

# THE 14 DAYS OF MANDELA

## THE STRUGGLE MUST CONTINUE

BY ARTHUR GOLDSTUCK

*"The future will determine the significance of my release in relation to the community as a whole." These were the words of Nelson Mandela in an interview with South Africa Now a few weeks after his release from prison. He reminds us that despite his own newly acquired "freedom" and the legalizations of the African National Congress and other anti-apartheid organizations, these incredible events are only the beginning of a process that will hopefully culminate in the creation of a democratic, nonracial South Africa.*

*A sober reflection on some of the obstacles to progress is needed. The very laws that banned countless dissenters and jailed or detained thousands like Mandela and his comrades are still on the books. The sentiment among white policemen is strongly conservative, in some cases, even neo-Nazi. The white supremacist AWB organization, led by Hitler worshipper Eugene Terre Blanche, promises a fight to the death. The horrific internecine violence in Natal province between supporters of the United Democratic Front and Inkatha, the Zulu nationalist organization, is not going to stop just because Mandela pleads for peace.*

*The educational system for the country's blacks is far inferior to that of the whites, suffering from gross underbudgeting, a scarcity of qualified teachers and more. The poverty and squalor that characterize the lives of the residents, especially the women, of the so-called homelands and the black townships will not be easily rectified nor will the heightened expectations of the masses of poor be easily met. These are legacies that will carry over into the postapartheid era. History is in the making, yes, but there is so much that needs to be done.*

*The Beat is fortunate to have someone "on the ground" in South Africa. Arthur Goldstuck, a young journalist living in Johannesburg, agreed to write a piece on his impressions and experiences of the time around the unbannings and Mandela's release. One of the frustrations of being a bimonthly publication is that it is impossible to present timely, up-to-the-minute news stories to our readers. But Arthur's observations hold up well, I think, and present a first-hand view of remarkable events in a remarkable land.*

*Here, then, is "The 14 Days of Mandela," a period which started for Arthur, as he told me during one of our phone conversations, "like I woke up in a new country."*

—TOM CHEYNEY

JOHANNESBURG—For two weeks we South Africans have waded waist-deep in history. At times it's been awesome, often bizarre.

As I write, it is six days since Nelson Mandela walked from prison. Fourteen days since President F.W. de Klerk delivered the speech that changed South Africa. For these 14 days, South Africa has belonged to Mandela. Even before his release, his presence was everywhere. On the T-shirts of the crowds; on the banners of protesters; on the front pages of newspapers; and in the words of the leaders of the left, right and center. Even where he had never walked, we saw his footsteps everywhere.

On Friday morning, Feb. 2, the new South Africa was born. At 11:30 a.m., De Klerk announced the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

At the publishing house where I work, the boardroom was crammed with people watching the live broadcast. The announcement brought gasps, exclamations of "Jesus Christ," cheers and applause. But mostly, we were stunned.

Not nearly as stunned, we were sure, as Dr. Andries Treurnicht, hard-line leader of the right-wing opposition in parliament, the Conservative Party. When the tv cameras focused briefly on his silent fury, it was almost possible to feel sympathy for him. The very heart of his ideology of fear and hate had been ripped out and almost causally tossed aside.

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THE PARTY BEGAN IN THE CENTRAL CITY, WHERE TRAFFIC WAS BLOCKED BY SMALL KNOTS OF DANCING, MARCHING, TOYI-TOYING PEOPLE. GRADUALLY, THE KNOTS FORMED GROUPS, AND THE GROUPS FORMED CROWDS. BY MIDNIGHT, A PROCESSION OF SEVERAL THOUSAND PEOPLE WAS MARCHING THROUGH THE STREETS OF THE CITY.



PHOTO BY ANNA ZEJMSKI, IMPACT VISUALS



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Speaking to reporters afterwards, he was apologetic with rage. He blustered and blurted his disbelief, and seemed willing and able to burst a blood vessel for the benefit of the cameras. To the audience in that boardroom, it was a joyous sight. Dancing in the streets was suddenly high on the agenda.

