



CHARACTER
COMRADE
LEADER
PRISONER
NEGOTIATOR
STATESMAN

During his Africa trip in 1962, Mandela met Colonel Boumedienne of the Algerian liberation army in Morocco. He gave Mandela some simple but very powerful advice.

“Take care not to be romantic or unrealistic. The object of most armed liberation movements is not to overthrow regimes but to bring them to the negotiating table.” Colonel Boumedienne

Bringing the apartheid regime to the negotiating table was Mandela's guiding objective. He always made it very clear that he regarded armed struggle as a tactic, and not a principle in itself. In 1961, it was Mandela who persuaded the ANC alliance to accept armed struggle. Yet, almost 30 years later, it was Mandela who had the vision and courage to push for negotiations.

The fruits of Mandela's commitment to negotiations are symbolised in this photograph. Taken in the early evening on 11 February 1990, Mandela addressed thousands of his supporters – and the entire world – from the balcony of Cape Town's City Hall overlooking the Grand Parade. After almost 10 000 days in prison, Mandela had negotiated his own release, paving the way for a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa.

"If we did not start dialogue soon, both sides would be plunged into a dark night of oppression, violence and war." Nelson Mandela

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MADIBA?"



In response to internal and external pressure, President P W Botha told Parliament on 31 January 1985 that he would release Mandela if he unconditionally rejected violence. Mandela's reply was the one that characterised his prison years: he rejected the offer and its conditions, while still keeping open the door for negotiations.

"My father says, 'Only free men can negotiate. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts. I cannot and will not give any undertaking at a time when I and you, the people, are not free.'" Zindzi Mandela reading her father's speech to an ecstatic crowd at Jabulani Stadium, Soweto, 10 February 1985



Nevertheless Mandela continued to explore the possibility of negotiations. In 1986, the Eminent Persons' Group from the Commonwealth visited South Africa to explore ways of getting negotiations going.

"No serious person we met was interested in a fight to the finish; all favoured negotiations and peaceful solutions. We drew the conclusion that the government's programme of 'reforms' was insufficient and would not end apartheid."

Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group on Southern Africa

The outlook seemed positive, with broad agreement on the way forward. Then, suddenly, the South African Defence Force once again violated international law by attacking ANC bases in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana.



In December 1988, President P W Botha was persuaded by Niël Barnard, head of the National Intelligence Service (centre), to invite Mandela to tea. The meeting was polite yet superficial; but it was significant because a precedent had been set.

"The rumours went around that Madiba was selling out. The message went abroad, and back came an enquiry from Oliver Tambo asking what he was doing. Madiba put it very succinctly: 'I am trying to get the government to talk to you.'" Ahmed Kathrada



“Mandela’s chief principle of political action was the one he had come to understand in prison: that the only way to beat the tiger was to tame him.” John Carlin

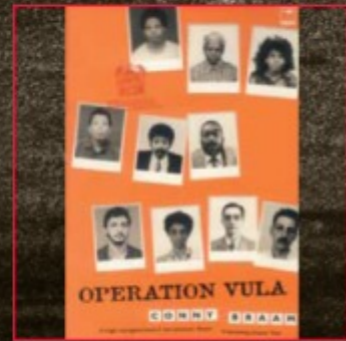
OPERATION VULA



In 1989 Eric Molobi, who had spent seven years on Robben Island, returned as a delegate of the United Democratic Front (UDF) to consult with Mandela at Victor Verster.

Molobi was taken aback by the comfort in which Mandela was living. What a contrast to the harsh years on the Island! Yet he put his trust in Mandela’s integrity.

“As a leader, one must sometimes take actions that are unpopular. This is particularly true of prison, where you must find consolation in being true to your ideals, even if no one else knows of it.” Eric Molobi



By 1989, Tambo was able to communicate secretly with Mandela through an ingenious secret process, known as Operation Vula, masterminded by Mac Maharaj. The correspondence was smuggled out of Victor Verster Prison concealed in a book cover and forwarded to Lusaka.

