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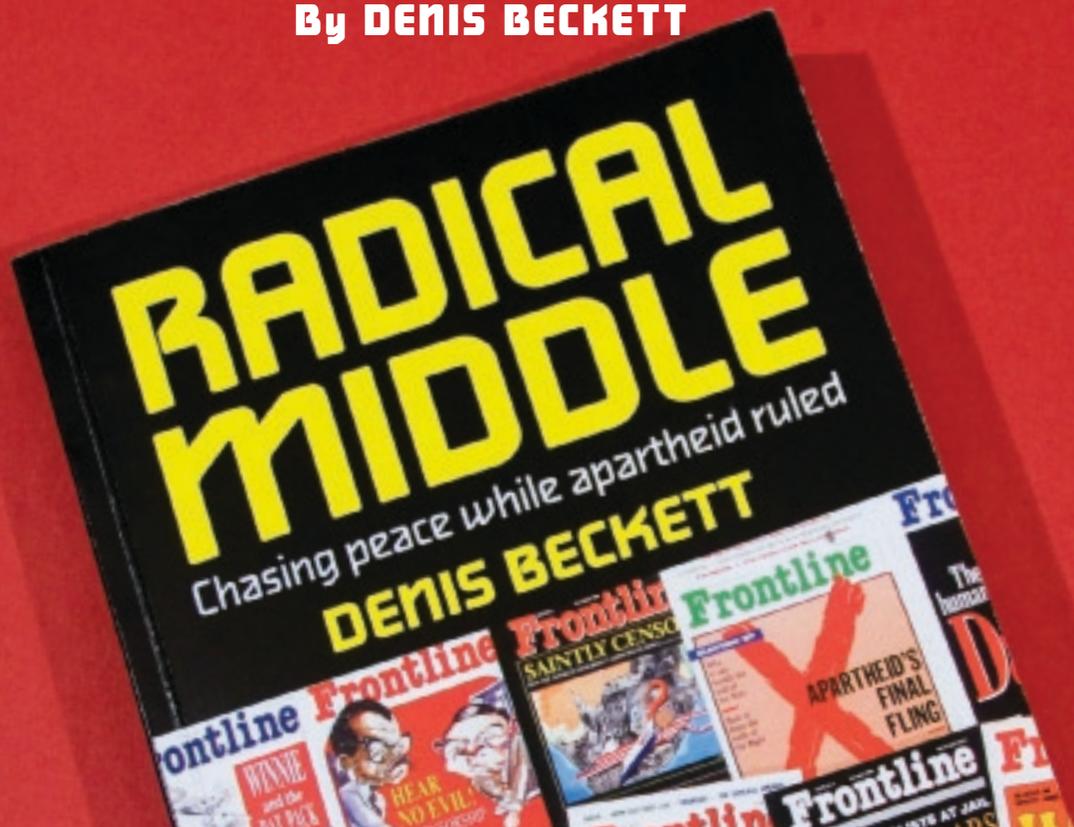
**WAITING FOR
SUPERBAN**

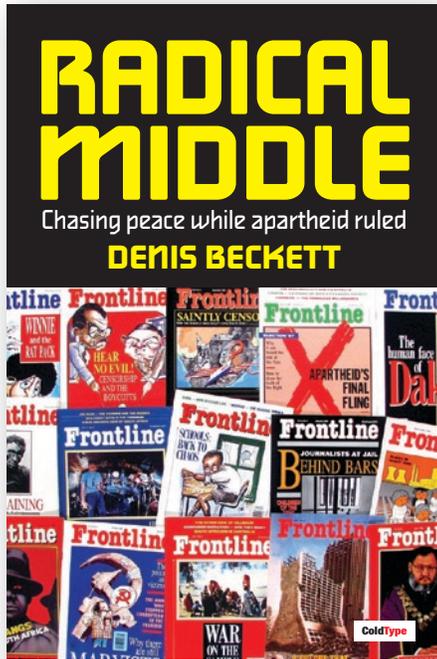
AN EXCERPT FROM

RADICAL MIDDLE

Chasing Peace While Apartheid Ruled

By **DENIS BECKETT**





RADICAL MIDDLE

Chasing Peace While Apartheid Ruled

Published by ColdType.net

(South African edition to be published by Tafelberg in Fall, 2010)

THE AUTHOR: Denis Beckett was a lawyer to start with, and, at that, the specialist brand that South Africa borrowed from the old colonial master and togs out in black gowns and 18th-century high collars. (What is a “Barrister” in Britain is an “Advocate” in SA, from the initial, Dutch, colonisers’ “Advokaat”). No-one believed he could swap this golden profession for the inky corners and Scrooge salaries of journalism, but forty years on he’s not showing conspicuous regret. His new (twelfth) book **Radical Middle**, published by ColdType.net, delves into the not always obvious tribulations of waving freedom’s flag during the terminal illness of an unfree state.

THE BOOK: The fringe of the anti-apartheid industry in the old South Africa was a poor breeding ground for Mr Popularity contestants. The (pale) Afrikaner Nationalist rulers thought you were a tool of the (dark) African Nationalist usurpers and vice versa. Worse, Denis Beckett’s *Frontline* magazine was grossly undisciplined. It gave a hearing to people whom neither Establishment approved of at all; unblushing old-guard racists and unreconstructed Zulu tribalists and even the Black Consciousness gang. A journal like this was not a springboard to wealth and importance, but it lent itself to an uncliché overview. **Radical Middle** tells the story of *Frontline* and some of Beckett’s other publishing escapades, such as his brief career with *Voice* newspaper, Chapter 5 of the book, which we republish on the following pages.

