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SAVING WATER BY CUTTING DOWN INVASIVE ALIENS

by Louise Asmal, former Irish antiapartheid activist and co-author of Reconciliation through Truth

The helicopter weaves its way gingerly through a narrow gorge in the mountains. Cliffs rise sheer and dark on each side, while in front a sharp peak guards our exit. The helicopter swerves around the peak and suddenly we are out in the open again, in the sunny winelands of the Western Cape, the vineyards stretching out beneath us.

Looking back at the mountains, we can see the dark patches of woodland which have invaded the banks of the streams and taken over from the native vegetation, while here and there a purplish-black expanse of rock shows where the invasive aliens have been removed.

Soon we land at a forestry station and meet Ronald and Madeleine, who will be our guides to visit one of the flagship projects of the South African scheme for eradicating invasive plants. Both are "Coloured." In the US they would be called Black; but since Coloureds are of partial white ancestry, under apartheid they were considered superior to Africans, and the Western Cape was declared a "Coloured Preference Area," to be ethnically cleansed of Africans.

Even so, in the old South Africa the two could never have aspired to the positions of authority they now exercise. Madeleine, fresh from a degree in environmental science, young and full of enthusiasm, is the project leader in this area. Ronald is an administrator in the head office of Cape Nature Conservation, which is running the whole Western Cape scheme under the aegis of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF).

This scheme is one of the most innovative and successful initiatives of the new democratic South Africa. It has been running little more than a year, but already has won a major award, the Green Trust Environment Award for the best conservation project in South Africa in 1996.

It was started in a country where water is scarce. Under apartheid huge dams were built to serve the cities and to irrigate white farms, while 15 million people, mostly African, were left without running water. Now Mandela's government must use precious resources to bring water to the neglected majority. Even if that means just one tap in the village, it is still a huge advance for people-- usually women-- who up to now have had to walk several kilometres a day to fetch water, often of poor quality, from the nearest river.

The new constitution also lays down specifically that the environment itself is entitled to water. So new development must take this into account.

All this places tremendous demands on the water supplies. Dams are not the ideal answer,

partly because they take years to plan and build, but also because they may themselves have an undesirable impact on the natural environment. Some new dams will have to be built, but if sufficient water can be saved through water conservation schemes, this will stave off the immediate necessity in some areas and so save money.

One such scheme is this national project to eliminate invasive alien vegetation. Trees such as North American pines and Australian acacias were originally imported to replace the native South African forests which had been cut down for ships and firewood. They are far thirstier than native species, and when they start to grow along the banks of the mountain streams, they consume huge amounts of water. One of the thirstiest, the blue gum, drinks over 600 quarts of water a day when it is mature.

Ronald tells me that one man on the project who has been living and working in the Franschoek all his life informed him proudly that in the areas he and the team had cleared the streams were now flowing as he had never seen them before.

This has been scientifically tested. In one area where an investigation was carried out after the ground was cleared, it was shown that 12,000 litres of water per hectare per day were saved. This will be reduced when the natural vegetation grows back; however, the natural bush vegetation, the beautiful Cape fynbos, is far less thirsty.

But saving water is not the only benefit that this scheme is bringing about. When I met the La Motte team, half-way up the mountain side, I discovered that none of them had been in permanent jobs when they applied for this work. Those who had been employed before were mostly seasonal workers on the fruit and wine farms of the area.

There are 60 workers on this team. As we approach, the man from DWAF, who has arranged the trip complains that they are all men, when it is a special pride of the scheme that half the workers are women. Actually, this is the case here too, but from a distance the small wiry figures clad in blue overalls look identical. I never managed to enquire whether this might be due to the generally poor living conditions of rural workers under apartheid or to the hard physical work the job entails.

Madeleine gathers everyone in a circle and asks whether there are any complaints. Some people say that the bright yellow t-shirts they wear under their overalls attract insects that bite them; but the bright colour, it is explained, is a safety measure in case of accident, so that the person can be seen easily. Others are frightened of snakes, but in fact no one has been bitten.

A more serious complaint concerns the low wages, although they are an improvement on what could be earned as a seasonal worker. The DWAF man says that this is due to a deliberate decision to employ as many people as quickly as possible on the scheme. Once the scheme is well established and water savings shown to be of direct benefit to local communities, then the authorities may be persuaded to contribute financially. Meanwhile, a form of piecework is being introduced; targets are being set each week for the teams, and once the target is reached, the team is paid and they can then proceed to the next task.

I asked Madeleine whether this would mean the men would do better than the women. She replied that, on the contrary, the women consistently worked harder than the men. She put this down to the fact that the men had picked up lazy working habits from their previous employment, whereas the women had never had jobs!

Two women, she told me, had just been promoted to the women's "hit squad" team (not to be confused with the "hit squads" being discussed before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission). This "hit squad" team has been trained in rock climbing and mountain survival techniques so that they can attack the alien invaders where they have taken root at the top of the mountains.

All the teams in the region have divided themselves up along gender lines, due to problems with sexual harassment. So far, however, there has been no such split along racial lines. Although groups who in the past were deliberately kept apart experience some teething troubles working together now. In the Western Cape, which has more Coloured than African inhabitants, and where there is an underlying friction because of Coloured suspicions that affirmative action policies may favour Africans and cut them out where previously they were given preference, the DWAF policy is to recruit from both communities when possible and to foster a team spirit through the encouragement of sporting teams drawn from the workers.

Whatever their background, the workers are eager to speak up about their problems. Many are illiterate, and so part of the funds for development and training are put aside for reading and writing. Two people who already have their matric (school leaving exam) have been sent to literacy classes in the nearest town (started by the newly-elected ANC council only last July) so that they can observe the teaching methods and then employ them to teach their fellow-workers.

Madeleine tells me that most of the groups are wholly ignorant about banks. As the supervisors are reluctant to deal in large cash sums each week, a local bank has been asked to send a staff member to explain how a bank works and what to do with your pay check.

Some ten of the group have formed a wood production team, which chops up the trees into logs and sells them for firewood. The profits go back into the overall resources and help fund development work. These workers would like a chainsaw to speed up the work and also training in more advanced woodworking skills, but so far this has not been possible.

Nevertheless, in one year these sixty people have all acquired a skill that will be useful even if the project does not continue indefinitely. Indeed, a few workers have already been offered permanent jobs with local farmers or are considering setting themselves up in their own businesses and hiring out their services. To empower people in this way is a notable success though it makes the project itself more difficult as new workers have to be trained.

