South Africa: Apartheid-era assassin Eugene De Kock granted parole

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In a mockery of justice, apartheid-era assassin Eugene De Kock, who was serving two life terms plus 212 years for other crimes, has been granted parole by South African Justice Minister Michael Masutha. The minister said he was being paroled "in the interests of nation-building."

Nicknamed "Prime Evil," De Kock confessed to more than 100 acts of murder, torture and fraud, and took full responsibility for the activities of his undercover unit. He was never tried for most of the killing and maiming he perpetrated on activists fighting white minority rule in the 1980s and early 1990s.

De Kock made his confessions in front of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which was established a year after South Africa's first fully democratic elections in 1994.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who chaired the TRC, said the decision to release him represented a milestone on South Africa's road to reconciliation and healing. He added: "I pray that those whom he hurt, those from whom he took loved ones, will find the power within them to forgive him. Forgiving is empowering for the forgiver and the forgiven."

Masutha denied De Kock parole last June, saying he had "made progress" towards rehabilitation but that some of the families of his victims had not been consulted "as required by law."

In 2012, De Kock sought out the relatives of some of his victims, including the mother and widow of African National Congress (ANC) lawyer Bheki Mlangeni. The family refused him forgiveness, questioning the sincerity of his request. Mlangeni was blown up by a bomb planted in a tape recorder sent to him in February 1991 while he was working to expose the activities of Vlakplaas, the secret police unit commanded by De Kock and named after the farm that served as its headquarters west of Pretoria.

De Kock was sentenced in 1996 for the murders of Japie Kereng Maponya and the Nelspruit Five—Oscar Mxolisi Ntshota, Glenack Masilo Mama, Lawrence Jacey Nyelende, Khona Gabela and Tisetso Leballo. Four were shot and killed in an ambush in the early hours of March 26, 1992 outside Nelspruit, Mpumalanga province. The fifth, Leballo, was killed later the same day "and the body subsequently destroyed by means of explosives at Penge Mine near Weltevreden," according to the TRC amnesty application of De Kock and nine accomplices.

The TRC was a piece of high political theatre, also carried out in the name of "nation building." Short on truth and long on reconciliation, it was designed for the benefit of the elite, black and white, but not for justice. No submission to the commission is permissible as evidence in court. None of the accomplices named by De Kock have been brought to trial, much less the bureaucrats and politicians who ordered and facilitated the murders carried out by Vlakplaas operatives.

In a guest column in the *Daily Maverick* posted just before Masutha's decision, Jane Quin asks, "[H]ow dare we as a country spend precious ... time, money and energy considering the release of the killers who are captive, when we haven't even bothered to bring the others to book?"

Quin's sister Jacki was shot and killed by Vlakplaas members under De Kock in a cross-border raid in Maseru, Lesotho in December 1985. The ultimate responsibility for this crime rests with the politicians, bureaucrats and assassins who planned and carried it out.

By the same token, certain prosecutors and investigators are complicit for making the call not to pursue criminal cases against those responsible. This is

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where responsibility and blame for the release of De Kock should be apportioned, not to “we as a country”, if that includes working class South Africans who want nothing more than to see apartheid-era oppressors brought to justice.

The consideration shown De Kock, a highly capable purveyor of state violence, runs counter to the democratic aspirations of the masses who sacrificed so much in the anti-apartheid struggle. His parole is an addendum to Nelson Mandela’s discredited narrative of “a *rainbow nation* at peace with itself *and* the world” and upheld to this day by the ruling ANC and the likes of Tutu.

This explains why among mainstream commentators, the news of De Kock’s parole has been broadly well received. “We are not a vengeful nation,” veteran journalist Max Du Preez pontificated in an interview with e.tv.

Speaking at the time of De Kock’s previous, unsuccessful parole application, right-wing opposition Democratic Alliance leader James Selfe commented, “It seems ... inequitable that Mr. De Kock is ... the only one [being] punished.” In other words, since none of his accomplices were in jail, De Kock had no business being behind bars either.

A month before his inauguration in May 2009, President Jacob Zuma of the ANC reportedly paid a secret visit to De Kock at Pretoria Central Prison. According to the *Sunday Independent*, De Kock gave Zuma information regarding the involvement in apartheid crimes of people who have thus far gone scot-free.

This could implicate figures now serving under the ANC government, since apartheid agents are known to have infiltrated the resistance movements. Most likely, any sensational information will be kept under wraps and used to settle matters between the various factions in the ruling party behind closed doors.

Masutha granted De Kock parole at the same time he denied Clive Derby-Lewis’s bid for medical parole. “There is nothing to suggest Mr. Derby-Lewis’s condition is such that he is rendered physically incapacitated … so as to severely limit daily activity,” said Masutha.

?Derby-Lewis, who has terminal lung cancer, was convicted for aiding and abetting Polish national Janusz Walus in the assassination of Chris Hani, a member of the ANC and the Stalinist South African Communist Party. Walus borrowed from Derby-Lewis the gun he used to kill Hani in the driveway of his home in Dawn Park, Ekurhuleni on April 10, 1993.

Masutha delayed a decision on the parole application of Ferdi Barnard, another apartheid state hitman, found guilty 17 years ago of the murder of anti-apartheid activist David Webster. “I was paid a R40,000 [US$3,400] production bonus after the killing. For a job well done,” Barnard boasts in Jacques Pauw’s *Into the Heart of Darkness: Confessions of Apartheid’s Assassins* (Jonathan Ball, 1997).

“It was an approved operation,” he maintains, “and Joe Verster [then director of the Civil Co-operation Bureau, Barnard’s unit] knew about everything.”

Barnard was sentenced in 1988 to 63 years and two life terms, the second being for an attempt on the life of Dullah Omar, who went on to serve in the cabinet of former President Mandela.

Whatever the fate of Derby-Lewis and Barnard, the ANC government has with De Kock’s parole signalled its contempt for any popular concept of justice. Through an endless series of backroom deals, the ruling elite is cynically whitewashing the past and palming off these efforts as “nation building.” The result is a country that is safe for mass murderers, a playground of the well-connected and rich criminals.

Workers have thus gained an insight into the ANC’s attitude towards the instruments of state security. As proved by the Marikana Massacre in 2012 that left 34 striking miners dead, and as it will be in the class struggle now developing, the uniformed brutes who come after Barnard and De Kock can also expect to get away with murder.

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