

HE HAS FOUR WIVES AND HE FACED 783 COUNTS OF CORRUPTION: PETER HITCHENS ON SOUTH AFRICA'S NEXT PRESIDENT

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Imagine how you would react if Gordon Brown opened and closed his election rallies by bursting into a song called *Bring Me My Machine Gun*, swaying and jigging to the



hypnotic chorus of this menacing ditty.

And how would you feel if the Prime Minister were alleged to be taking campaign money from Colonel Gaddafi; faced 783 counts of fraud, racketeering, tax evasion and corruption which somehow never came to court; and had been acquitted of rape while his fearsome supporters mobbed the courthouse? Then ponder how you would despair if, despite all these things, Mr Brown's party was certain to win the election whatever he did or said. If you can picture all this happening here, then you have an inkling of the horrible process South Africa is now going through. Except it is much, much worse.

© DANSE MACABRE: ZUMA LOVES TO DRESS, AND DANCE, LIKE A ZULU WARRIOR

This fast-approaching catastrophe is a source of shame and apprehension to

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1165473/He-wives-faced-783-counts-corruption-PETER-HITCHENS-South-Africas-president.html>
millions of honest people, white and black, in South Africa itself.

It is also a tragedy for Africa as a whole, a continent hungry for any reason to hope. And it is grave news for the civilised world, which needs no more failed states.

Yet I can promise you I will be accused of alarmism and pessimism for saying so, and quite possibly of 'racism' too.

Why? All the soppy admirers of Nelson Mandela - especially the BBC - gave the new South Africa a free pass when apartheid ended 15 years ago.

They wanted to believe this complicated and important nation had become a sort of heaven on Earth where all tears were dried and all problems solved.

Mr Mandela himself, personally decent but politically ineffectual and naive, served as both figurehead and figleaf for the new order. The world ignored or forgave his continuing friendships with the world's worst despots, and the fraudulent bungling that surrounded him.

Now, looking frail, bemused and ancient, he recently had to be helped on to the stage by his suspect would-be successor, to endorse the grotesque rabble who seek to succeed him.

Once, South Africa dominated the nightly news for weeks on end. Now the liberal media barely mention it. Why not? Because post-apartheid South Africa is a failure.

You don't hear about the terrifying crime. You don't hear about the pestilence of corruption, or the absurd purchase of needless submarines and aircraft for a country with no serious enemies except its own elite.

There is a little about AIDS, but nothing like as much as there should be, given the acres of graves that commemorate the government's moronic policies, of denial and folk remedies (including beetroot).

Violent xenophobic rage against uncontrolled mass immigration was played down both in South Africa and abroad because it did not fit the smiley picture beloved by the Mandela worshippers. And little is said about the unstoppable spread of shanty towns, far outstripping state attempts to build proper houses for the poor.

Electricity blackouts - the invariable sign of a country on the slide - are now frequent. The ill-run nuclear power station inherited from the apartheid regime's atom bomb programme is beginning to judder and fail, raising fears of an African Chernobyl.

Then there are the overstretched water supply, the railway system fraying at the edges and the unguarded borders open to migrants and refugees from every destitute nation in

Africa.

It is largely thanks to these new arrivals that wretched, instant slums sprout right up to the edge of Cape Town's slick new airport, currently being expensively modernised ready for the World Cup next year during which Mandela groupies will doubtless once again swoon about the 'success' of the Rainbow Nation.

© NEW ORDER: PETER HITCHENS WITH ZUMA'S SUPPORTERS IN SPRINGBOK



Of course much of tourist South Africa still looks like the American West Coast: smooth six-lane highways, shopping malls, big houses in shady gardens, all tended by cheap black servants.

But close to the prettiness is fear and apprehension. Even in the lovely Cape wine country, squatter camps have erupted on the outskirts of towns where chefs drizzle olive oil on to fancy salads less than a mile from open sewers and gang wars among corrugated iron shacks.

Here is another world, much bigger than the tourist paradise, and truly, cruelly poor. It is also increasingly hostile to the soft enclaves where the new rich and the holidaymakers are apparently oblivious of the filth, hunger, alcoholic stupor, drug-taking and wretchedness which lie just the other side of every hill.

Like ice and fire, these two societies cannot coexist forever, and when one is 40 million strong and the other one tenth of that, there is little doubt which will win. The only question is how and when the dreamtime will end.