Halfway up the mountain, under a blue sky and with not a human habitation in sight, this looks an idyllic place to work. In fact, the labour is hard, the slashers the workers carry to attack the alien trees are heavy, and the work has to be thoroughly and painstakingly carried out if it is to be successful.

Nevertheless, the rewards are immense, both for the country in terms of the water to be saved, and for the approximately 7,000 workers throughout the land who are being given new skills and a pride in their work which they never had before. The project has caught the imagination of foreign donors, who are helping to finance it, and of local businesses such as the helicopter company who fly the administrators to conduct the necessary aerial surveys at a greatly reduced cost.

No one knows how long the project will continue though follow-up work is necessary for years to prevent dormant seeds from growing into new trees. The DWAF man hopes that eventually it may be financed from water rates, but that will have to wait until the planned new water law comes into effect. Meanwhile, a lot of energy goes to finding the funds to keep it going.

But as I wave goodbye to the workers, who are now piling into lorries to go higher up the mountain, I have no doubt that this project has already proved truly worthy of the new South Africa.

*Louise Asmal is the wife of Water and Forestry Affairs
Minister, Kader Asmal.*

A controversial UK firm is at the centre of a growing row over Nelspruit's water privatisation, report Eddie Koch and Sharon Hammond

A BRITISH firm linked to a secret clique which ran the United Kingdom's Conservative Party's controversial aid-for-trade programme in the Third World is at the centre of a growing row between organised labour and the government over plans to privatise municipal water services in Nelspruit.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu) this week announced it will begin a week-long series of protests on May 1 to oppose efforts by foreign companies to "buy" South Africa's water supply services from local authorities — a move it believes will lead to job losses and tariff hikes.

The union says plans to privatise water and waste services in Nelspruit are part of a wider scheme by the British company, Bwwater, and other multinationals to obtain lucrative contracts to control municipal water in South Africa.

In a bizarre twist to the controversy, Sanco Holdings — the investment company run by the South African National Civics Organisation (Sanco) — has teamed up with Bwwater to bid for commercial rights to manage Nelspruit's water. The consortium is tipped to win the tender.

The partnership appears to put Sanco Holdings — headed by former Congress of South African Trade Unions militant Moses Mayekiso — in direct conflict with organised labour and in an alliance with conservative British capital on the issue.

Reports in the British *Independent* newspaper show Bwwater was among a select group of civil contractors and defence manufacturers which benefited from a secret network that controlled the supply of British aid and arms to, and trade with, overseas countries initiated at the start of former prime minister Margaret Thatcher's rule.

The network, an inner circle of senior civil servants, government and industry figures, effectively decided how the Britain Aid and Trade Provision Programme (ATP) — aid money to help finance contracts from overseas governments — should be allocated, and how contracts for arms sales should be won.

Bwwater was among five companies which accounted for almost 43% of the ATP budget between 1978 and 1992. Its contracts included projects in Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Thailand — some linked to efforts by the British government to sell advanced defence equipment to these countries. Bwwater has also been a generous supporter of the Conservative Party — one of 18 companies which gave the party directly or through a middleman organisation more than £6-million between 1979 and 1993. Mayekiso was unavailable to comment about

Sanco Holdings's consortium partner. Meanwhile, though Samwu has "declared war against privatisation", its members in Mpumalanga appear to be taking a more cautious stance, waiting to see if the plans will generate advantages or job losses for the workforce.

Samwu's Nelspruit secretary, and employee of the town council, Louis Mthisi, said earlier this week that his organisation wanted the council to explain what it meant by "privatisation" before deciding on a course of action.

"They [the council] say it's not really privatisation but delegated management. Now, do they mean that all assets will go to the private company that wins the tender or that the water and sewage will only be managed by the company?" asked Mthisi.

Nelspruit council spokesman Etienne Garnett-Bennett said a decision about which of the eight bidders should win the tender for the town's water management had been postponed. This is probably to allow more time for the union movement and the civic organisations to explore and discuss issues surrounding water privatisation.

The council has asked the unions to elect representatives to a committee that will decide which bidder should be awarded the contract.

The chairman of Cosatu's local branch, Michael Nkosi, has also added to confusion at rank-and-file level by saying local residents and workers will probably support privatisation. "Where we live there is no water supply. We believe service would be better from a private company," he said.

Members of the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union could also be affected by the possible privatisation of services delivered by Nelspruit's water and sewage department. But representative William Spencer said: "We don't approve of privatisation but understand the council cannot provide the services the public expects until 10 or even 20 years down the line."

Samwu's national leadership is adamant that planned protests will go ahead, and that these will be supported by its members in the Nelspruit area. The union says international experience showed workers lose jobs, water prices rise and quality drops when private companies take over concessions to manage municipal supplies.

Samwu is demanding a moratorium on all negotiations between local authorities and the private sector over privatisation of municipal services. The union wants "restructuring of the public sector" to be dealt with only through the National Labour Relations Forum.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry cannot, in terms of the Constitution, intervene in decisions taken by local authorities over how to manage their water.

But the department is trying to ensure that municipal water is managed efficiently and in the interests of the poor by promulgating regulations that will lay down a basic set of standards and guidelines for local government. "The proposed water services Bill will give national government a mechanism to promote the public interest in

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including nurses, farmers, municipalites and citizens. "We urgently need to change people's behaviour from a free-and-easy approach of using as much water as they like, to one which balances conservation with availability of a scarce resource," said Ned MacLeod, chairman of the National Water Regula-

Kader Asmal: Unconventional
The by-laws, outlined in the proposed national water supply regulations, aim to dramatically cut the water consumed by municipal users, including nurses, farmers, municipalites and citizens. "We urgently need to change people's behaviour from a free-and-easy approach of using as much water as they like, to one which balances conservation with availability of a scarce resource," said Ned MacLeod, chairman of the National Water Regula-

Local authorities will also be required to conduct an annual water audit to establish consumption and losses to leaking pipes and illegal connections. In places like Soweto and other apartheid townships, up to 50% of water supplies are lost due to leaks. "We're an arid country, compared with Israel, and these regulations are

Half the measures contained in a 12-point water conservation plan — including informative billing that shows consumers how much they use, intensive communication with residents and an escalating tariff on a "more-you-use-more-you-pay" basis

Department officials were reluctant to speculate yet about the possibility that the new measures would reduce the need for Gauteng to draw water from the Lesotho Highlands Project. But the success of Asmal's conservation campaign — described by American experts recently as "unprecedented in terms of approach and effectiveness" — has raised questions about the future of conventional engineering approaches to water shortage in South Africa.



become law within months. They include:
● A ban on watering gardens, sportsfields or lawns between 1am and 3pm between the months of October and March.
● A complete and nationwide ban on the use of high-pressure hoses to clean pavements and other hardened surfaces.
● An embargo on the installation of lavatory cisterns with a capacity greater than nine litres. All new toilets will be fitted with dual flushing devices so that less water can be used to flush liquids only.
● All new shower heads will have a maximum flow rate of less than 10 litres a minute. Efforts will be made to replace old shower heads and cisterns with new water-saving technologies.
● All car washes will have to be done in a way that ensures 70% of water is recycled.