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WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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An Excerpt From

RADICAL MIDDLE

Chasing Peace While Apartheid Ruled

By DENIS BECKETT

SOUTH AFRICA in the seventies and eighties was a weird place. Not that South Africa in the noughties has been all bonny meadows and calm uplands, but nowadays the protestors wave the national flag and the police use rubber bullets. Progress has taken place. Wheresoever two South Africans are gathered together they will wrangle over who or what caused the progress: The revolution and its Soviet patrons?; the subtle resistance of the disenfranchised townships?; parliamentary opposition and liberal businessmen?; or the old regime connecting its brain cables and shedding the blinkers of history? Lots of people had a go (though not nearly as many as afterwards suddenly revealed that they had inwardly been anti-apartheid all along). Among the more interesting, or at least more visible, categories of troublemaker was the motley crew of journals christened the “alternative press”. **Denis Beckett**, in his new book “**Radical Middle**”, published by ColdType, relates how the good fight was fought at several of those journals. This excerpt takes up the tale after the dramatic banning in 1977 of *World*, the biggest of the “black” papers, where Beckett was editor of its Weekend edition . . .

Out of work, abruptly. My wife, Gael, urged me to take a few days contemplating my navel. This was a fine idea but the few days turned out to comprise Thursday, October 27, 1987. On Friday morning after Gael went to work I lay in bed reading Tom Wolfe. The phone rang. It was Revelation Ntoula, editor of a new Black Consciousness paper called *Voice*. He wanted a business manager.

What I knew about business management could be written on the back of a stamp, but this was one-eye in the land of the blind. What anyone else at *Voice* knew about business management could be written on the head of a pin. Rev offered a salary much lower than *World* on the grounds that *Voice*'s belt was tightened in the service of the oppressed masses. I would soon learn that this was bull: *Voice* was too well funded. In the end its flab would do as much to kill it as government did. But the job looked interesting. I took it.

If I'd thought *World* was a bit imprisoned in its blackness, it was a free soaring eagle compared to *Voice*, whose profession was blackness. Its slogan was "The Real Black Paper", designed to say "unlike those white-owned Uncle Toms at *World*".

But I was manager, minding rands and cents; I was not writing and I had no *World*-type worries about passing myself off as black. Well, not many. I was to spend six months or a year "establishing a management system" and inducting a successor.

Things worked, for a while; even shone. No commercial distributor would carry *Voice*, it being not "illegal" but patently disapproved-of. We set up a barefoot distribution system in the townships, with butchers and bakers and shebeen-queens



Having never had any regular ads, the breakthrough edition showed not one but two – Albany cigarettes and Old Buck gin, large and lucrative. I strutted about like the cat who licked the cream, and there was euphoria in the office

and all. At first I thought we'd hit jackpot. Sales – actual copies bought, with money in the bank – soared, many weeks to 10,000 or more, but as the base grew, so did the superstructure wobble around the edges. Soon there was so much commission going into the distribution pyramid that we might as well have glued coins on Page 1.

"Self-sufficiency" was the buzz and I tried. I adjusted the commission structure and caused outrage. One morning I arrived at the office in Jorissen Street to find myself the target of a picket. A picket was illegal but these picketers hadn't been reading statute books. They were school-boys with a grievance and home-made placards. I still have one: BOYCOT THE VOICE BECOS THE PULLING THE 3c BY MR DANIES BEKIT.

The corporate culture at *Voice* was heavy spending and token income gathering. The Swedes and the Germans had plenty of the stuff, after all. Once I saw a telex spelling out how badly we needed a 10-ton truck. I blinked; shook myself. We needed a 10-ton truck like we needed an executive jet. I raised it with my boss, Revelation, who said (i) we'd surely need one sometime, and (ii) his very good truck-driver friend Taylor was out of work.

I reported both to Revelation and to the (all-black) Board. In dealings with the funding agencies I was entirely blindfold and substantially invisible. Nobody actually denied that there was a dreaded white man lurking among all this blackness, but they sure didn't shout about it.

Part of my job was to look for advertising income. We got bits and pieces of routine "alternative" advertising, recirculating funds from the same pool of Swedish kronor and German marks. I sought commercial advertising, and one glorious day I made a breakthrough. Having never had

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any regular ads, the breakthrough edition showed not one but two – Albany cigarettes and Old Buck gin, large and lucrative. I strutted about like the cat who licked the cream, and there was euphoria in the office.

Next day Rev and I were called to a special board meeting. I wondered, modestly: would they give me a bonus or a citation? Neither. The attack was led by Sally Motlana, who during Winnie Mandela's banishment was the grande dame of the Soweto establishment. Sally wasn't having cigarettes in her paper, nor liquor neither. I was stunned. I said we'd never pay our way with the ads revenue from Single Mothers Against Apartheid. Sally was adamant.

Sam Buti backed her up, though not through personal aversion to the demon rum. Sam was godfather of Alexandra Township, Soweto's older if smaller brother, and at the time was in the top layer of media-approved Authentic Blacks (though he later caught a dose of collaborationitis).

A row broke out. The chairman, delightful gentle Father Joe Mzamane, hammered the table and said, "My brothers and sisters, this matter is causing dissension. We shall now cease to discuss it."

