auschwitz was never deported?" And who emerged as a legal voice for Gordji? Monsieur Jacques Vergès. Discerning exactly who is or is not tied to whom or what or how is a rather foggy matter. But as the old pun goes, the plot seems to get ever sicker.

At the Barbie trial Vergès assembled an international "defense" team, including two Algerian and Congolese attorneys, respectively Nabil Bouaita and Jean-Marie M'Bemba. One imagines that this was to confront the West with Third World grievances in person. The very tactic was a crime against the Third World. These men might have taken their stand on the side of fascism's victims and, in a spirit of solidarity of the oppressed, called for unending struggle against all racism. That they chose spectacle instead, that they chose to present Third World grievances as Klaus Barbie's lawyers, delegitimizes any "J'accuse" they could utter. It tells us much more about them than about imperialism, whose victims surely deserve better.

The nature of this "defense" became particularly evident in the final week of the trial. Barbie, as is well known, was accused (among other things) of sending in 1944 forty-four Jewish children from the village of Izieu to their deaths in the extermination camps. Bouaita chose to grandstand in court by paying "tribute" to "the children of Izieu, Soweto, and Sabra and Shatila." Now, surely any decent person would pay tribute to these and all murdered children. But note which innocents were absent from his list. Those slaughtered in the Israeli village of Maalot by Palestinian terrorists, for example.

Indeed, let us imagine that some of the Izieu children escaped Barbie's clutches and made it to—of all places!—Palestine. And let us suppose them or their children killed some three decades later, say in a PLO attack on a civilian bus on the Haifa-Tel Aviv highway. Would Barbie's defense team then bow heads in tribute to them along with the young