The ANC leadership in exile formulated conditions for negotiations through the Harare Declaration, sending a copy to Mandela and to the internal leadership. This paved the way for new talks.

A NEW OPPORTUNITY



In September 1989, the white electorate voted F W de Klerk into power as President, after P W Botha suffered a stroke.

Prominent Afrikaners advised De Klerk that a modernised version of apartheid would simply not work. He was also reminded of Ian Smith’s “lost Rhodesian opportunity”.

“Ian Smith found himself embroiled in a seven-year guerrilla war and negotiating a belated settlement which led to a Marxist government. When the opportunity was there for negotiation, it was not grasped. We must not make that mistake.” F W de Klerk



Kobie Coetsee, Minister of Justice (extreme right), and Niël Barnard had conducted talks with Mandela over two years and were convinced Mandela was a man with whom the government could do business.

“The old man (Mandela) is one of those strange individuals who captivate you. He has this strange charisma. There was in our minds never the slightest doubt. This is the man – if you cannot find a settlement with him, any settlement will be out.” Niël Barnard



Mandela consulted with a number of internal leaders and then initiated a meeting with President de Klerk.

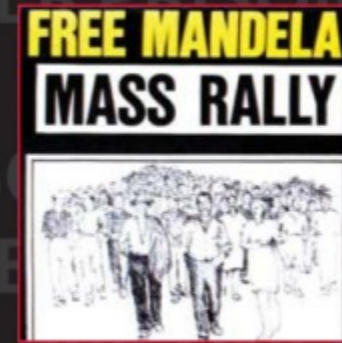
“I told Mr de Klerk how impressed I was by his emphasis on reconciliation, enunciated in his inaugural address. The very first step to reconciliation, I said, would be the complete dismantling of apartheid.”

Nelson Mandela

Mandela met De Klerk on 12 December 1989 at Tuynhuis, the President’s official residence in Cape Town. He raised the question of his own release and indicated that there was no point in his leaving prison unless the ban on the ANC was also lifted.

FREE NELSON MANDELA

During the 1970s and 1980s the Anti-Apartheid Movement grew in many countries around the world. Young people, the churches and community activists began to call more loudly for the release of Mandela – the living symbol for all political prisoners.



In 1988 Mandela turned seventy. A massive Free Mandela Concert at Wembley Stadium in England was a culmination of broad civil society support for Mandela as a powerful icon in the struggle against the global scourge of racism.

"The response from the young people was phenomenal. Hundreds, no thousands began marching from all corners of Britain. Most of those who responded enthusiastically had not even been born when Nelson went to prison in 1964. The world had not seen him or heard him speak for all those many years. Yet he was already a moral giant bestriding our globe like a colossus." Archbishop Desmond Tutu



FREE AT LAST!

On 2 February 1990, President De Klerk announced that he was unbanning the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe, the PAC and the South African Communist Party. He lifted emergency regulations, apartheid regulations, capital punishment and restrictions on the media. Political prisoners would be released and exiles would be permitted to return home. In one stroke, everything had changed.

The hard work of Mandela and many thousands, indeed millions, of men and women in South Africa, southern Africa and around the world, had paid off. A week later, on 11 February 1990, Nelson Mandela was unconditionally released from prison. De Klerk's government had at last agreed to Mandela's stipulation for negotiations without any pre-conditions.

“This violence is both organised and orchestrated. It is specifically directed at the democratic movement. It constitutes the cold-blooded strategy of state terrorism.” Nelson Mandela

TESTED TO THE LIMIT



The “insurrectionists” in the liberation movement were convinced that they would be betrayed if they relied simply on negotiations. The armed struggle waited in the wings. The Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Azanian People’s Organisation (APO) refused to participate in the discussions.

The white supremacists were oiling their “vooraiers” – their traditional weapons. And bloodshed continued in townships and villages, mainly in Zululand and Natal. Mandela’s statesmanship was to be tested to the limit.