Results from measures adopted by the Hermannus municipality in the Western Cape showed that local consumption could be reduced by 30% in months, said City Preston, special adviser to Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry Kader Asmal.
Half the measures contained in a 12-point water conservation plan — including informative billing that shows consumers how much they use, intensive communication with residents and an escalating tariff on a "more-you-use-more-you-pay" basis

— has led to a 30% saving in the municipality in the last four months. "This has been achieved by implementing half the proposed programme. Once the other measures are put in place, Hermannus can expect to save even more water," said Preston. He estimates such savings, if adopted by Cape Town, will allow the city to delay building new dams and that the total saving to the local government and its ratepayers would thus amount to some R780-million.
If local Gauteng authorities adopted similar measures — and they will be encouraged to do so by the restrictions and audit obligations contained in the proposed regulations — the savings in terms of dam construction costs would run to billions of rands.

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cases like this by requiring local government to go through a structured procurement and planning process in the public interest," said department deputy director general Mike Muller. The outcome of the Nelspruit debate will have crucial implications

Eddie Koch
The construction of expensive and environmentally damaging dams — and new inter-catchment transfer schemes like the controversial Lesotho Highlands Project — could be postponed by revolutionary water-saving measures contained in municipal regulations to be introduced across the country this year.

The proposed Israeli-style regulations, some of them so dramatic they were considered an April Fool's joke when reported this week, are part of a package designed to ensure South Africa uses water supplies efficiently and in a way that provides the poorest with a supply of potable water.

Consumers have reacted with some degree of shock, but senior officials in the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry said the real significance of the regulations lay in their potential to prevent the need for new expensive and destructive dam projects.

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THIRD FORCE

MINUTES of a State Security Council (SSC) meeting that have been handed to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission point to the direct involvement of top National Party leaders — including former president F W de Klerk — in the formation of a “counter-revolutionary” third force.

The minutes of the meeting, held on

May 12, 1986, are part of a long document, marked top secret (uiters geheim), that is likely to send ripples through the opposition NP, as De Klerk and former minister of foreign affairs Mr Pik Botha have consistently denied knowing about a third force.

De Klerk recently told a press conference that the term “third force” had been used only as a suggested description for a policing mechanism for crowd control. He denied it had been the former NP government’s intention to use it as a force to marginalise or eliminate political opponents.

Members of the Truth Commission refused to release the report to the media last night. It is part of a package of investigations by the Investigation Task Board headed by Durban lawyer Mr Howard Varney. His damning report is drawn from secret apartheid-era documents and tells a different story from the NP version.

According to a leaked section of the report, the Investigation Task Board has found that the infamous Operation Marion — a secret agreement between Inkatha and the SA Defence Force to train recruits to work against the “revolutionary” United Democratic Front — cannot be explained away by the “bad egg” syndrome.

In a television debate before the elections in 1994, President Nelson Mandela accused De Klerk of “being implicated in financing the murderous activities of the Inkatha Freedom Party”.

The report says that, in a state strategy, the “methods of the revolutionaries” were applied to counter the per-

ceived revolutionary threat. These included murder and other unlawful actions.

The report also argues that those at leadership level were well aware that this type of support would lead to Inkatha’s offensive units’ launching attacks on its political opponents.

It says that although the state was under violent attack, its political leaders adopted strategies which in effect cast

aside the application of the rule of law.

“These decisions still (have an) impact on society today.”

The minutes contained in Varney’s document refer to an SSC meeting chaired by then-president Mr P W Botha. It was attended by then-minister of education De Klerk, Fik Botha, law and order minister Mr Louis le Grange, defence minister General Magnus Malan, justice minister Mr Kobie Coetsee, constitutional development and planning minister Mr Chris Heunis, deputy law and order minister Mr Adriaan Vlok, transport minister Mr Hendrik Schoeman and finance minister Mr Barend du Plessis.

Also present were Lieutenant-General P W van der Westhuizen, secretary of the SSC, Major-General R P J van Vuuren and Mr P H Viljoen of the SSC secretariat, Dr Niel Barnard, then-director-general of the National Intelligence Service and now director-general of the Western Cape, General P J Coetzee, police commissioner, and Mr P R Killen, director-general of foreign affairs.

According to the minutes of the meeting, it was held that a third force should be mobile, “with a well-trained ability to effectively wipe out terrorists”.

“This mobility must be provided by the ability of the SA Defence Force and the SA Police,” the minutes said.

The minutes, in Afrikaans and stamped “Top-secret”, are headed “Agenda Item 11: Discussion of the Third Force” (Bespreking van die Derde Mag).

The chairman is quoted as saying the proposed third force should

supplement other security force to ensure the good name of the security forces was not blemished. The Afrikaans text reads: “Die voorsitter (P W Botha) se dat die voorgestelde Derde Mag aanvullend tot die ander veiligheidsmagte moet wees, sodat die veiligheidsmagte nie in die gedrang sal kom nie.”

The minutes say the security forces must co-operate in establishing the third force so that “the subversives can be combated using their own methods”. The Afrikaans original reads: “Die veiligheidsmagte moet saamwerk tot die daargestelling van die Derde Mag sodat die ondermyners met hulle eie metodes bekamp kan word.”

Malan and Le Grange were designated to follow this up.

It was agreed that the capacity of the proposed third force should be provided by the security force establishment. The minutes say the third force should be prepared to be perceived as being unpopular “and even feared”, but should not impair the dignity of the security forces. The Afrikaans wording is: “Dit moet bereid wees om onpopulêr en selfs gevrees te wees, sonder dat dit die SA Weermag of die SA Polisie se aansien sal aantas.”