One of my colleagues, a long-time activist, suggested we head for the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand, popularly known as Wits. The largest English-language university in South Africa, it had developed a reputation over the years for its often violent activism against apartheid.

Although the new semester hadn't started yet, and only academic staff and student movement people would be on campus, we were sure to find celebrations in progress. Unfortunately, we missed the boat by more than an hour. The moment De Klerk had announced the unbanning, halfway through his speech, people had poured out of offices and cafeterias and gone marching into the streets. Already, the casualties were returning.

Breathless students told us of riot police awaiting them on the main route into the city. Apparently, the cops had not yet been notified of the new South Africa. They had waded into the marchers with batons and whips, beating anyone they could reach. We encountered several more student activists on the hunt for the party. Some of them were veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle, with several periods of detention to their credit. Their faces shone with a mixture of joy, disbelief and sheer relief. It was an expression that would become familiar over the next two weeks.

Along the way, we bought an early edition of the afternoon newspaper, the *Star*. "FW OPENS DOORS TO FREEDOM" it declared. For the next few days, South African history would be written in headlines. "WORLD LAUDS FW." "BUSH TO REVIEW SANCTIONS." "ANC SAYS LET'S SWAP PRISONERS." Within hours of the announcement, the weekly "alternative" newspaper, *New Nation*, had produced a rush edition bearing the flags of the ANC and the SACP on the cover, above the headline "LONG LIVE THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE." The optimism was tangible.

Outside the *New Nation's* city offices, the dancing on the streets began at midday. By 5 p.m., it had spread throughout the central city. Traffic came to a standstill. The riot police, presumably unable to read newspaper headlines, waded in with truncheons and teargas yet again. Old habits die hard.

That night, the new, surreal South Africa began to emerge from our tv screens. The state-controlled South African Broadcasting Corp. (SABC), usually nothing more than a propaganda arm of the ruling National Party, gave extensive coverage to the reactions of long-time

foes of apartheid. Foes like Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu and World Alliance of Reformed Churches leader Alan Boesak, both of whom had consistently been vilified by tv commentators. Foes like Thabo Mbeki, senior member of the ANC executive committee and the congress' foreign minister. The appearance of Mbeki on our screens was on a par with the arrival of an extraterrestrial being. For so many years he and his comrades had been banned from our media, we expected him to be nothing less than a supernatural creature with horns and a tail.

Over the next week, such broadcasts would become routine, even boring. The names of ANC bigwigs, once given satanic dimensions by government and police spokesmen, would be given faces, and we would be allowed to see them in the guise of rational human beings. More incredibly, it seemed as if the official news broadcasts and commentaries were bending over backwards to portray the ANC as a moderate force for positive change. It was obvious that the SABC was pulling out all the stops to convince the white electorate they had nothing to fear from the ANC.

This was, of course, less out of magnanimity toward the ANC than out of an intense drive to forestall a white backlash against De Klerk. Also, it would soften the impact when De Klerk was ready to announce the release of Mandela. In fact, by the following weekend, the shock of the unbannings had given way to euphoria. The stock market had hit record highs, political prisoners were coming out, exiles were coming back.

Saturday, Feb. 10, we returned to the Wits campus for its annual History Workshop Cultural Day. In the past, this had been a relatively staid, formal event. On this day it was a noisy, crowded celebration of the impending end of apartheid. A book exhibition sold literature of the left and the far left; an exhibit of political posters of the previous decade came alive with the vibrancy of history-in-the-making; poets, writers and musicians performed for free in venues across the campus; and freed political prisoner Ahmed Kathrada (imprisoned with Mandela in 1963) addressed a capacity audience in the university's Great Hall.

Khatrada later repeated his address from the steps outside the hall for the hundreds who hadn't been able to get in. Every time he mentioned the ANC, Mandela or the Struggle, the crowd responded with choruses of "Viva!" When his speech ended, they refused to let him go. They escorted him across campus with a mass *toy-toy*—a combination dance/jog/march that has become synonymous with anti-apartheid celebrations.

