



CHRIS HANI: A Jacana Pocket Biography

Hugh Macmillan

Jacana: Auckland Park, 2014. 152 pp

Reviewed by Howard Smith

Hugh Macmillan – historian and author of *The Lusaka Years: The ANC in Exile in Zambia 1963–1994* (2013) – has written a biography of Chris Hani that provides the lively introduction promised by Jacana’s “Pocket Guide” series. It also usefully brings together a valuable record of Hani’s life, thought

and contribution to the struggle – information that previously has been accessible only from a variety of sources.

Macmillan’s chronological account briefly covers Hani’s early life and schooling in the rural Transkei and his education at Fort Hare; his move to Cape Town to stay with his father and uncle, where he joined the Communist Party and first underwent military training at the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) camp near Mamre; and the first few years after he left the country in 1963, including military training in the Soviet Union. The biography becomes more detailed after Hani returns to Africa. Attaining a senior position in MK, he was involved in both planning and leading the joint ZAPU–ANC force that entered Zimbabwe at the end of July 1967. He was the political commissar and second-in-command of the Luthuli Detachment, the ANC component.

Hani demonstrated military leadership and personal courage in that campaign, but it was his role in the subsequent challenge to aspects of the ANC’s leadership that built his reputation for principled political commitment. Disciplined at first for his critical 1969 Memorandum, his position was vindicated by the subsequent ANC Consultative Conference in Morogoro. From 1975 to 1982, Hani was deployed to Lesotho, where he was responsible with others for the infiltration of ANC cadres into South Africa. He also entered the country himself on numerous occasions. As MK political commissar in the 1980s, he was active in Zambia, Mozambique and Angola. In Angola,

his courage was again displayed in successful interventions to stem revolts in MK camps, where he was resolute but yet able to win the support of the overwhelming majority of cadres.

Macmillan notes Hani’s consistent emphasis on the political control of MK, the need for strong organisation in South Africa, and the importance of political work. As the struggle landscape changed and negotiations became first a distinct possibility and then a reality, Hani adapted to the changed circumstances without wavering from those principles. When the ANC leadership suspended the armed struggle, Hani as MK leader accepted that decision and traversed the country winning support for its implementation.

While other leaders adapted to the new opportunities opened up by negotiations and access to political power, Hani adhered to his political principles and became secretary-general of the rapidly growing South African Communist Party in 1991. Macmillan notes that this choice may have cost Hani positions in the future government.

We cannot know what role Hani would have played after 1994, but we do know that it was because of his role as a communist leader of the people’s struggle that he was assassinated in 1993. The book’s epigraph quotes Hani’s “Socialism is the future” and the comment of Cuban envoy Carlos Mas Abala that “Chris Hani was the future of (South Africa). They murdered the future”. Both quotations, like the book itself, pay fitting tribute to one South Africa’s many great persons. [NA](#)



NELSON MANDELA: A Jacana Pocket Biography

Colin Bundy

Jacana: Auckland Park, 2015. 159 pp

Reviewed by Sivalingum Rungan (Centre for Sustainability in Mining and Industry, University of the Witwatersrand)

A pocket biography of a person like Mandela cannot capture the essence of the man. Colin Bundy, while recognising this dilemma, has presented a clear and coherent introduction, making it very easy to slip back in time and relive many of the events considered. Those who have not read anything of Mandela would find this book an [▶▶](#)