

PJ 7/11/10/114

EDITOR

South Africa's time to forgive

From Mr Maritz van den Berg
Sir: The campaign against John Lloyd, the Labour Party candidate for Exeter, is ill-founded and vindictive ("Terrorism" returns to haunt candidate", 27 October).

I was a friend of John Harris, the anti-apartheid activist who (as your story tells) was executed in Pretoria on 1 April 1965. After the explosion at Johannesburg station on 24 July 1964, I was among those arrested by the security police and held for interrogation in Pretoria jail. Following my release on 27 August, I attended the whole of the Harris trial in the Transvaal Supreme Court and was present when Lloyd gave evidence against Harris (who had, by then, signed a full confession). I corresponded with John Harris in the death cell after his conviction and visited him regularly in Pretoria jail, our last conversation being on the day before his execution.

I want to place on record that John Harris bore John Lloyd no grudge, said so, and tried (I believe) to convey this message to Lloyd - whether successfully or not I do not know. Indeed, he had no grounds for any grudge. Lloyd was innocent of an act planned and executed entirely by Harris but found himself at risk of being charged as an accessory to an offence carrying the death penalty. He succumbed to unbearable pressure and went into the witness box.

John Lloyd was guilty of human frailty, but then who isn't? After these many years I for one wish him good luck.

Yours faithfully,
MARITZ VAN DEN BERG
London, SW15

From Mr Ron Press

Sir: The events in which John Lloyd was involved have been

well documented. John Lloyd has, on numerous occasions, expressed his remorse and openly admitted his mistakes of that time. The liberation movement in the UK discussed these matters years ago and accepted his atonement as genuine.

Other far more extreme cases illustrate the attitude of the ANC. Dirk Coetzee was a member of a death squad that murdered anti-apartheid activists. He admitted his mistakes and became active in the struggle for the end of apartheid. The ANC welcomed his change of heart and accepted his help and bona fides.

South Africa has had a turbulent history. This has left a legacy of hatreds, cries for revenge, and traumas. The Government of National Unity, in which the African National Congress plays a major role, has opened the perspective for a new dispensation where the past, having been revealed, can be a stepping stone to reconciliation and hope. The time for revenge and chasing ghosts is past. We are surely bigger than that.

For more than 40 years I have been active in South Africa and the UK, in the African National Congress, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, and the anti-apartheid movement. I was accused of treason in the 1950s and exiled in the 1960s. What we struggled for has come to pass. Now is a time to build. Do not let the mistakes of the past destroy our future. But more importantly, do not let those mistakes made in South Africa be used for the generation of vendettas in the UK.

Yours faithfully,
RON PRESS
London, N2
29 October

INDEPENDENT

31.10.95.

Bomber's death-cell missive

THE campaign against John Lloyd, the Labour Party candidate for Exeter (Terror trial role haunts potential MP, October 27) is vindictive and based on dubious history. I was a friend of John Harris, the anti-apartheid activist who was executed in Pretoria on April 1, 1965. After the explosion on Johannesburg Station on July 24, 1964, I was among those arrested and interrogated by the Security Police. Following my release, I attended the Harris trial in the Transvaal Supreme Court and was present when Lloyd gave evidence against Harris (who had by then signed a full confession). I corresponded with John Harris in the death cell after his conviction and visited him regularly in Pretoria Prison.

John Harris bore John

Lloyd no grudge and tried (I believe) to convey this to him - whether successfully or not I do not know. Lloyd was innocent of an act planned and executed entirely by Harris but found himself at risk of being charged as an accessory to an offence carrying the death penalty. He succumbed to unbearable pressure and went into the witness box.

John Lloyd was guilty of human frailty. But then, who isn't?

Maritz van den Berg.
Gwendolen Avenue,
London SW15.

GUARDIAN
31.10.95.

Magnum

These letters displeased a lot of people, including Randolph Vigne, but I stand by every word.

Maritz

25.8.98.