With Kathrada on his way home, we made our way to the headquarters of Capital Radio, a music station formed 10 years ago as a partnership between private enterprise and the gov-

ernment of the "independent" South African-created black state of Transkei. While successive Transkei governments had proved to be deeply corrupt and were overthrown one after the other, Capital retained its credibility as a reliable news source. With the coming to power two years ago of a seemingly enlightened military government, their news broadcasts had become a study in free expression. This was encouraged by the military ruler, General Bantu Holomisa, who had started introducing change to Transkei months before De Klerk began showing his reformist colors.

The alternative anti-apartheid newspaper *Weekly Mail* had assigned me to write a feature on the new-look Capital. I'd already interviewed David O'Sullivan, the news editor and had to collect a tape he had made for me of a no-holds-barred interview with Holomisa. At the station, O'Sullivan was ready with the tape and also with a suggestion that I stick around. He had been alerted that De Klerk had called an international press conference for 5 p.m. It was a minute to five.

We watched the telex machine in anticipation. In the studio, a dj was playing "99 Red Balloons," a German anti-war pop song. At five past five the telexes came to life with the newbreak of the decade: "Nelson Mandela is to be released tomorrow." A reporter ripped the sheet of paper off the telex and dashed for the studio to interrupt the program. Capital Radio thus became the first South African news organ to break the news, and I had my most powerful story hook in years.

We hurried back to the campus, expecting the celebrations to have started all over again, but only a few individuals remained. We bumped into actor Ramalaho Makhene, star of the hit musical *Sophiatown*, and told him the news. "I can't believe this," he exclaimed. "Suddenly, I feel I am alive!"

This was a reaction that would be common in the days to come.

As the news filtered through the city, the celebrations began in earnest. People gathered spontaneously in Johannesburg's "gray areas"—suburbs where the authorities turned a blind eye to whites and blacks living illegally side-by-side.

The party began in the central city, where traffic was blocked by small knots of dancing, marching, toy-toting people. Gradually, the knots formed groups, and the groups formed crowds. By midnight, a procession of several thousand people was marching through the streets of the city. The police appeared to have heard at last about the new South Africa. They followed quietly behind the marchers or went ahead to keep traffic off the route.

That night I was sleeping over at a friend's apartment in Berea, a suburb of apartment blocks next door to Hillbrow, which had been

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the first suburb to "go gray" during the '80s. At 3:30 a.m., I was awakened by a tremendous noise. I leaped to the window, expecting to see explosions or flames or a riot. There was an explosion all right. An explosion of joy. Two thousand people were marching along the suburban street, singing and chanting. "Mandela is calling you," ran their constant refrain, punctuated by cries of "Viva ANC! Viva SACP! Viva Mandela!"

That same march would continue for the next two days. Some marchers would drop off, others would join. But by the end of the weekend, most of Johannesburg would know its people were celebrating.

Sunday, Feb. 11, Mandela was due to walk free from prison at 3 p.m. Few South Africans were not in front of their tv screens, at the Victor Verster prison gates, at the Cape Town rally where Mandela was due to appear or marching through the streets of Johannesburg. At 4:16 p.m., the world watched Mandela emerge into the bright South African sunlight, give a clenched-fist salute and a double-clenched fist salute.

The world watched him address the Cape Town rally in fading light. The world heard him call for the struggle to continue. The part of the world that relied on stock markets for a living slept badly that night.

I was watching the tv broadcast with some friends. We briefly contemplated driving out to the airport in the hope of spotting Mandela arriving, until a tv news bulletin reported that he'd be staying over in Cape Town. Instead, we drove into the central city to see if there was still any dancing to be had in the streets. It was about 10 p.m., and we drove about for a half-hour before we came across the last remnants of the endless parade. Still carrying ANC banners, red flags and symbolic peace branches torn from trees, a few hundred people trudged along, chanting "Nelson Mandela, *sabela uyabizwa*" ("Nelson Mandela answer back, you are being called"). It appeared to be the last gasp of the celebration. After watching the group break up, we headed home.

The next day, the *Star* brought out a special morning edition, with the banner headline quoting Mandela: "The struggle must continue." Its early afternoon edition announced: "Johannesburg stands by to greet Mandela." The final evening edition reported: "Mandela's return to Jo'burg delayed."

