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Mandela and South Africa

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By the brutal if simple expedient of imprisoning him, the government of South Africa has succeeded in cutting off Nelson Mandela from his family, his people, his work, his leadership of the South African liberation movement. But the South African government has failed to eradicate Mandela's influence. Indeed, the opposite is true: Mandela, a prisoner serving a life sentence on South Africa's notorious Robben Island prison since 1964, has achieved worldwide recognition as a leader in the struggle against apartheid. And yet, for most of us, Nelson Mandela remains a one-dimensional figure, more of an emblem than a man.

Nelson Mandela: The Struggle Is My Life (Pathfinder Press, 410 West St., New York, N.Y. 10014. \$6.95) is a useful introduction to Mandela's life and work through his speeches and writings, the reminiscences of his comrades, and the incidental biographical details that emerge from these writings. We discover that the 68-year-old Mandela—the son of a Transkei tribal chief, a graduate of the University of South Africa, a "qualified solicitor," an early and important leader of the African National Congress and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation")—may be legitimately compared not only to Martin Luther King Jr. but to Washington and Jefferson; not only to Ghandi but to Lenin and Castro, too.

Under Mandela's leadership, the ANC defined the struggle for liberation as a multiracial movement: "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white." He organized protest in the form of a nonviolent general strike in 1961—a "Stay-at-Home"—and called for a campaign of "non-cooperation" to compel the creation of a "new democratic constitution." He professed his admiration for the Magna Charta, the Bill of Rights and the structure of American democracy. But Mandela adopted the familiar rhetoric of Third-

World liberation movements, with a facile condemnation of "American imperialism" and a self-confessed sympathy for "Marxist thought" and the socialist model, and he did not shrink from armed struggle: "The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: Submit or fight," recites the manifesto of "Spear of the Nation." "That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom."

"Nelson Mandela" was compiled and published by the London-based International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa as a tribute to Mandela on his 60th birthday in 1978. The new edition has been expanded and updated, but the crucial facts remain unchanged: Mandela is still a prisoner—and he is still, in the words of the editors, "the single most vital symbol not only of liberation from the tyranny of apartheid, but of a new way of life in South Africa."