I said that was no good. Was I going out to get these ads or was I not? Father Joe said, "My brother, we will have no further dissension", and that was that.

Desmond Tutu wasn't at that meeting, which was a pity. He often had something sound to say. Him and Fred Bell of the Lutherans. Allan Boesak, too, despite a tendency to treat board meetings like rallies. Tutu had recently returned after years abroad to become General Secretary



of the SA Council of Churches, and brought with him a distinctive brand of personal behaviour; acute moral honesty.

One day I was collecting a document from his secretary, Elizabeth Storey – wife of Peter, the Methodist bishop who had (among other achievements) married Gael and I. Tutu emerged from his office, with visitors, and launched into a tirade, demanding replies to a charge that bemused me. It transpired to be an identity confusion. A prize typesetter, known to him as Yoliswa and to me as Sylvia, had left him to work for me. He thought I'd wheedled her away, but the facts as he knew them were far from the facts as I knew them. Simmering-down took place, with red faces.

A week later I was in a meeting when Revelation's secretary Mabel barged in, flustered, calling me to the phone. I said I'd phone back. "No", she said, scandalised, "it is Moruti Desmond." Moruti Desmond, later to be the nation's Deputy Chief Saint, was already the pinnacle of her world. I couldn't subject her to telling him, "Denis will call back", so I took the call in her office, quizzically.

Tutu had called to say sorry. He said his information was wrong, and even if it had not been wrong his behaviour had been bad, would I please accept an apology? I believe I managed to oblige. I liked this idea of someone apologising when he didn't need to, he got no benefit out of it, the event was drifting out of mind, and the apologist outranked the apologisee from backside to breakfast-time. And he had just picked up the phone unaided! He needed to go give management seminars.

Voice's first banning order came in

March '78, causing shock and consternation. Three weeks later, the next. By the end of May it was weekly, and each ban in its own right elicited a yawn. But there was a but, a big but. To each ban in its own right, pfft; but Superban was coming, the “and all subsequent editions” ban that would wipe us out. (*World* had been dealt a one-off nuclear ban under the Internal Security Act. *Voice's* bannings were cat-and-mouse by the Publications Act.)

The axe quivering overhead exacerbated tensions, and then came two arrests. Juby Mayet, the aforementioned non-Bantu with long straight hair, was picked up at home one evening. As her official employer, I could visit her in women's section, Johannesburg Fort. The first time I waited a long while on the visitors' side, and got worried. Then Juby came staggering in from the prisoner side, panting and sweating. Omigod!

“Juby, what are they doing to you?” I gasped. “Nothing”, said Juby lyrically, “We've been dancing on the quadrangle.”

Juby's lyricism did not last. Each subsequent visit she was more depressed, and more worried about her eight kids, and had a longer list of bills and problems for me to handle.

Zakes Mofokeng had been one of the incredible number of respondents to an ad I ran in *Voice* for my potential successor. Hundreds applied, but most thought that pigment was the sole qualifier, and many considered it unnecessary or even sell-out to claim an interest in bourgeois trivia like revenue.

Two people fitted the bill and one of them, Cyril Kobus, fitted it like a glove. I wanted to appoint him at all costs but “all costs” was the problem. Cyril's salary ideas were large and when I put his case to my board, one member said indignantly, “Does he think he's white?”



Voice's first banning order came in March '78, causing shock and consternation. Three weeks later, the next. By the end of May it was weekly, and each ban in its own right elicited a yawn

One school of boardroom thought was willing to pay a “white” salary if we got a “white” job. The other wanted a “committed” manager, willing to make sacrifices in the service of the struggle. I asked this school how much sacrificing they'd be doing if they commanded a Cyril-type salary. This did not go down well and Cyril was vetoed. He became general manager of the premier soccer league instead, and passed a decade of extreme acclaim that ended with a thump, in court.

The thumbs-down on Cyril left me with Zakes, and I wasn't complaining. Zakes didn't offer whizz-bang managership but he brought marvellous humanship. At first meeting, moreover, we impressed each other hugely. What impressed me hugely was that he had written a brilliant unknown play called *The Train*. What impressed him hugely was that I had seen it.

Zakes was signed on. A succession plan! Yo, we felt like real managers.

For a few months, all was on track. Then, one morning an advertising chap named John Cooney was in my office. Zakes walked in with the design for a bumper-sticker in his hand and two white men behind him. Funny that the bumper-sticker company sends two reps, I thought. I glanced at the sticker and said, “That looks fine”.

“No”, said Zakes, “They're taking me away”.

One cop nodded, “Section 6”. That was the worst of all, the one that allowed “questioning” and which had led to the demise of Steve Biko, among others. Zakes was so placid – for him detention was old news – that he calmed me down. The cops sat quietly in a corner of my office, drinking several cups of tea while Zakes briefed me on matters in progress, bumper-stickers and beyond. Then he stood up, held his

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hands out like Jesus blessing Rio de Janeiro, and said “Let’s go”.

The staff lined the narrow corridor, sombre as a funeral. Zakes shook hands and slapped shoulders, telling us to cheer up.