The placing of municipal police under the direct authority of the SA Police should also be investigated, the minutes say. Heunis, Le Grange, the cabinet secretary and the SSC secretariat were designated to follow this up.

Varney said last night the full document detailed counter-revolutionary actions of the former state.

It indicated that then-president Botha would have been party to a large number of decisions about cross-border raids.

It made the argument that, logically, the same structures involved in authorising these raids could have been involved in internal counter-revolutionary operations, said Varney.

De Klerk’s spokesmen, Mr Gerrit Koozhof and Mr Fanus Schoeman, could not be reached for comment late last night. It was understood they were attending an NP meeting in Pretoria.

TRC spokesman Mr Glen Goosen confirmed yesterday that the TRC had received the full document from Varney, but declined to release it in full to the media. He said it had yet to be studied by commission members.

Mr Joel Netshitenzhe, a spokesman for President Mandela, said last night that “these are matters being investigat-

ed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”.

He said the ANC — which had long averred that there was a state-sponsored third force — was “being vindicated”. He reiterated the call to members of the former regime to “come clean”.

Former president Botha, speaking from his home in Wilderness, said last night that the matter of a third force had been dealt with three years ago in his biography, written by former presidential adviser Dr Daan Prinsloo, as well as in a statement to TRC chairman Archbishop Desmond Tutu last year. He was not prepared to comment further.

“I don’t want to comment on issues that were dealt with in the biography,” Botha said.

He said Prinsloo’s book — which hit the headlines when De Klerk had

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excerpts that placed him in a bad light removed — had been based on notes and minutes archived with the Parliament-affiliated Institute for Contemporary History.

“All my notes are there,” Botha added. He initially refused to have anything to do with the TRC.

However, when Tutu visited him last year Botha handed him a manuscript of Prinsloo’s book as well as a 10-page statement.

In the statement, he said: “It would now appear, however, that there might have been instances during the conflict of the past where individuals exceeded the limits of their authority.”

“I cannot be expected to take responsibility for the actions of any such individuals.”

Botha added: “I stand, however, without any qualification, behind all the thousands of members of the security forces who, in the lawful execution of their duties, bravely fought against the revolutionary onslaught of Soviet imperialism.”

The South African army turned bushmen into killers then deserted them, writes Adam Alexander in Schmidtsdrif

IN A REMOTE place in South Africa's barren Karoo desert, the sun is setting over an army camp unlike any other in the world. This is the time when the sea of mudbrown tents called Schmidtsdrif springs to life.

The encampment has been home to a desperately damaged community for seven years.

Here, under the auspices of the South African army, 4,000 people live and die on the banks of the Vaal river, 45 miles from Kimberley.

Neglected, in some cases to the point of starvation, they are the remnants of South Africa's 31 Battalion — the force of fighting bushmen.

'Many have died of hunger here,' said Riano Nduve, a 23-year-old bushman who teaches Afrikaans at the camp. 'Sometimes the doctors at the sick bay tell them they have something else and that it is not hunger. But it's not the truth'.

Nduve, who works as part of a new government education programme to aid the bushmen, claims that as many as 100 people have died of starvation since the camp was formed and that many are now afraid to visit the sick bay in case they, too, 'disappear'. 'My mother went with only a headache. I never saw her alive again,' said one bushman.

Yet few communities need a sick bay as much as this one. Twenty-five years of almost continuous war has shattered these naturally non-aggressive people, used as front-line troops first by the Portuguese colonists in Angola, then by the South African defence forces against Namibia.

'They are the most traumatised community in the world,' said human-rights lawyer Roger Chennels, a member of a trust board set up to help the bushmen. 'They are the only group of bushmen in Africa who will kill each other with a bow and arrow over an argument.'

They were brought to this corner of the military training ground of Schmidtsdrif in 1990 after Namibia's independence and they have been in limbo ever since, living on the meagre salaries of the few soldiers still employed by their

army and on endless broken promises.

'Nothing could be worse for bushmen than to put them in straight lines and to tell them to live in one place. They're used to roaming southern Africa and being free,' said Chennels.

The South African army is now busy integrating more than seven armies into one new force and has more to think about than the bushmen who served the country so loyally and bravely. Fewer than 100 have been integrated into the 3 Infantry Battalion based at Kimberley.

Former infantry man Smit Tjohimba, 34, looks much older than his years. He has been trying for three years, since his demobilisation, to get an army pension to support his wife and two children. His letters to military headquarters in Pretoria have met with no reply.

'They promised us we would get pensions but we never got them,' said Tjohimba, who keeps his family alive by fishing in the Vaal and selling his catch in the nearest town 25 miles away.

His eyes are bloodshot from cheap wine as he watches a traditional dance next to his tent, and his face betrays the profound disappointment that pervades the camp.

Yet he is one of the lucky ones. Walk into the sick bay and you pass uniformed bushmen who lost limbs as frontline trackers for the South African army. There are 50 amputees at the camp. They will tell you about the mine or grenade that maimed

them but they will not talk about the war or how they feel now. 'They are very secretive,' said Captain Steve Moyo, a nurse at the sick bay.

Moyo believes the bushmen are deteriorating rapidly — mentally and physically. 'They have no income and they don't know where they stand. They live for today. Tomorrow they don't know where they will be.'

'They got a lot of promises that they would be resettled in a month or two — and this is now their sixth year.'

The latest promise is of a farm outside Kimberley, bought for them by the government two months ago. They are forbidden to grow food on any reasonable scale at Schmidtsdrif, so this would at last give them an area where they could feed themselves.

But the bushmen are wary of promises. Sergeant Major Engelbrecht, second in command at Schmidtsdrif, said: 'The whites migrated up from the south and the black tribes from central Africa migrated down — and the bushmen were caught in the middle. They fought on the Portuguese side in the Angolan civil war and they fought on our side in the Namibian civil war — and they've been fighting on the wrong side ever since.'

Swapo's victory in what is now Namibia threatened the bushmen with possible retribution. Engelbrecht explained: 'They were given a choice — to stay or to come back with us — and 500 of them, with their families, decided to come with us. The

idea was to spend £7.5 million building a town for them here at Schmidtsdrif, and that 31 Battalion would carry on as an ethnic type of battalion like the British Gurkhas.'