In the coming weeks, South Africa seems to me to be taking several definite steps towards its cold, shocking awakening - as a full member of the Third World.

The man who will lead it there is called Jacob Zuma. Remember the name. You are going to hear a lot more of it.

Zuma is wholly African. He has at least four wives and 18 children. He has for years avoided standing trial on fraud and corruption charges. Nobody seriously believes he ever will: his approaching election is already spreading fear in South Africa's legal establishment.

Mr Zuma joined the Communist Party in 1962 (he only left a few years ago), and has a dark and inadequately examined past as a much-feared intelligence chief in the ANC's ruthless armed wing, Spear of the Nation. He underwent 'military training' in the old Soviet Union in 1978, when the KGB was very much in charge of such things.

On April 22 he will become President of one of the world's most important countries.

Comrade Zuma, as his supporters know him, certainly is not dull. And South Africa will not be dull either when he takes over.

Many fear it will rapidly become a lawless kleptocracy when he comes to power, which he will do after a hopelessly one-sided and rather crooked election.

The grisly Winnie Mandela, a convicted fraud with a creepy past, is number five on the ANC's parliamentary election list, despite the fact that as a criminal she is legally banned from being an MP. She is expected to be a minister in any Zuma government.



Zuma's old friend and business partner, Schabir Shaik, has just been released early - on medical grounds, although almost nobody believes this - from a 15-year sentence imposed in 2006 for fraud and corruption, including a payment to Zuma himself.

© AN AILING NELSON MANDELA IS HELPED ON TO THE STAGE AT A RALLY BY THE BESPECTACLED ZUMA,

THE MAN HE IS ENDORSING AS THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA

Jackie Selebi, the National Police Commissioner, is famous for asking, 'what's all the fuss about?' when taxed with the country's appalling levels of crime and violence. He is currently suspended, accused of having - yes - a 'generally corrupt relationship' with a convicted drug smuggler and also 'defeating the ends of justice'. The once-admired Scorpions, a police anti-corruption squad symbolising the country's determination not to follow the rest of Africa into corrupt squalor, have been disbanded. So the approaching enthronement of this sinister, populist one-time Zulu herd-boy really ought to mark the moment when South Africa has to stop dreaming about rainbows and miracles, and recognise that experience is usually a better guide to the future than hope. Zuma is attractive in some ways. He has made his way up from utter poverty. He is a fighter, a keen and hypocrisy-free lover of women and a cunning charmer. He makes no pretence of being Westernised, and delights in wearing traditional Zulu dress, leopardskin, loincloth and all. He has an excellent singing voice, as I can testify. He comes from the deep heart of Zululand, where his home is surprisingly modest but guarded by a modern security fence. It lies in the Nkandla district, in the lovely Zulu highlands a morning's drive from the Victorian battlefields of Isandlwana, where the Zulus destroyed a British army, and Rorke's Drift, where a small British force survived against enormous odds. South Africa's largest tribe are a proud fighting people, and Zuma will not be a mild leader, as Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, his two forerunners, were. This, not the far-off world of Cape Town, is the real South Africa. It is currently tense and frightening, as well as obviously poor and ravaged by AIDS. Young men, brought up in the warrior spirit, wander in angry and resentful groups, strikingly unlike the more peaceful Xhosas to the south. My Zulu guide, Emmanuel, is afraid I might be mistaken for a policeman or rival political campaigner, so he lends me his jacket so I'll blend in better, and is pleased when our car



is caked with red mud, as he is afraid it looks too much like a police vehicle.

This area is generally run by the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Party, and opponents have died at their rallies. Interlopers are unwelcome. There are Zuma posters, but the ANC - mistrusted here as a mainly Xhosa party - has to come into these districts under heavy police escort. The posters are nailed on electricity poles about 15ft up, to stop Inkatha militants tearing them down. 'People around here will vote for Zuma because he is a Zulu, but in spite of the fact that he is from the ANC,' one local explains.

Ø MENACING: JACOB ZUMA DANCES TO WHAT HAS BECOME HIS SIGNATURE SONG, BRING ME MY MACHINE GUN!

The idea that tribal loyalty doesn't matter any more in South Africa, spread for years by blinkered optimists, seems absurd here - and tribal rivalry might well play a part in the more troubled future, as it has everywhere else in Africa.

