

BOOK REVIEW

Paul S. Landau. *Spear: Mandela and the Revolutionaries*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2022. 412 pp. Map. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00. Cloth. ISBN: 9780821424704.

When Nelson Mandela died at the age of ninety-five in 2013, he was remembered the world over as an icon of unity and forgiveness; by that time, his early attempts at violent revolution had largely been forgotten. In *Spear: Mandela and the Revolutionaries*, Paul Landau, a professor of history at the University of Maryland at College Park, seeks to rectify this historical amnesia. His book focuses on the launch of the armed struggle against apartheid in the early 1960s, particularly that part led by Mandela and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) (Spear of the Nation), the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC). Landau's goals are "to look back at what Mandela and his comrades were trying to do, what they did, and how they met defeat" (19). The author does not focus solely on Mandela's role in the armed struggle, but explores that of his "comrades, colleagues, and competitors" as well (12).

The scope of Landau's research is extraordinary. He worked on the book for more than a decade, painstakingly gathering sources from widely scattered archives and repositories, including recently released material from the US State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency. Landau also drew upon approximately 250 oral interviews, mostly with those who participated in MK, its allies, or competitors.

The book begins by focusing on how Mandela and his allies in the ANC made the transition to the armed struggle. Landau argues that, contrary to later government assertions, the initiative for MK came from Mandela and other black South African activists, not from white communists. But Mandela's ties to the communists were "a central part of his ascent [and] leadership" (289). Landau discusses the intellectual currents influencing Mandela as he launched the armed struggle and how these strands—chiefly Marxism, anticolonialism, and Pan Africanism—influenced others in the movement. Landau documents ANC President Albert Lutuli's initial reluctance to endorse the armed struggle and his eventual realization that it could be justified as long as the ANC wasn't wholly transformed into a military-style liberation organization.

The middle portion of *Spear* focuses on the actual conduct of the armed struggle. Landau discusses the organization, plans, and sabotage operations of MK and details the challenges of going underground by telling the stories of specific, lesser-known MK members. Landau's account is so thorough that he even reveals the chemical composition of MK's early bombs and provides details about fuses and timers. He discusses the activities of the Pan Africanist Congress in the early 1960s, particularly its launch of Poqo, an armed resistance group based in the Transkei, and reveals that the PAC and the ANC engaged in tentative unity talks in the early 1960s, a fact not widely known. He documents Mandela's trip to other African countries in 1962 and shows how Mandela downplayed his partnership with communists in order to gain potential financial and logistical support. By analyzing the text of Operation Mayibuye, Landau traces how MK devised a "plan for an invasion of trained guerilla commandos, in order to spur an uprising in the towns and the countryside" (210).

In the latter part of *Spear*, Landau analyzes MK's failure to spark revolutionary action among the South African masses and the South African state's successful suppression of their movement. He discusses how MK's hideout in Rivonia was discovered and the legal strategies of both sides in the Rivonia trial. Landau does not, however, address why the judge, Quartus de Wet, sentenced the Rivonia men to life in prison rather than death. The South African government certainly faced international pressure to spare the lives of the rebels, but the exact forms that international pressure took await further study. After years of systematic repression (and torture), the state had finally crushed MK within South Africa by the mid-1960s. Although MK survived in exile, it would not be strong enough to challenge the South African government for the foreseeable future. But in the years ahead, the ANC would raise the world's awareness of apartheid and work to "assail South Africa's international standing" (287).

Spear considerably expands our understanding of the armed struggle against apartheid. It offers a finely grained reconstruction of revolutionaries' thoughts, discussions, and activities on a level not previously available. It provides a snapshot of lesser-known MK cadres, revealing what the armed resistance movement involved for those who have been previously neglected by history. It adds to our knowledge of key informers such as Bruno Mtolo, the MK member who became a state witness in the Rivonia trial, and presents further evidence suggesting that the CIA played a crucial role in Mandela's 1962 arrest. The author strikes a careful balance between admiration and criticism; he admires MK for persisting against great odds but acknowledges that it wasn't a professional military force and that it "failed to make any durable connections in the countryside" (290). This in-depth study deserves a wide readership.

Steven Gish 

Auburn University at Montgomery
Montgomery, Alabama, USA

sgish@aum.edu

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