Mandela's government had other ideas. It disbanded the battalion in 1994. Having taken up South African citizenship, none of its members could return to their homes in Namibia or Angola. Yet the army claims to have only a 'municipal' responsibility to them now — providing water, sanitation, refuse collection and the sick bay, but not food.

The South African officers who led them in the war against Swapo praised them at the time as skilled trackers and brave soldiers. They certainly needed to be brave: the 500 now at Schmidtsdrif lost another 500 dead in battle.

'They took very heavy casualties,' said Engelbrecht. 'But they are people who can easily adapt. Nowadays we use the bushmen in 3 Battalion with the same success in the townships.'

For those left at Schmidtsdrif, hopes of a return to the old way of life lie with the children. Their faces do not bear the scars of war. They burst with happiness. The smallest ones carry bows and arrows fashioned from twigs and nylon cord, and deftly search for what little bush fauna exists here.

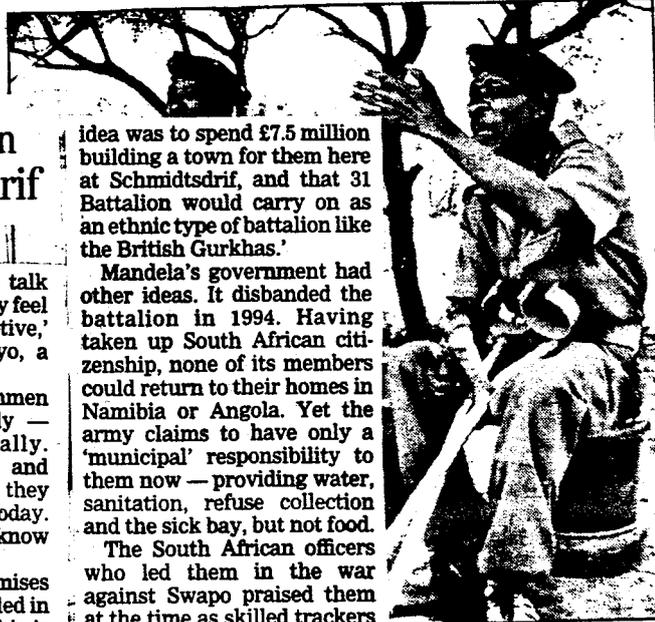
WHEN the sun has set on Schmidtsdrif, the elders tell stories of how they lived before the world found them and carved up the land they roamed freely.

Many have turned to Christianity for support. A bizarre double dose of Western culture is provided in the shape of a church that doubles every Friday night as a cinema. Sermons are currently vying with the Mutant Ninja Turtles.

There is also a government education programme involving 26 teachers, priming the bushmen with new skills in preparation for the long-awaited move.

When that move comes, Schmidtsdrif will be handed over to a group of Tswana people who won it in a recent land claim. The bushmen will be glad to see the back of it but they won't believe it until it happens.

Wisely, it seems. 'We cannot say that 1998 is written in gold as the year they will be resettled. If we can manage it by 2000 then it's thumbs up,' said Engelbrecht.



Many are afraid to visit the sick bay in case they disappear. 'My mother went with only a headache. I never saw her alive again,' said one



Children with makeshift bows keep the old ways alive.

WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 1997

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INTERNATIONAL:

EO force in Bougainville said to include Namibians

The involvement of the South African based military group Executive Outcomes in the South Pacific took a new twist this week, with reports that Namibians are among those sent by the company to Papua New Guinea.

The contingent is supporting government forces which have been fighting secessionist rebels on the copper-rich Bougainville Island for the past nine years.

A Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) spokesperson said there were indications that up to 100 former soldiers from Namibia were part of the EO contingent.

He added that 44 white mercenaries were training Papua New Guinean soldiers for a strike against mineral rich Bougainville, and had been making surveillance flights across the island. There are also reports that British mercenaries are involved in the fighting.

The BRA has appealed to South African president Nelson Mandela to force the withdrawal of the EO force from the island.

The foreign ministry in Pretoria has expressed its "dismay" at EO's involvement. However, moves announced early last year to restrict mercenary activities from SA have thus far come to nought (*SouthScan* v11/08).

Rebel sources claimed last week that 170 "foreigners" had already landed on Bougainville and that up to 190 paid fighters had been hired by Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan's PNG government.

BRA leaders believe the mercenaries were on the island to conduct "surgical operations" aimed at wiping out rebel leaders.

EO director Eben Barlow this week admitted that EO was active in PNG, but insisted they were involved only in training government forces.

"A British company known as Sandline International was contracted as the prime contractor, and Executive Outcomes is a subcontractor to Sandline, and our task at present is to retrain the Papua New Guinea security forces", Barlow said.

Sandline International, which is based in London but operates out of South Africa, is being paid \$23 million (about R103 million) by the Papua New Guinea government.

Meanwhile, an Amnesty International report released last week claimed that the level of human rights violations in Bougainville in recent months had "reached heights not seen for several years".

Australia and New Zealand have denounced Papua New Guinea's use of mercenary forces to crush the Bougainville rebellion and have hinted at a cut-off of financial aid, which makes up much of the annual budget of the island state.

Racism still on reading list for SA children

Adrian Hadland

Three years after Nelson Mandela became president, many South African children are still being taught history from outdated, often racist, textbooks which most educationalists agree should be in the bin rather than in school satchels.

"Lots and lots of them need to be got rid of," said Orenna Krut, a manager with one of the country's largest educational publishers, Maskew Miller Longman.

Until recently the fiefdom of Afrikaner publishing houses, the bulk of South Africa's history textbooks are full of the eurocentric emphases and historical distortions once considered necessary to sustain and legitimise Apartheid.

But rather than throw the books out, teachers and parents have little option other than to continue using them, for some age groups, until beyond the turn of the century.

While preparations are well underway for the introduction of a new school programme, called "Curriculum 2005", the anticipated change to new teaching methods and materials will take many years.

At a function in Cape Town on Monday, South Africa's education minister, Professor Sibusiso Bengu, formally received the official report on Curriculum 2005 from his technical advisory committee. According to Sheila Sisulu, an adviser to Bengu, the programme hopes to wean students from a textbook-dependent approach to education and encourage the use of multi-media resources. The textbooks that are used will be new or rewritten to give a more balanced view of South Africa's past.

Once approved, the new syllabus will be overhauled from next year, two school years at a time, and is scheduled to take until the end of 2004. Delays in defining the curriculum have, however, made it difficult for educational publishers to prepare appropriate texts in time.