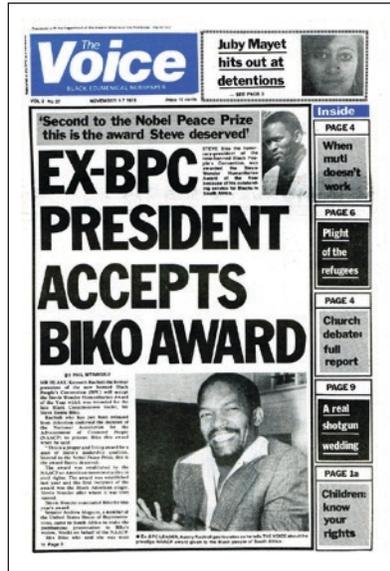
He and his wife Makgauta had recently found a flat in Newclare. A photographer, Ruben Ground, a.k.a. Ruben Mabu Ground-Nkadimeng – he could be coloured or African at whim, or double-barrelled for class – went off in his beloved smart Volvo to apprise Makgauta. She saw him pull up and take Zakes’s black briefcase out of the car. She knew the story before he got to the door.

So she told me next day, when I called. Makgauta told me other things that stuck. When she was detained she had to stand for 11 days, while forgotten cuts and scratches re-appeared. She’d see a weal on her leg and re-live a childhood game. Now with Zakes away she felt extra insecure in Newclare. It’s a coloured area and some of the neighbours were muttering about blacks moving in. While she talked she was painting the flat – “you’ve got to assume the best”, she said.

There was no seeing Zakes under Section 6 – not by employer, lawyer, magistrate, anyone – but we did see him again and a good deal sooner than anyone thought. After a month there was a phone call which I first thought might have been from Timbuktu. It took a lot of “whats?” to believe it was Zakes saying “I’m coming”.

Again I said “what?” The only way Section 6 ended in a month was feet first. Coming where, when? Was he crazy, was I crazy? I prepared for a party, feeling foolish.

In half an hour Zakes arrived with Letsatsi Mosala, trade unionist. The welcome



signs were half way up, but consumables were ready.

What started as a party turned into a war. On the third or fourth refill, the chief sub, Mike Norton, made a speech, “The management” hadn’t done nearly enough to get Zakes out of jail, (was I supposed to storm Pretoria?) and, “The management” must make amends by suing the Prime Minister. Mike was backed up by his cohorts, Paul Cain, whose real name was Sam Pop, and Steve Young. They all broadsided me, the insidious fifth-columnist white liberal. I was um um umming; stunned and wordless. The reporters’ lips were zipped. It was very uncomfortable. After a while Zakes, man of the moment, said he’d been in jail, he was out of jail, enough. But blood had been tasted. The “white liberal presence” was on the menu. Honeymoon over.

The editorial staff of *Voice* were (a) reporters, on the south side and all African, and (b) sub-editors, on the north side and all coloured/Indian, aside from Tony Sutton, whose full-time job was editor of *Drum*, the granddad of “black” periodicals. Tony, mad, English, and a raving workaholic with a fascination for Africa, had been invited to redesign *Voice* shortly before I arrived and was thereafter inveigled in on deadline days to design the front page.

Of full-timers, including full-time hangers-around as well as formal employees, there were eight or ten on each side. They all supposedly shared the same philosophy, Black Consciousness (Tony and I being definitively uninvited) but internal dynamics were not rock-solid. The north side was known on the south as “the colouredstan”, and in unguarded moments the colouredstan referred to the

south as “the drivelpit”. (All sub-editors believe they are uniquely cursed with the worst reporters in history, but *Voice*’s subs faced some special tests.)

The ideological engine-room was unequivocally the north side. One sub in particular had spent much of his life being white, or passing for white, and now had to be the blackest black in town. I didn’t blame him for being hung up, I blamed our idiot society that made people resent their own skin. Nor did I blame any of the others for their complicated anxieties over identity and solidarity. But I bore the brunt. As the resident non-member of The United Brotherhood of All Black People No Matter How Pale Their Pigment, I, you see, had to have a vested interest in keeping blacks down, an inner need to preserve black dependency on the white man.

In principle, I didn’t blame them for that either. Plenty of whiteys took the put-down view, and my approach was no less selfish, just more logical: the quicker the blacks moved up, the less pain they’d cause my life. But it gets tiresome being eternally tarred – uh, make that white-washed – with a racist brush, especially in the holy name of anti-racism, and the manifestations could be bizarre.

One day the Colouredstan produced an alternative promotional brochure (“The management” hadn’t tried hard enough, you understand). This brochure happily proclaimed that we were selling 30,000 copies. At the time we were printing 15,000, and only in my dreams did we sell them all. I hit the roof, and, more effectually, destroyed the brochure.

An hour later Revelation called me to his office, where a general staff meeting was on the go under the agenda: “Manager’s Disloyalty”. Subs as prosecutors, reporters as wavering and confused jury,



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Revelation urging peace, my sense of humour under strain.

Then Bernard put a memo on the notice-boards, urging reporters to “proof-read your copy before it is typeset”.

Strictly, “proof-read” is what you do once you have a proof, which is after the typesetting. Before, you correct your copy, or check it. You don’t use the word ‘proof-read’. So, fine, Bernard used a wrong word. What he meant was very clear: Reporters, please get your spelling right, or the subs miss your errors, the typesetter sets them, and time and money are wasted.

But the subs raised blitzkrieg: look at this ignorant mining house lackey not knowing what proof-read means!

I defended Bernard. Zakes defended Bernard. Bernard shouldn’t have to be defended. Revelation ducked. The reporters’ room was supine. *Voice* was supposed to be a harbinger of how the new society would work. This way?