Despite his revolutionary credentials, Joe Slovo, a high-ranking member of the ANC and the SACP, could see that the commitment to the armed struggle was delaying negotiations. In August 1990, the ANC announced the suspension of the armed struggle. On the ground, many people considered the move a “sellout”.



On 20 December 1991, after more than a year of talks about talks, the real talks began. The first real negotiations between the government, the ANC and other groups became known as CODESA – the Convention for a Democratic South Africa.

Seventeen of the 19 participating organisations signed a declaration of intent, setting out guidelines for a future constitution. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the PAC refused to sign.



As the former enemies sat down to talk, violent conflict was suddenly unleashed in Gauteng. Sinister forces were at work. Passengers were thrown off trains, hostels became ethnic enclaves and entire families were violently ejected from their homes.

On 17 June 1992, 46 residents in Bolpatong, near Sharpeville, were slaughtered. Witnesses reported that the killers came from an IFP-controlled hostel. Investigative reporters claimed that police vehicles accompanied the killers under cover of darkness.

TRUE LEADERSHIP



During a protest march that spilled across the border of the Ciskei "homeland" in September 1992, Ciskei troops opened fire with machine guns, killing 29 people in Bisho. Mandela reached out to both his opponents and his own movement.

"The tragedy of Bisho led to a new opening in the negotiations. I met De Klerk in order to find common ground and avoid the repetition of another tragedy like Bisho."

Nelson Mandela

Soon afterwards, the Record of Understanding was signed. The constitutional deadlock was broken. A renewed solution to the menacing prospect of full-scale civil war needed to be found.

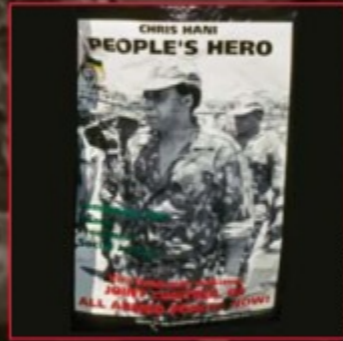


"The important thing when you sit down with an enemy is whether you can trust the character of the people you have across the table from you and whether they carry their people's support. Mandela had both."

Constand Viljoen

Fear of the perceived threat of the unbanned ANC led to the mobilisation of the Afrikaner right wing led by General Constand Viljoen, the former head of the South African Defence Force.