"The learning programmes for next year are still not available and it's March already. It is physically not possible for us to wait ... Publishers are just trying to guess and do the best we can," Ms Krut said.

In the process of rewriting history, though, dangers lurk in the temptation to produce a "victor's history" as distorted one way as the previous ones were the other, according to one historian engaged in writing the new textbooks. "The temptation to glorify the struggle is bound to have an effect on history writing, replacing an Afrikaner nationalist text with a liberation movement narrative," the historian said.

The new curriculum is scheduled to be introduced in February next year.

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Mandela and De Klerk warn of SA fault lines

President Nelson Mandela and his predecessor, FW de Klerk, who shared a Nobel prize for bringing democracy to South Africa, yesterday warned that their country's post-apartheid unity was cracking.

"We are burdened with the legacy of decades, indeed centuries, of deliberate division, conflict and hostility. It would be a mighty error to imagine that three years could eradicate all trace of what kept us apart for so long. Today, in some ways, the old fault lines in our society are showing more sharply," Mr Mandela told parliament.

Mr de Klerk appeared to agree. "Reconciliation, co-operation and nation-building have become central themes of your presidency. Unfortunately ... objective analysis shows that we are slipping downwards, that we are beginning to lose out," he said.

Black workers are claiming damages for death and injury from industrial poisoning, reports Ian Burrell

Two dozen black workers from southern Africa are set to give evidence in London against British companies which they say poisoned them with asbestos and mercury.

Two workers have died from mercury poisoning and hundreds from asbestos-related diseases after working at plants set up by British firms. In three separate legal actions, the companies are accused of allowing their subsidiaries to flout safety standards which would have been required in the United Kingdom.

A claim for damages will be served this week on Cape plc, of Middlesex, by solicitors acting for workers at asbestos mines run by the company's subsidiary in South Africa. Employees from the Penge mine in north-east Transvaal will produce evidence that children under 12 were made to trample asbestos and pack it into bags while bosses with whips watched over them.

The workers, who were paid £1 a week in the immediate

post-war years, later died or became seriously ill from asbestos-related diseases. They allege that Cape was fully aware of the dangers of the material from 1931 when Britain's Asbestos Regulations were introduced to reduce exposure to potentially deadly fibres.

In South Africa, it is alleged, the company continued to expose its subsidiary company's black workforce to fibre levels at least 35 times as high as British limits. Asbestos-related cancer takes between 15 and 50 years to appear and victims are still being identified.

As part of the same action, two Afrikaner families living near an asbestos mill at Prieska in the north-west Cape, are also seeking damages from Cape plc. Studies have shown that 14 per cent of deaths in the town are from mesothelioma, a form of cancer only caused by asbestos.

Cape said that it pulled out of South Africa in 1979 and its present business had nothing to do with asbestos. The company's lawyers are preparing a response to the action.

Next October, 20 black South African workers and relatives of dead employees are set to fly to London to give evidence against Thor Chemicals Holdings Ltd, of Margate, Kent, which they accuse of exposing them to potentially lethal doses of mercury.

The workers, who are Zulu-speaking, claim that they were given no safety training and were allowed to eat food on the floor of the plant in Cato Ridge, Natal. In 1992, two workers died from mercury poisoning. Actions against Thor were started by their families and 18 other workers, two more of whom have since died.

Thor's lawyers have fought to stop the cases being heard in Britain but the company declined to speak about the case.

A separate case brought against RTZ, the London-based multinational, by a former worker at the company's Namibian uranium mine, will go before the House of Lords this month, when a decision will be made on whether it should be heard in Britain. Edward Connelly, now of Glasgow, alleges that the company breached safety standards in exposing him to uranium dust. He has throat cancer and can no longer work. RTZ, which strongly denies responsibility, believes the case should be heard in Namibia.

Richard Meeran, of the London solicitors Leigh Day, said: "These British companies are inevitably responsible for the design of technology and systems of work and have the power and duty to ensure that people are not injured. We are dealing with wholly owned subsidiaries here."

THE INDEPENDENT

SATURDAY 12 APRIL 1997 •

Ian Burrell

hospital in 1992, suffering from severe mercury poisoning.

Peter Cele, 21, died seven months later. Englebert Ngcobe, 55, was in hospital for three years before he slipped into a coma and died.

They had all worked at Thor's mercury plant at Cato Ridge in Natal. The operation had been set up by the English parent company using technology and systems of operation which had been developed in Britain.

Thor had operated a mercury plant at Margate which, during the 1980s, was repeatedly criticised by the Health and Safety Executive for bad working practices and the over-exposure of British workers to mercury.

Under pressure from the HSE, Thor closed down its mercury operations in Britain in 1987 and expanded them in South Africa, where the plant relied on Zulu-speaking casual,

untrained and unskilled labour.

In bringing their claim, which was also made against the Thor chairman Desmond Cowley, the workers enlisted the support of experts in occupational medicine and toxicology.

In their evidence, the workers testified that rather than trying to reduce mercury levels in the environment, the company adopted a policy of trying to control mercury exposure by replacing workers who had high levels of mercury with new casual employees. Others, they said, were sent to work in the garden until their mercury levels dropped.

Thor had fought to prevent the workers' claims being heard in a British court, even appealing to the House of Lords. But the case had been set for a three-month trial in October.

No one at Thor was available for comment yesterday.

All day long they stepped. Small black children, covered from head to foot in large shipping bags, trampling down deadly asbestos for their British bosses. As the fluffy amosite asbestos cascaded on to their heads, a supervisor kept them marching with the crack of his whip.

Watching the children, some of whom were under 12 years old, was a South African government medical official, Dr Gerrit Schepers, who recorded what he saw: "I believe these children to have had the ultimate of asbestos dust exposure. X-ray revealed several to have radiologic asbestos [asbestosis] before the age of 12."

Writing in 1949, Dr Schepers was a visitor to the Penge asbestos mine, which British entrepreneurs set up in north-east Transvaal after the discovery of amosite outcrops in 1907. The price of extracting the mineral is still being paid in death and injury, 90 years later.

This week a claim for damages is being made by three former black workers of the Penge mining company (Egnep) against its British parent, Cape plc. All three have asbestosis and claim that Cape ignored British safety standards and exposed the black South African workforce at Penge to deadly levels of suffocating fibres.

Matlaweng Mohlala, now 58, experienced similar conditions to those described by Dr Schepers. He was employed at 12 and spent 14 years packing asbestos fibre into sacks with his bare hands. He said his employers gave him no warning about the dangers.