Underlying the fraying was our rising banability factor. On the surface, the bans were masterpieces of bureaucratic illogic. We appeared on Wednesday, and sold until Monday. The following Friday’s Government Gazette made it illegal to sell the edition that nobody had sold for the last four days. Technically, this ban was empty, but did your normal policeman, and/or samoosa-shop owner, know that? No, he did not.

In the townships a few bold shops distributed us because we were being banned all the time. In town, and more importantly in industrial areas, shopkeepers shooed our people away on sight. Where *Post* was brandished on street corners, if you looked around carefully you’d see a guy skulking nearby with an opaque plastic bag, from which if you asked him he’d give you a *Voice* for 10c.

The second anniversary of June 16 was

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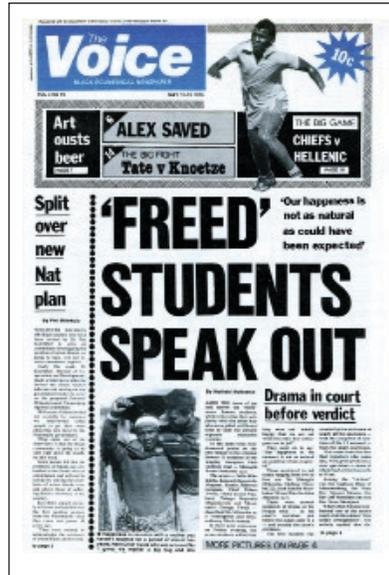
coming. The country was thick with expectation – whether in hope or fear – of drama on the way. I know what I dreamt of on Thursday nights, and it was the same for others. I dreamt of the Government Gazette, and of a nebulous silly-looking four-word phrase “... and all subsequent editions.”

I don't think anyone expected us to survive until June 16, but someone in Publications had a sense of humour, or torture. Each week we loyally featured in the bannings list – *Voice*, Vol 2 No 6; *Voice* Vol 2 No 7 – but not those funny four words.

Meantime, we were taking all the evasive actions we could. I and Professor Lighton at the Directorate of Publications spent half our day on the phone to each other. The publications committees which did the banning were meant to be anonymous and variegated (and “representative of the general population”), but all our banning orders betrayed the same pen, which we unofficially knew belonged to Prof Andrew Murray of the University of Cape Town. His trademark was his detailed knowledge of communist history, and our “anonymous” reasons regularly tracked heartfelt cries of protest by desperate township youth back to some abstruse instruction given by Lenin to the Third Comintern in 1919.

We often appealed but never won, which seemed extra-wrong to me because the Appeals chairman, Judge Lammie Snyman, held a special place in my personal history. He was the first ranking-type Afrikaner I ever sat with, talked to, ate with.

Where I grew up, “Afrikaner” meant the police sergeant who came to arrest the maid's husband for Pass Offence. The charmed triangle stretching north of Jo-



hannesburg between Louis Botha and Jan Smuts avenues (the two Prime Ministers who befriended the English) was Britain-in-the-Sun. Afrikaners were somewhere else and welcome to stay there, with their pencil moustaches and the combs in their socks.

While I studied for an LLB I worked at the Supreme Court as a judge's clerk, and was amazed to discover that one could actually discuss things with Afrikaners. It was in our language, of course; that was reflex, they switched seamlessly in genetic expectation that our Afrikaans would amount to goya moora. (They

misjudged us: we were also excellent on buy a donkey.) Exposure meant growth, and discovering Afrikaner humanness was wondrous, but it was still culture-shock when my fellow clerk Marlene Snyman invited me to a party at the wondrously rambling peri-urban seat of her father and boss, Judge Lammie. A party? Where people would quite possibly just speak Afrikaans, as if that was an okay thing to do? This was very novel.

Lammie round the braai was terrific. I came away bemused: Afrikaner dignitaries were mensches; why did people say nasty things about them? Lammie on the Appeals Board was something else. I said nasty things.

At one of my appeals – I did some and Oliver Barrett of Bowen's attorneys did some, neither of us very fond of the other's style – Lammie stabbed his finger at a picture of the lawyer Priscilla Jana giving a Black Power salute. “And this fat woman”, said Lammie, “why's she waving her fist in the air?” I didn't rate our chances highly.

We also tried the route of having lawyers check our copy. I hated this. I'd seen

it at the *Mail* and *The Star*. It could be legit for a complicated interpretation of an awkward Act, but it was a dud way of handling the routine “unrest” report and doubly dud when what you were fighting was the Publications Act.

The Publications Act exempts members of the Newspaper Press Union, which is to say, the big and the strong. It applies to the rats and mice and its criteria are simple in the extreme. The big one prohibits jeopardy to the “peace and good order of the State” and the other four are just as blunt. It was perverse for editors to have lawyers do their editing for them. Lawyers must keep you out of trouble. If you get a writ or a ban they’ve failed, they have to be over-cautious. Editors are there to print what’s right to print, and I doubt there’s a nation on the planet where this doesn’t involve some creative gap-taking from time to time.

I argued the lawyers-aren’t-editors case to *Voice*’s board. Half were with me until Tutu replied, and scored a walkover. I’d argued principle where Tutu recognised reality: Revelation, the editor, was not a decision-maker and the subs room, which decided what went in and what did not, was on another planet.

Once when the Anglican synod issued a complex political statement, a sub dealt with the confusing bits by chopping them out. Mike Norton, on deadline and working as usual like a Trojan, saw that the piece read wrong. It was not Mike’s style to leave things that he saw were wrong. He dealt with the hanging half-sentences by chopping them out as well. Thus did *Voice* publish the synod as having resolved the opposite of what the resolution said the synod had resolved.