This is also a very old-fashioned place, where the price of a wife is still 11 cows, and polygamy is normal.

Zuma has already considered how to cope with this tricky detail when working out which of his wives will be his First Lady. He explains: 'There is no First Lady. If there is an occasion, one day we will have the wife we are with, another day we will have another one.' He defends his domestic arrangements by saying of his more conventional critics: 'Many of them have wives, girlfriends and children that they try to hide. I love all my wives and children and I'm proud of them, so I'm completely open about it.'

Several of his wives praise Zuma as a family man. Alas for him, another has indicted him from beyond the grave.

Kate Mantsho, mother of five of his children, killed herself with an overdose in 2000, and left a devastating suicide note denouncing him. In one harrowing passage she said: 'I hope it is true we will meet again - but not as husband and wife. I dare not take that chance again due to the bitter and most painful 24 years of married life I have gone through.'

South African coverage of this event was muted, and many journalists denounced the small newspaper that broke the story.

Zuma himself has carried on as if Kate's note had never been published. He is above all a Zulu, a man who holds to ancient traditions and customs. Whatever he can be accused of (and it is quite a lot) he is not an urban liberal.

He once spoke of how, in his youth, he would knock down any 'pansy boy'. He has also said same-sex marriage was a 'disgrace to the nation'.

He has hinted he might restore the death penalty. He is keen on traditional medicine men. He thinks teenage unwed mothers should have their babies taken away; that school prayers should be compulsory and that there is too much sex on TV.

He completely lacks the Westernised polish and smoothness of Mandela and Mbeki. His political party, the African National Congress, sometimes seems aghast that it has chosen him as leader. Too late.

The ANC's gruesomely Stalinist communist faction, the most powerful communist party outside China, thought they could use him as a battering ram against the more cautious Mbeki, a cold and solitary academic.

Mbeki sought above all to keep Western investors happy, thus disappointing the communist radicals who wanted to invest in socialist projects. They hoped they could control Zuma or perhaps push him aside after he had done their dirty work. But he is far cleverer than he looks.

At first sight he is the jovial double of the Michelin man, bald, bespectacled and wide-mouthed. As he campaigns, he wears a Nelson Mandela T-shirt (his aides sport Jacob Zuma shirts) and a bizarre black leather cowboy hat.

I watched him electioneering in and around the bleak and stony town of Springbok, in South Africa's remote and conservative North West.

He arrived for a carefully staged visit to Elizabeth Cloete, a 49-year-old who dwells on an arid hillside in a hovel made of plastic sheets, and lives by scrabbling through rubbish dumps looking for saleable scrap - a trade that brings her about £6 a week.

Her neighbourhood is the bitter end of rural South Africa, many of whose inhabitants exist, in a permanent haze of cheap drink or drugs, defeated and without hope.

Zuma must know that places like this, and their still crueller and more violent urban equivalents, are evidence of the ANC's failure, in 15 years of unrestricted power, to keep its ambitious promises to the poor.

He actually admitted later that day: 'We came here to see the conditions. The conditions are extremely bad.'

But when I tried, courteously, to speak to him on the spot, having failed to obtain an interview over several weeks, he brushed me aside. Worse, I was menacingly reproved by an ANC apparatchik, outraged that I should dare to question the next President.

I was also upbraided by a smug, dreadlocked member of the Johannesburg Press corps who sneered at me, 'This is Africa, man, we do things differently here.' They certainly do.

Zuma's admission that conditions are dreadful was about the only truthful thing in his speech, made to a few thousand listless supporters in a bleak rugby stadium on the edge of town, after efforts to work them into a frenzy had failed.

'Viva ANC!' shouted the master of ceremonies. No response. 'Viva Zuma!' No response. And you can't blame them.

Speaking in English, the future President has all the charisma of an ashtray. The scripted slogans fall from his lips like blobs of cold porridge. He talks of the fight against crime as if he were not himself overshadowed by criminal charges and the unabashed friend of convicted crooks.

As he drones, the chatter from the audience becomes almost deafening. Most of them do not speak English anyway.

He wins a little applause for claiming that corrupt officials will be removed. One departing member of the crowd openly sniggers as Zuma declares: 'We don't want people to say that the ANC is a corrupt organisation because of corrupt individuals.'