"None at all by anybody," he said. "No gloves, boots or any protective clothing was supplied. I was X-rayed on engagement and discharge at Penge but not told anything was wrong."

Mr Mohlala now has a permanent burning in his chest, struggles to breathe and cannot work. Yet back in Britain, the dangers of asbestos had been known for more than a generation.

Graphs produced by Cape itself show that asbestos dust levels in the Penge factory were 12 to 35 times higher than permitted levels in Britain. In 1979 the mine was finally closed, but the problems remain. Medical researchers found that 80 per cent of black Penge miners who died between 1959 and 1964 had asbestosis. Their average age of the men was 43.

Cape's operations have also incurred the wrath of rural Afrikaners living close to its plants. While Matlaweng Mohlala was packing brown asbestos by hand in Penge, Matthys Nel was a teenager, breathing in blue asbestos fibres in Prieska in the north-west Cape.

Researchers from the National Centre for Occupational Health found that 14 per cent of deaths in the town were from mesothelioma, a cancer caused by asbestos. Mr Nel died from mesothelioma in 1995 even though he never worked at the Prieska mill, which was closed down in 1964. His brother and mother also died from the disease.

Two years earlier in a private

report the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research said that "an alarmingly high number of cases with mesothelioma have been discovered among people who live or who have lived in the north-western Cape area and there is evidence to suggest that this condition is associated with an exposure to asbestos dust inhalation".

The Nel family is claiming damages from Cape, along with Rachel Lubbe, 57, who is still alive but has mesothelioma.

Because the South African mining industry has few white workers it has had less union representation than other industries - and worse safety standards. It was not until 1954 that South African workers were given any regulatory protection against asbestos and

Mercury staff 'were poisoned'

In 1987 Thor closed its mercury plant in Margate, Kent. There had been repeated inquiries by the Health and Safety Executive into the high levels of mercury being absorbed by workers. The chemicals company no longer makes mercury-based products.

In Cato Ridge, Natal, however, the company's subsidiary Thor Chemicals SA expanded its mercury reprocessing operation, using technology developed in Britain.

Workers from South Africa who will seek damages in the High Court in London next October allege that they were not warned of the potential dangers of their job. In statements, they say that when the mercury levels in their urine reached dangerous levels they were told to "have a few beers" by the management.

In 1992 workers say they realised something was seriously wrong. They began to hallucinate and show other symptoms of mercury poisoning. Peter Cele, 21, died after six months in hospital. Englebert Ngcobe, 54, died after three years. Both their families are suing Thor. The company is also being sued by 16 other workers and the relatives of two others who have since died.

fibre limits were not brought into line with Britain until 1976.

But Richard Meeran, a solicitor with Leigh Day, of London, who are representing the plaintiffs, said: "The British companies cannot hide behind the fact that they had no regulations in South Africa. That does not give them a licence to totally disregard hazardous dust levels."

Michael Pitt-Payne, Cape plc's company secretary, said Cape had pulled out of South Africa in 1979 and no longer used asbestos in its products. "We sold the companies that were doing the mining in South Africa in 1979 and as such we have got very few people here who had anything to do with that business at the time." He said the action was in the hands of the company's lawyers and he did not wish to comment further.

REV STEVE TITUS, the president-elect of the United Congregational Church in Southern Africa (UCCSA), who teaches theology in Windhoek, sent us this report on the relation between the churches and the new government in Namibia today.

This is the first story in what we hope will become a regular feature about church and people in other African countries.

The Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) was a great campaigner for the abolition of apartheid in Namibia and for that country's independence from South Africa.

The CCN at that time was made up of the two black Evangelical Lutheran Churches (ELC), the Roman Catholic Church (RC), the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). With Swapo in exile, leaders from the CCN spearheaded the struggle against apartheid within the country and therefore celebrated Namibia's independence in 1990 with a sense of accomplishment.

Swapo became the government of an independent Namibia. The new government expressed their gratitude for the support given by the churches over the years and

a number of church ministers became members of the National Assembly. Pastor Hendrik Witbooi (AME) became the first deputy president and the minister of labour and was later made deputy prime minister. Pastor Zephania Kameeta (ELC) became the deputy speaker of parliament. Rev Matti Amadhila (ELC) also became a parliamentarian. The general secretary of CCN and another leading minister were appointed to the Board of the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC).

Will this be the beginning of the end for the prophetic roles these ministers have played? The danger is there. We know about the "court prophets" in the Old Testament who collaborated with the king and his court, the government of the day, speaking only favourable things about those who paid them. The Dutch Reformed Churches now freely admit that they fell into the trap of becoming "court prophets" to the apartheid regime in South Af-

rica. We must be ever on our guard against this temptation.

Relations between the churches and the state have been very friendly since Swapo took over as the new government. The CCN and other non-affiliated churches were asked to present a religious programme during the independence celebrations. From time to time the CCN has organized church services to which they invite members of parliament, although the response has been very poor. Individual members of cabinet have called upon the churches to support the fight against crime, the anti-aids campaign, the effective administration of prison services and so forth. An important project in which the government and the CCN have been co-operating is the Food Management and Logistics Programme.

Even before independence parents of Swapo guerillas were asking questions about their children who could not be accounted for by the Swapo leadership. They begged for a proper investigation which would account for the disappearance of their children or other relatives.

Some people who had left the country to join Swapo in exile returned and reported that they had been harshly treated and tortured by Swapo because they were suspected of being spies.

The publication of Groth's book at the beginning of 1996 gave new impetus to those who had continued to campaign against the wall of silence about the atrocities committed by Swapo. Groth also mentions by name some leaders of CCN affiliated churches who knew about these atrocities but remained silent.

A Breaking the Wall of Silence Committee (BWSC) was formed, with Mr Samson Ndeikwila, an ex-detainee, as its chairperson and Prof Christo Lombard, Director of the Ecumenical Institute of Namibia (EIN), as its secretary.

The BWSC appealed to the CCN to launch the Groth book in Namibia. They did not agree to do this but they undertook to hold a conference to facilitate reconciliation between the

perpetrators and the victims of these atrocities.

In the meantime Lombard reviewed the book and before long a storm broke out around Pastor Groth and the BWSC. President Nujoma addressed the nation over television condemning the book as one-sided. Moses Garoeb, then Secretary-General of Swapo, declared war on the BWSC and implored Swapo supporters to burn the book. The Namibian Council of Churches' proposal of a conference to facilitate reconciliation was discredited by the press for implicitly accepting Groth's accusations.