Next day Bishop Timothy Bavin wrote to Rev, admirably restrained, with a closing injunction to beware “irresponsible re-



Finally, into June, the ban-list included not only the second latest *Voice* as usual but also the four famous words “... and all subsequent editions”

porting”. Rev delegated it to me. I tracked the route. I recommended that (a) we run an apology and correction, and (b) Mike and Rev go see the bishop and unqueen the pitch.

Next week there was no apology; but there was the original statement in full length and perplexity. I enquired. Mike said there was no better apology than to give them all that space; what more did I want? So what a sub hadn’t been able to master, we inflicted holus on the general reader. And Bavin received only a letter from Paul Cain, the reporter, claiming damages for the use of the word “irresponsible”.

This episode was par, so I wasn’t het up about Tutu winning on the lawyers.

The next few editions were final-edited by Bowens, and a more respectable law firm you do not get. Oliver Barrett was the boss and his assistant Debbie Dison was resident commissioner. No-one did more than Debbie to keep *Voice* alive. She was a special person; had polio all her life and a smile to melt stone. She was killed in a car crash in Zimbabwe. At her funeral I took a stint as pall-bearer, and I never carried a more sorrowful burden.

Tuesdays came to mean high tempers about what the lawyers wanted out and subs wanted in. Once, when the lawyers won, the offending story was replaced with a routine wire service feature about China. The lawyers sighed relief and the subs growled about integrity and relevance. When that week’s banning order arrived, it cited the China story for propagating communism.

Finally, into June, the ban-list included not only the second latest *Voice* as usual but also the four famous words “... and all subsequent editions.”

Hard on its heels, Tutu pitched up for prayer and hymn and pep-talk. He was

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good in that way. Then we got round to figuring What Now. At least, half the staff did. The rest declared long leave. First step: appeal, though no sane person would bet on our chances.

A young reporter, Tebello Radebe, tentatively said how about submitting pages in advance, for the publications committee to vet. This met yowls of outrage, but nobody had much else in mind. After a while Tebello's idea swam back, to responses varying from reluctant consideration to outright rejection.

Voice proceeded to enjoy its five minutes of fame. Diplomats and journalists wore bare the upholstery in the editor's anteroom. Radio stations in Belize and newspapers in Austria were backing up to speak to Rev. I got calls of a different kind. One was from an office furniture dealer I'd been buying from since Star days.

"I'm very perturbed", he said, "very, very perturbed".

"Gee, Colin", I said, "I didn't know you cared. It's good of you to phone, I appreciate it."

"Yes", he replied, "I'm very, very perturbed. There's nearly R300 on your account".

Everyone and his uncle were giving me the Jonah line: "You go to *World*, and it gets banned. You go to *Voice*, and it gets banned." After a while the best I could muster was a very wan smile. A worthwhile variation came from Tim Wilson, the superintendent of the Alexandra Clinic. He phoned to say: "Hey, I have a good idea, go and work for the *Citizen*."

(The *Citizen*, antidote to the anti-apartheid flavour of the English Press, would soon be exposed as a government front.



In the meantime its chief reporter, Gordon Winter, later unmasked as a police spy, had a high time attacking *Voice*.)

In theory we were composing strategies for a supermeeting, board plus staff. I was tempted by Tebello's vetting notion, where I had been among outright rejecters and had veered towards reluctant considerers. Was it better to live to fight another day than to die outright? Maybe, yes, probably, depends, but would we hold our heads up?

The Council of Churches had an unassuming monthly called *Kairos*, an ecumenical newspaper, which gave it a nominal commonality with *Voice*, officially a "Black Ecumenical Newspaper". Both *Kairos* and *Voice* had been fathered by John Rees, Tutu's predecessor, and were still funded by the SACC. But *Kairos* was "non-racial", and was edited by a white man, David Thomas. David (later to emigrate to Australia), made a plan to outfox the ban by merging *Voice* with *Kairos*, he and Rev as joint editors.

Up came the big meeting, at the SACC right over the road from *Voice*. I was astounded that many of our staff were entering that portal for the first time. If that was a failing, it was partly my failing. We were meant to pioneer new better ways, new better employment, new better relationships. Now, in death throes, staff and board shared a room for the first time. Was this a new way and better way? Of the half, or so, of each group who had bothered to pitch up, most had never seen each other.

What a meeting. After Joe Mzamane opened with the usual soulful and somewhat rambly prayer, Mike Norton rose to ask if "the staff" may present a petition. Joe agreed, and Mike went into point

one, declaring “in the strongest possible terms” that the staff would not work for *Kairos*. Part two, in stronger terms, or at least with more adjectives, objected to money earmarked for a black project being re-routed to a non-racial one.

As was quite common, Tutu became de facto chairman. As was not common, he went, in a word that was not yet cliché, ballistic. He ripped in. The staff had not put tuppence of input into the working-out; who were they to come the bolshies now? Bit by bit the mutiny withered, but on one point the petitioners would not budge, and no staff members dissented from them: having achieved a “black” identity it was retrogressive to retreat to a “non-racial” one.

Tutu wanted to hear bright ideas for keeping this black entity alive, and we were back to square one. Now, while a pea-soup of rejection and foiled hopes weighted the atmosphere, in trundled Oliver Barrett with beaming face to say all was fixed. He had arranged with the directorate to submit copy for approval.

