

## Book Review

# External Missions: The ANC in Exile

Stephen Ellis

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Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball

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*External Mission: The ANC in Exile* highlights information about the history of the African National Congress (ANC) during the struggle against apartheid that is not immediately accessible to the public but makes sense when reviewing the near future of South Africa. In other words, this book about the ANC explains the culmination of past events that have a direct and almost repetitive influence and representation of the present and the possible future of South Africa. In this book, Ellis aims to provide insider information on the ANC during a time in history when the party was banned and frowned upon by the government of the day. Moreover, this book gives an account of how the various and ongoing operations of the ANC took place, and how this political party became the strongest political party and eventually formed the government of the day in South Africa. The meticulous and precise presentation of facts is what makes this book interesting and powerful for the current generation of South Africans. Understanding the formation and upcoming of the ANC and what its initial intentions as a political party were essential in understanding why its leaders are at loggerheads with and to a certain extent struggling to lead South Africans today. For example, the ANC was a political party that was created for black Africans in South Africa. It only opened to all ethnic groups much later, after apartheid.<sup>582</sup> Furthermore, although other ethnic groups did join and form part of the ANC, they were only allowed to join certain departments and operations of the ANC and not the highest command of the political party. If one looks at the leadership of the ANC since its coming to power in 1994, one will find that there has never been a leader or president of the political party who was not a black African.

The linear presentation of chapters starting with Call to Arms (Chapter 1) through to Perspectives (Chapter 8) showcases the various levels of mistrust, the lack of comradeship, members not being loyal to the cause, and a considerable amount of misinformation. For example, there were differences about what should be done as a form of retaliation and political expression against the oppressive apartheid government,<sup>583</sup> and on several occasions, armed response was delayed due to some party members not being 100 per cent supportive of the call.<sup>584</sup> These examples reflect what is currently taking place regarding the internal political disputes in South Africa.

With reference to the separation of people in the same party into their cultural and traditional tribes according to language, is another pivoting factor with loud divisive undertones yet unaddressed in South Africa.<sup>585</sup> This is even trickling down to society where people separate themselves from each other and are very aware of the different languages and cultural backgrounds of others. This is now growing into something that has the potential to shape and label people adversely according to negative stereotypes in terms of their culture, for example, the Zulu people who are associated with being aggressive and violent.

*External Mission* speaks of corruption, which in its natural form cannot be fully measured scientifically, but the consequences of corruption are visible and continue to grow. Corruption started many years ago in apartheid South Africa long before the country became a democracy, and this is critically articulated in *External Mission*. Many events were interconnected. The rise in school boycotts and the war waged on the minority government at the time, were for instance all adding to what eventually led to the end of apartheid. Several internal and external factors, such as the Soweto uprising and the end of the Cold War,<sup>586</sup> were integral ingredients that came to pass, leading to the very first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994.

Ellis' main conclusions are that the methodological underpinnings that led to the demise of the National Party are what is currently crushing the ruling ANC and their failure to view, review and address reality for what it actually is – the reality of the state of South Africa. External forces will forever influence how the country progresses because South Africa is not an island; it works with and is dependent on the success and operation of many other countries in the world with regard to economics and the price of food, fuel and trade.

Once the ANC leaders address the reality of the poorest inhabitants of South Africa instead of covering it up with bureaucratic assumptions and policing, only then will the reality of this country change and make progress for the better. In other words, the ANC may have played an important role in leading South Africa to democracy, but it is failing dismally to maintain the functionality and growth of this democratic country. I believe the main audience for this book is the current youth in South Africa.

In Chapter 8, titled Perspectives, Ellis speaks to the unforeseen future that can change the status quo overnight, and nobody would have control over it or can predict it – much like the effect that the Cold War had on trade, or the aftermath of the Cold War. More recently, an unpredicted event came in the form of COVID-19, which affected the world and killed thousands of people. The world changed, and even before it could recover from the fallout of the pandemic, the Ukraine and Russia went to war. This has a highly negative socio-political and economic effect on South Africa.

The strength of this book is that it gives a detailed step-by-step explanation with evidence of the political developments in South Africa leading to the unbanning of the ANC and the success of the liberation struggle. It includes personal accounts from members of the ANC, and mentions documents that are accessible. The weakness of this book is that some of the documents that are mentioned here are no longer publicly available for download,



or they are no longer available to the public. One therefore has to do a thorough search in order to find and confirm that the information provided in this book is indeed true.

In conclusion, Stephen Ellis descriptively shows how the current South African society came under the leadership of the ANC and with careful observation, one can easily anticipate a future that sees the ANC losing power as the government of the day in South Africa, unless some major changes are made and implemented so that the current generation can benefit when it comes to addressing issues of unemployment, poverty, opportunities to study, and the growth of this beautiful country.

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>582</sup> Another option was simply to open the ANC to people of every ethnic group. S Ellis, *External Missions: The ANC in Exile* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2022), 47.
- <sup>583</sup> Ellis states that the decision of the national executive of the ANC to turn a blind eye to the formation of a new militant organisation paved the way for a discussion to be held by the joint executive of the entire Congress Alliance, which met just a day later, in Durban. S Ellis, *External Missions: The ANC in Exile* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2022), 105.
- <sup>584</sup> Ellis shares that in many cases where ANC party members were also members of another organisation, such as the Congress of Democrats, internal party discipline required that “at all times, the first loyalty of the Party members is to their Party [the ANC]”, the very rule that Kotane flouted when he argued in the ANC meetings against adopting a policy of armed struggle. S Ellis, *External Missions: The ANC in Exile* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2022), 27.
- <sup>585</sup> Within the context of being in exile in Tanzania, a disillusioned Zulu cadre wrote: “Everyone with experience of Kongwa agreed on the existence of tribalism in the camp: There was less pressure and more hesitation in taking disciplinary action when Xhosa-speaking people are involved than in the case with the Zulu-speaking people”. S Ellis, *External Missions: The ANC in Exile* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2022), 54.
- <sup>586</sup> The uprisings, however, also had consequences. Ellis argues that “The cold reality was that school boycotts condemned a generation of mostly poor South Africans to almost no education at all, which did not aid their material chances of earning a decent living in the future, nor improve their sense of self-worth”. S Ellis, *External Missions: The ANC in Exile* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2022), 214.