But the multitude springs back into life when Zuma switches to his native Zulu and, in a rich and powerful baritone, begins to sing the song with which he will always be associated, dancing and swaying as he does so.

Bring Me My Machine Gun is surprisingly catchy, and easy to join in. It only has two lines, and the second goes, rather politely, 'Please bring me my machine gun.'

What is he doing here, in this arid dorp halfway to Nigeria? The truth is that the ANC faces a rebellion, and is trying to quell it with a mixture of power and pay-outs.

A breakaway, called the Congress of the People (COPE), has just scored surprisingly well in council by-elections near Springbok. Zuma's allies, furious that for the first time they face serious opponents, have let their rage show in ways which have rightly scared many peaceful South Africans.

The ANC youth league chief Julius Malema, a portly young loudmouth with a gift for rabble-rousing, has declared that his movement was ready to 'take up arms and kill for Zuma'. He has since been made to apologise, but many are unconvinced.

Another ANC youth league militant said COPE 'behave like cockroaches and they must be destroyed'.

The word 'cockroaches' leaves a specially nasty taste in Africa. Hutu fanatics repeatedly used the same insult to describe their Tutsi neighbours in Rwanda, shortly before the 1994 massacres that horrified the world.

No African is unaware of this. Allan Boesak, a leading figure in COPE, told me the ANC tries to silence his party by the crudest methods.

He warns that a Zuma government will mean 'far more concentration of socialist power, less democracy, new laws to curtail the Press'.

He also claims the ANC tried to recruit him as a parliamentary candidate, assuring him it had plenty of money for his campaign - including cash from the Libyan leader, Colonel Gaddafi.

'They think they own democracy,' he says, and adds that public officials who endorse COPE are harassed and denounced by colleagues: 'When we try to book a venue, the hall is always "under repair", or if that fails they organise discos next door to drown out our speakers.'

In Springbok, the COPE offices are just down the road from the ANC headquarters. Painted on the side of the COPE building is a large arrow pointing directly at the ANC building, and the words: 'Tell no lies'.

The ANC response has been cynical beyond belief. Ever since COPE did well in local polls, ANC officials have been promising free food parcels to those who stay loyal to them. Regrettably, the tactic has already won back significant support.

Judging by the Springbok rally's warm response to Jacob Zuma's sing-song and the food parcel strategy, the ANC steamroller will triumph here and almost everywhere else.

The one place most likely to resist is the Western Cape, the area round Cape Town itself and the heartland of Helen Zille, the popular and effective mayor of Cape Town and leader of the Democratic Alliance.

She knows the Alliance must break out of being nothing more than a white liberal party. But alas she is a white liberal, albeit a very impressive one.

I caught up with her at Stellenbosch University, where she was speaking to an almost wholly white student audience, switching easily from English to Afrikaans.

Unlike Zuma, she is a witty, fluent orator. She does not break into song, and critics joke that if she did it would be 'Bring me my cappuccino' rather than 'Bring me my machine gun'.

Her aides, however, point out that she also speaks fluent Xhosa, Nelson Mandela's language, and that many of her meetings are full of black and brown faces.

But her cogent message really appeals only to the well-educated, who are not influenced by tribal loyalties, or open to bribery. Her words are heavy with fear for the future.

'The closed crony system,' she warns, 'leads to power abuse and eventually to a criminal state.'

She urges her supporters to concentrate on reducing the ANC's vote and get it used to the idea of real democracy. Otherwise it will misuse its excessive power - something she warns 'inevitably leads to Zimbabwe'. Liberation movements such as the ANC, she says, make bad democratic governments because they believe their goal is to seize power.

The diagnosis is impressive, cool and clear. The cure: a real law-governed democracy, is attractive. But the prognosis - a rigged and menacing election, a government founded on lawlessness and an uneducated, cunning new leader, an African 'Big Man' with his roots in tribe and tradition - is not so good.

How distressing to think it might never have come to this if the world had been more critical, and more interested, during the long wasted years of Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki.

Wide-eyed idealism has let us down again, as it always does.

It was not, as the fashionable people claimed, a fairy story. History did not stop when Nelson Mandela ended his long walk to freedom. They are not all going to live happily ever after.

• *Peter Hitchens has been short-listed for the Orwell Prize.*

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