

## BOOK REVIEW

Paul S. Landau. *Spear: Mandela and the Revolutionaries*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2022. 412 pp. Maps. Notes. Sources. Index. \$36.95. Paper. ISBN: 9780821424797.

In *Spear*, Landau tracks the rise of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), “Spear of the Nation,” its struggle to respond to the apartheid state’s ever-increasing repression, its armed resistance toward a Black nationalist, multiracial future for South Africa, and its eventual fragmentation and defeat at the hands of state violence, mass arrests, and torture. In doing so, he restricts himself to a narrative that confines itself, intentionally so, to the insurgency from 1960 through 1963, which unfolds inside South Africa. *Spear* is that rare scholarship of meticulous, thorough, and detailed evidence that requires enormous effort over much time: Landau’s research spans twelve years (21) and hundreds of oral interviews from forty-nine collections at nineteen locations in five countries—and, with collaborative assistance, another seven archives (16). From these, he constructs a narrative that unfolds nearly month to month and offers insights into Mandela’s deliberations in defining revolutionary struggle, his tireless efforts to organize MK, his guidance of its actions, and his witness to its demise—insights based on evidence that heretofore has not been widely available much less coherently gathered, contemplated, and marshalled for an understanding of MK and the victory in its defeat of liberation thirty years later. *Spear* is the defining study of Umkhonto we Sizwe: nothing else published to date matches it nor is any work likely to surpass it for the foreseeable future.

In the early chapters, Landau begins with the Sharpeville Massacre (March 21, 1960) that provoked the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-African Congress (PAC) into decisive actions. In the wake of a thousand rounds fired in thirty seconds that left sixty-nine dead and hundreds more wounded while protesting the infamous pass-book registration of Blacks in South Africa, both the ANC and PAC, which had organized the protest, sought to mobilize the masses for an insurgency against the state. In a useful context, he offers an account of the past decade’s events and Mandela’s growth in leadership up to the Treason Trial (1956–61). In doing so, the reader comes to see Mandela’s cofounding of the ANC Youth League in 1944 as both the forerunner of the ANC’s development in the 1950s and the split from the ANC of the PAC in 1959, his difficult but determined decision to abandon fifty years of ANC nonviolent resistance in favor of necessary armed resistance, and the debates that unfolded among the ANC, the PAC and the SA Communist Party (SACP). What becomes abundantly clear is that Mandela would seek solidarity with and support for MK from anyone anywhere (Cuba, the Soviets, Mao’s China among others, especially newly liberated African

countries, and even the Zionist Irgun) if the liberation of Black South Africans was foremost in the ideology and strategy. Consequently, Landau takes us through the organizational strategies within South Africa and Mandela's six months of travel within Africa, including military training in Ethiopia, during which he sought assistance in arms, training, and funding for MK camps outside South Africa. In doing so, he recounts the increasing repression and violence toward the "dissidents" with the declared State of Emergency in 1960 and the banning of the ANC, the PAC and the SACP—nearly all political dissent. Of note is Landau's construction of Mandela's reading in 1961 and his subsequent but failed attempt to take control of the ANC. With thousands of angry young men available, Mandela sought to take a small MK to a national force through mass mobilization that had been sketched previously in the "M-Plan," a near block-by-block hope to enlist recruits.

In the middle chapters, Landau follows Mandela's underground movements, after his conviction in the Treason Trial, to organize MK and, through the futile M-Plan, to build an external army of insurgents against the apartheid state as well as selecting targets for sabotage. He recounts the conflict between newly independent African states and their leaders in their demand for a unified front of armed resistance and the fragmentation of organizations within South Africa, especially PAC's Poqo, its undisciplined "violent revolutionaries." He also parallels the state's increasing repression through state violence, mass arrests, and judicially sanctioned torture with MK's acts of sabotage as a consequence of the 1962 Sabotage Act, under which nonviolent protest and acts of violence alike could bring incarceration without charges for nine months. MK soldiers, with British intelligence playing both MK and the apartheid state against each other, were more and more frequently arrested in seeking to expand the movement into mass mobilization and a sustained insurgency—Operation Mayibuye, a plan for the first MK recruits to return and to foment widespread rural guerilla warfare that would complement MK's revolution in urban areas. With Mandela's capture on August 5, 1962, because of a CIA agent's betrayal—though the United States itself had no interest in Black South African liberation—MK failed to mount any offensive save that of sporadic sabotage. Landau fully examines Operation Mayibuye in its formulation, in its strategies, in its acts, and in its failure.

The later chapters of *Spear* chart the demise of MK in fragmentation and mass arrests of its leaders along with those in the PAC and the SACP. Being underground now became escaping the country itself. In these accounts, Landau underscores the cost of political activity in the personal damage to marriages, families, relatives, and friends. In weaving the political activity of MK leaders with the emotional stress of being absent while underground or abroad throughout the narrative, he shows how the collapse of MK, increasingly undercut by informants, also brought the collapse of relationships—even without prolonged time behind bars. While Landau centers his narrative on Mandela, no reader can miss the crucial role of many others in the formation of MK and its defeat.

For the general reader, *Spear* will be daunting in its detail, acronyms, and sheer number of names. For readers even somewhat familiar with South African history, *Spear* provides new understanding of MK and the difficulty of

revolutionary struggle anywhere, and it evokes new questions: Did MK fail because its members were citizens rather than soldiers? Did it succeed, even delayed by thirty years, because its citizens were the forerunners of Steve Biko's Black Consciousness movement? Did the state's unrelenting brutality nurture an international moral cause over the next three decades? *Spear* seems the last word on MK, but it begins anew considerations of "South Africa [as still] very much a work in progress" (291).

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