Here came bedlam. Also solidarity, at last. The staff was ready to crucify Oliver. So was I. There was a tricky question to be worked out, in this; by barging through he had wrecked it. Tutu was outraged – was this a lawyer’s job? Poor Oliver; he was already thinking of an easier life in Australia, I think this day helped him on. I could feel people like Tebello, and Joyce Seroke, director of the YWCA, and Name-di Mphahlele, moderator of the Presbyterians, longing for love and peace. This was supposed to be a nice place, kind and gentle. It was sounding like a pit-bull ring.

Out of the chaos arose the solution. Manas Buthelezi spoke up. Manas had a bucket of structural clout, as president of the SACC. Better, he had inner clout. He spoke seldom, and with effect. The



Manas said he was uncomfortable about asking for approval, “May we print this article, may we print this letter”, but he had no worries sending them what we had printed and saying, “Here’s what we have, if you want to ban it, ban it now”

caterwauling silenced. Manas said he was uncomfortable about asking for approval, “May we print this article, may we print this letter”, but he had no worries sending them what we had printed and saying, “Here’s what we have, if you want to ban it, ban it now.”

This was genius. The Directorate thought so, too. By the time our appeal came up, June 16 was over. Its fireworks had been muted. The temperature was down. We proposed a condition of appeal: we’d courier copies to Cape Town before we distributed. On this condition, we won. Thereafter, each Tuesday night copies were on the midnight plane. The directorate obligingly got its committee to sit at an unearthly hour once a week and ban or non-ban by telephone.

This was new and historic censorship practice, and rather eye-blinking. Firstly, it was probably not legal. It is eminently doubtful that the Act permitted what the enforcers of the Act were now doing the better to achieve the objectives of the Act. Parties to an issue were working out a solution by commonsense rather than by statute. That was great, in my view, but not, um, normal.

Secondly, we had skirted the edge of, but not fallen in to, a more radical novelty. Officially, South Africa has never had “censorship” – i.e., an official standing behind the editor’s chair. It has had “publications control” – i.e., thwack the offender after the offence. Indeed, the Publications Committee formally warned us off using the term “Censors” (an outrageous interpretation of the law, but lost in the flood). The approval idea clearly meant “censorship”. Had we gone ahead with that, we would have made a brand of legal history that nobody wanted.

The appeal deal ended our banning hassles like dew in sunlight. Four editions

WAITING FOR SUPERBAN

in a row were approved with not a hiccup. Had we subtly blunted our pen? I couldn't see it. By the fourth edition I thought we were fiercer than ever. Staff were getting desperate. The banning phase had been ruinous to life expectancy but it was fantastic for street cred. Previously I couldn't sleep on Thursday nights, dreading Friday's banning. Now I couldn't sleep on Tuesday nights, dreading Wednesday's approval.

We had to get into the NPU, where only the Minister of Justice could ban us. *Voice* had been applying since before I arrived. At first it was thwarted by technicalities, later by bannings, and the mood was certainty that the white establishment would never let a dark parvenu in. But now here we were, squeaky clean and smelling of roses, establishment-wise. We tried again and got a new response: please come and meet the executive.

The NPU offices on Sept 13, 1978, set a record for the body-language of "meetings". Five NPU people sat at a raised dais. In the middle was Hal Miller, now managing director of the Argus company and president of the NPU. Alongside: vice-president Duimpie Opperman, chairman of what was presumed to be the more hard-line of the Afrikaans press groups, Perskor.

Below, occupying the front row of an otherwise empty auditorium, were Revelation, chief reporter Phil Mtimkulu, myself, and acting manager Bernard Kgantsi. (Zakes had vanished during a night of many arrests, later to acquire asylum in Switzerland).

The four of us looked and felt like defendants peering up at a magistrate. We were wearing suits and ties and polished shoes. Hal delivered a sermon on good be-



haviour and Duimpie added a codicil. In theory we should have bristled but in practice we wore our best shit-eating grins. When we came away we were NPU members. We had come in my car, which was decorated with a parking ticket. Rev plucked the ticket away and *Voice* paid it. For the first time and the last, a perk!

Now, exempt from the Publications Committees, we were in the less capricious hands of the Press Council with its less dire powers. It could make us publish apologies or pay compensation. The chairman, Judge Oscar Galgut, was renowned for both fierceness and fairness but personally I knew more about the former. As Acting Judge President when I was a judge's clerk, he had kicked me out of the judges' parking lot. I prepared a righteous law-student appeal with Latin phrases and Roman-Dutch principles to say that since no-one else was using the bay, I may as well. He listened to half of it and responded without proper citation of judicial precedent: "You're a cheeky little bugger".

It was a Wednesday that we were admitted to the NPU. Thursday at the office was a day of euphoria, and some reevaluating of the permanent intractable hostility of the white establishment. On the Friday Galgut phoned. He introduced himself and asked for the editor and Mabel took fright. So did Rev; in trouble already? He took the call and Galgut said: "Will you visit me for tea?"

Rev arranged that I would go with him. I suppose we expected a lecture, but it didn't look like a vicious one. We missed the scheduled meeting because my first child was being born. Rev apologetically worried that this was a black mark against us. When we got there, Galgut spent half

the meeting being grandfatherly and the other half telling Rev how glad he was to have new independent *voices* emerging.