Throughout the day, thousands of people gathered in stadiums in Soweto and at the Mandela home or in groups on Johannesburg streets. By evening, the march was on again. Through the night, the triumphant procession kept the city awake with its songs for Mandela. Tuesday morning, all roads led to Soccer City. This stadium outside Soweto was the only one large enough to hold the crowds that were expected to turn out to hear Mandela speak. A rally was due to begin at 2 p.m. By 1 o'clock, radio stations were asking people headed for

the stadium to turn back—there was no more room inside. But still they arrived.

Finally, 150,000 people listened to Mandela's first speech in his hometown in 27 years. *Weekly Mail* writer Thami Mkhwanazi saw it like this: "There were 150,000 dreams at Soccer City on Tuesday. The dreams unfolded, in broad daylight, amid the strains of muted jazz trumpet, screams, toyi-toyi chants and poetry."

The crowd sang "Samlandela uMandela" (We'll follow Mandela) when he arrived. At the end of his speech, Mandela shouted "Afrika!" The crowd roared "*Mayibuye!*" (Come back!). It was the popular nationalistic war cry of the ANC in the 1950s; almost forgotten for the past two decades, Nelson Mandela had brought it back to life, just as he'd brought back to life the dreams of his people. That night, the chant of

musters, he excused himself from the proceedings. For most of the audience, it was good riddance—the discussions on a future South Africa could begin in earnest.

Ironically, the education minister then became the butt of most of the criticism. It was a rare opportunity for many members of the audience, representing organizations at the heart of the country's sociological disaster, to grill a senior cabinet member under the glare of international cameras. It was like watching a sports championship where the underdog turns the tables and begins mauling the favorite. It was as exhilarating and, to South Africans used to the pussyfooting SABC, as unreal.

Meanwhile, across town the SABC, struggling free from the ideological straightjacket of a half-century of government policy, was flexing

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the marchers continued through the night in Hillbrow, Berea and the central city.

By Wednesday, the euphoria in the streets was dying down. It was television's turn to mold the news—to be more than just a mirror of events.

On Thursday morning, Feb. 15, ABC's Ted Koppel lured me, along with 350 other South Africans, back to the Wits campus. He had set up a "Town Meeting" in the Great Hall to bring together all shades of South African opinion. That he achieved, with a vengeance. The panel included pioneer human rights campaigner Helen Suzman, right-wing Conservative Party MP Koos van der Merwe, Minister of Education Stoffel van der Merwe and, by live satellite link-up from the Zambian capital of Lusaka, Thabo Mbeki.

The invited audience was no less illustrious, including internal ANC leader Walter Sisulu and Nobel Literature Prize nominee Nadine Gordimer. Chief police spokesman Brigadier Leon Mellet sat next to renegade police lieutenant Gregory Rockman, who had laid criminal charges against the riot police for excessive violence.

For celebrities and celebrity-spotters alike, this was the place to be. For Koos van der Merwe, it was decidedly *not* the place to be. After giving the most carefully polio tv performance of his career, he was horrified to find himself debating the ANC—in the form of both Mbeki thousands of miles away and Sisulu 10 feet away. With as much dignity as he could

journalistic muscles it didn't know it had. They threw together panel discussions involving avowed ANC supporters, representatives of the formerly anathemized alternative press and vicious critics of National Party policy. News broadcasts gave equal time to statements from the left and the right.

Thursday night, the SABC broadcast its first interview with Mandela by its own staffers. Their two most senior black and white interviewers were together given a half-hour by the man. Their respectful almost dutiful attitude to him was of the kind previously accorded only to President de Klerk. And the sky did not fall. The nature of the interview allowed Mandela to appear to a predominantly white viewership as a man of stature and reason. It transformed him from what the SABC had traditionally portrayed as a dangerous terrorist into an essential participant in dialogue and a driving force in negotiations for a new South African order.

When the sun rose on Feb. 16, Mandela had transcended two former roles. He was no longer a martyr; he was not exactly a messiah. He had become a mortal man. A great mortal man, certainly, but at last, a man again.

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