After a session with President Nujoma, the bishops of the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican Churches disassociated themselves from the conference. The church ministers who serve in the National Assembly remained silent.

But the issue will not just go away. The first edition of the book was soon sold out. Editions are now available in German, English, Afrikaans and Oshiwambo. The CCN is still in the process of organizing a conference where it hopes to bring together representatives of Swapo, ex-detainees and the general public.

But it is unclear how this matter is going to be resolved. Swapo does not want to be involved in costly lawsuits to contest the allegations and there is no Truth and Reconciliation Commission with its am-

A very controversial book
The first test for the church and its prophetic calling came in 1996 with the publication of a book by Pastor Siegfried Groth, a former chaplain to Swapo in exile, entitled Namibia: The Wall of Silence.

nesty possibilities as in South Africa. In the meantime how does the church remain prophetic in such circumstances?

Other tensions

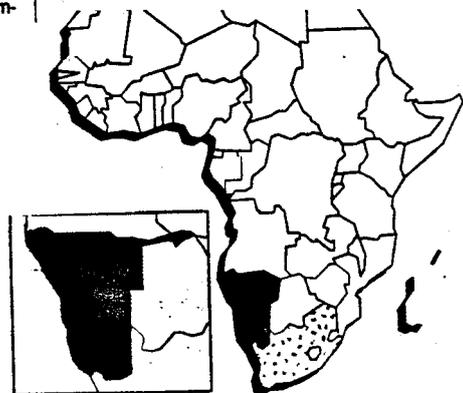
The dust of this storm had barely settled when the Council of Churches was rocked by accusations of misappropriation of funds by its Food Management and Logistics Unit (FMLU). The prime minister's office has an Emergency Management Unit (EMU) which obtains funds and food-aid from donor countries. The CCN, which has store-rooms and trucks, distributes the food to communities which have been declared needy by the government.

In order to do this the CCN hires employees who are paid from funds provided by the government. During May 1996 an employee allegedly defrauded the FMLU of N\$242 000.00. This person was summarily dismissed by the CCN.

The government said that it was the duty of the Council of Churches to institute criminal charges against the accused. The CCN, on the other hand, was of the opinion that the government should institute a police investigation into alleged fraud by both the EMU and the FMLU. The government is regarded by the CCN to be in a better position to bear the legal and other costs involved in such an investigation.

Some sectors of the press have had a field day accusing the CCN of being dishonest and corrupt. However, the prime minister made it quite clear that it is the individuals who are corrupt and not the bodies they work for.

Eventually the police investigation was instituted by the government and this will hopefully clear the good names of both the Namibian government and the CCN who are both trying to maintain a relationship of cooperation despite all the difficulties and inevitable tensions. □



The Africa Fund is sponsoring a spring U.S. speaking tour for Father Michael Lapsley. We are planning his visit to North America in co-ordination with the Canadian Churches, and we have little lead time. We are alerting you to his coming in case you should wish to arrange one or more speaking engagements for Michael in your area.

DATES AVAILABLE:

New York and East Coast : Friday May 2 through Monday May 5

Chicago and mid-West : Wednesday May 21 through Wednesday May 28

West Coast : Wednesday June 4 through midday June 7.

If you are interested in organizing an event for Michael please let us know immediately by completing the attached form and faxing it back to us at 212-964-8570

We have no funding for this project so participants should be prepared to pay the cost of two airfares (Michael and his assistant) from the previous engagement, and to provide an honorarium and comfortable accomodation for two people.

Michael Lapsley SSM is the subject of *Priest and partisan: A South African journey*, by Michael Worsnip, published by Ocean Press.

Michael Lapsley was born in Hastings, New Zealand on June 2, 1949. In 1967 he went to Adelaide, Australia, to begin his training as an Anglican (Episcopalian) priest. At the same time he was a novice of an Anglican Religious Community called the Society of the Sacred Mission (SSM). In 1973 he was ordained priest, and in September of that year was transferred by SSM to Durban, South Africa, where he enrolled at the University of Natal.

Michael was elected National Chaplain of Anglican Students in 1976, at the time of the Soweto uprising. He was expelled from South Africa the same year, and went to live in Lesotho, where he was able to complete his studies. While in Lesotho, Michael joined the African National Congress (ANC), which at the time was conducting an underground guerrilla struggle against the apartheid government of South Africa. For many years Michael also functioned as a chaplain of the ANC.

In December 1982, the South African army massacred 42 people in Lesotho. Although he was out of the country at the time, the Church authorities believed that Michael was a target for these attacks and forced him to leave Lesotho "for his own safety and that of others."

Michael used the next nine months traveling extensively in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Canada, the United States, and the Netherlands, speaking out against apartheid and in support of the ANC.

From late 1983 to February 1992, Michael lived in Zimbabwe where he completed his Masters degree in Religious Studies at the University of Zimbabwe. His Masters thesis was published as *Neutrality or co-option? Anglican Church and State from 1964 to the independence of Zimbabwe*.

In April 1990, shortly after returning to his home in Harare, Zimbabwe, after a trip to Cuba and Canada, Michael received a letter bomb, a trademark of the South African government in its terror campaign against opponents of apartheid. In the explosion he lost both his hands, an eye and his eardrums were shattered among other injuries. He spent one month in hospital in Harare and six months in Australian hospitals.

In 1991 Michael was awarded the Queen's Service Medal in the New Zealand New Year's Honors list for service to the community in the countries of Southern Africa.

The Canadian Churches made a 30 minute documentary, "Apartheid has not ended," about the bombing of Michael Lapsley.

After returning to Zimbabwe in December 1990, Michael undertook an extensive speaking tour of the UK, USA, Canada, Norway, Sweden reflecting on his own bombing and survival and the current situation in Southern Africa.

In February 1992 Michael returned to South Africa under the amnesty program for ANC exiles. He is currently working as chaplain to the Trauma Center for Victims of Violence and Torture in Cape Town, which is assisting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Michael was shortlisted as one of President Nelson Mandela's nominees for this Commission.

Since his return to South Africa, Michael has been re-elected as National Chaplain to the Anglican Students' Federation of the Church Province of Southern Africa.

Michael has played a major role in developing a model that assists faith communities in the process of healing the psychological, emotional and spiritual wounds of the apartheid years.