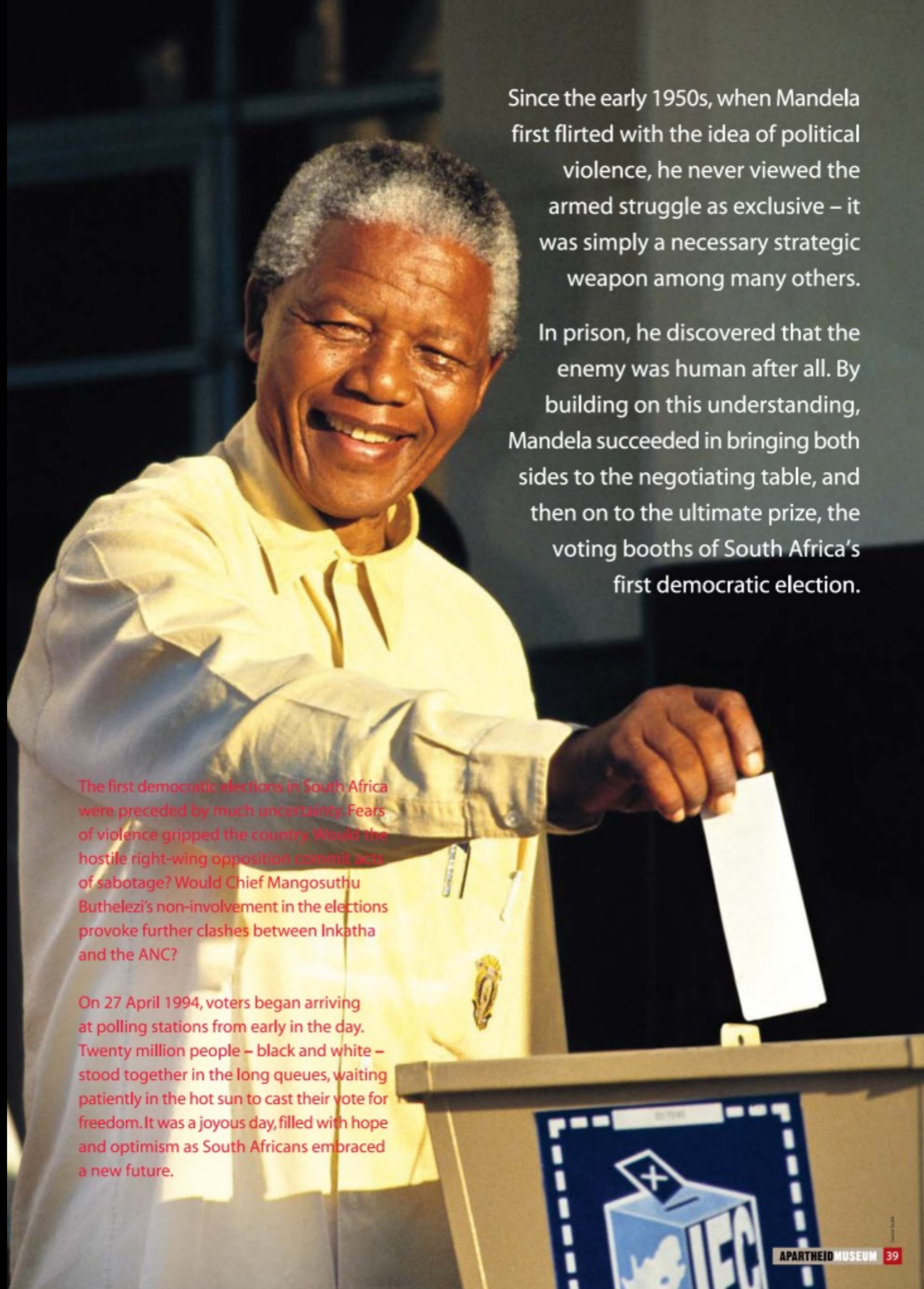
Mandela responded by inviting Viljoen to his home and disarming him through his understanding of his concerns. Viljoen went on to call off the proposed disruption of the impending elections.



On 10 April 1993, one of the most beloved leaders of the liberation struggle, Chris Hanu, was shot dead outside his home in Boksburg on the East Rand. While De Klerk remained silent, Mandela immediately flew to Johannesburg to appeal to the nation on radio and television.

By this act of statesmanship and true leadership, Mandela had de facto become the President of South Africa.

"Tonight I am reaching out to every single South African, black and white, from the depths of my being. A white man came to our country and committed a deed so foul that our whole nation now teeters on the brink of disaster. A white woman, of Afrikaner origin, risked her life so that we may bring to justice, this assassin." Nelson Mandela



Since the early 1950s, when Mandela first flirted with the idea of political violence, he never viewed the armed struggle as exclusive – it was simply a necessary strategic weapon among many others.

In prison, he discovered that the enemy was human after all. By building on this understanding, Mandela succeeded in bringing both sides to the negotiating table, and then on to the ultimate prize, the voting booths of South Africa's first democratic election.

The first democratic elections in South Africa were preceded by much uncertainty. Fears of violence gripped the country. Would the hostile right-wing opposition commit acts of sabotage? Would Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's non-involvement in the elections provoke further clashes between Inkatha and the ANC?

On 27 April 1994, voters began arriving at polling stations from early in the day. Twenty million people – black and white – stood together in the long queues, waiting patiently in the hot sun to cast their vote for freedom. It was a joyous day, filled with hope and optimism as South Africans embraced a new future.