Rev was bowled over, and there was stir at the office. Most people had not imagined there could be authority figures who weren't automatically down on us. A young reporter said to me: "I sometimes wonder if the government really is all evil". Galgut wouldn't consider himself "the government" but from the reporter's point of view authority was authority, all one thing, white men with power.

Other heresies were coming up, too, such as mumblings about "wallowing in the mental ghettos of Black Consciousness" and about when the time would come to work on positives instead of harping on negatives.

These were whispers, though, coming disproportionately to me as the resident outsider. In meetings, the orthodox complexes deepened, dissidents huddling in silence. Therein is the one big plus of the route I tread: when you have no-one's line to toe, you toe no-one's but your own.

Voice had never been the world's best journal, and it got worse. Tensions, ideological and other, ate the place. The view spread that it would have been best to go out with glory. From the start there'd been downs at the *Voice*, but balanced by terrific ups. A year later, the downs were winning.

My main reward was the township agents who sold the paper. Most of these guys had as much interest in fossil formations as in the tortured issues of blackness and purity that cursed the office. One, Ntsizi Moremi in Sebokeng, set up a network of practical go-ahead. No-one had ever told him about "community projects", he'd just done it. Apart from selling *Voice*, he arranged vegetable gardens and a marketing system and sewing



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co-ops. This was as good a good-news story as I ever saw. But word got round the cocktail circuit and next thing his dusty track was full of long cars and TV cameras. Then there was a sponsored combi, and then another, and then the combis were crashed and the bickering drowned the sounds of industry and Ntsizi – and more particularly his wife Seipati – were slipping out of kilter.

One day I found a bag on my doorstep. It had a figurine of an old man on his haunches holding a stick, and a letter from Ntsizi: he was fine, he was in Kenya, (no address), he was working for the ANC. "May God bless you and Geal and new waited member of family. Be a male – conquer in struggle. Be a female – Ambassador of liberation."

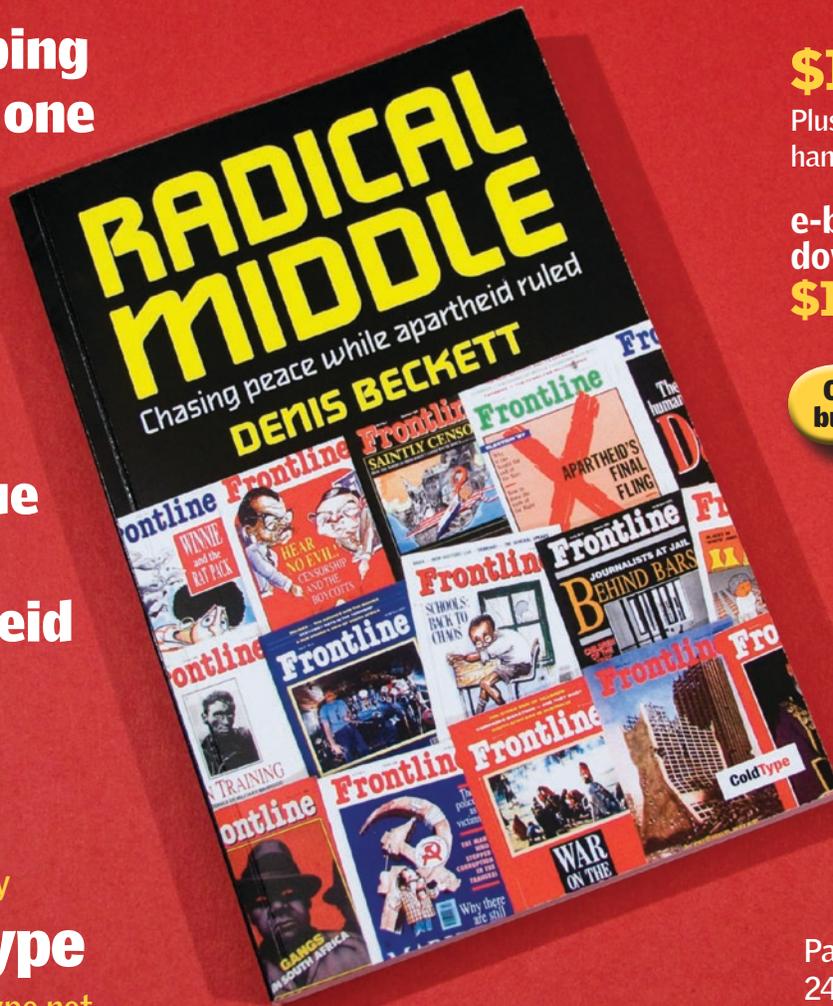
That upset me. Ntsizi belonged here. He was making South Africa work. He belonged with the guys who, like Swift said, get two blades of grain to grow where one grew before. Distortions had driven him away, distortions had messed him up. What dumb distortions we had. Would they end when times changed, or just change shape?

In October '78 the "management structure" was as well up as I could get it. It was time for me to move on. I drew up a letterhead calling myself "Labour Consultant", figuring I'd work out what that entailed. The main manne in the reporters' room gradually dispersed. Sekola Sello became sports editor of *Drum*. Phil Mtimkulu became president of MWASA, the black journalists' union, had a stretch in jail, and became a university professor. Bernard went back to JCI whence he had come, and turned up later, under the forename Moroe, as chairman of the SA golfers' association. *Voice* limped on for another year, until no-one knew why it was there or what it was doing. **CT**

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... so will you."**

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