

tions that ignored these lessons, and McCain was not much better. Economics seems the only discipline in which libertarian views have significant support. Grandmasters had problems swaying skeptics so it is unsurprising that Bradley did not score a knockout.

In dealing with resource pessimism, Bradley moves to a realm in which he is a well-established contributor and in which the prior literature is less extensive. He provides an excellent overview of hysteria over resource depletion. It appears at a particularly opportune time. Both U.S. main political parties are insanely devoted to an energy independence program that proposes to repeat the policy disasters of the 1970s. A wide range of organizations that should know better are supporting this folly.

He thus has succeeded in his effort to show that Enron was guided by faulty premises well-refuted in the economics literature. The financial crises of 2008 eclipse Enron as the quintessence of political capitalism, but Bradley's insights apply to the new circumstances even better than to the old.

Richard L. Gordon
Pennsylvania State University

On the Contrary: Leading the Opposition in a Democratic South Africa

Tony Leon

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On the Contrary is a seamless combination of a memoir of an influential South African politician and a well-researched modern history of his country. The author was the leader of the liberal Democratic Alliance, the leader of the opposition in Parliament.

Having entered politics in the mid 1980s, Leon saw firsthand the repression that accompanied the final years of the minority rule in South Africa. He provides a vivid account of a collapsing state beset by financial problems, growing radicalization, and violence. He offers a disturbing account of the out-of-control security apparatus, which increasingly ignored the civilized values it claimed to defend.

With great compassion, he describes the suffering and humiliation of his black countrymen, and the efforts of a minority of liberal-minded whites to bring about political reform through peaceful

means. Reduced to its bare essence, Leon's tome is about liberalism, the people who kept it alive during the dark days of apartheid, and the struggle to sustain it in the post-apartheid South Africa.

Leon grew up in a liberal upper-middle class Jewish family with roots in tsarist Russia. His father, a high-court judge in Natal, was not afraid to rule repeatedly against the government of the day. Ramon and Sheila Leon taught their children to respect individuals irrespective of their race. They were told "never under any circumstances to refer to blacks as 'natives' or to Indians as 'coolies,' but to call them Africans and Indians." Leon and his brother Peter "were instructed to stand when *any* adult entered the room [original emphasis]."

Though later accused of being rather too comfortable with doing business in apartheid South Africa, South African Jews in fact were overrepresented in the fight against racial oppression. Among the leading lights of the struggle were Helen Suzman, whom Leon replaced in Parliament in 1989, and Joe Slovo, the former head of the South African Communist Party (SACP). Certainly, the small community had to tread lightly in the face of the often explicitly anti-Semitic Afrikaner government.

By the early 1980s, when Leon entered the University of the Witwatersrand, the campus was a hotbed of Marxism. South African liberals, who were used to being called "communists" by government sympathizers, were quickly labeled as "fascist" by disaffected and increasingly radicalized university students. South Africa was a country of extremes with little space for liberal politics. Still, Leon managed to complete his law degree, to win a seat on the Students' Representative Council, and, after a brief career as a lawyer and Johannesburg city councilor, to enter Parliament on a liberal Democratic Party ticket in 1989.

A few months later, the then-state president F. W. de Klerk released Nelson Mandela from prison and removed the political ban on the African National Congress and the SACP. The negotiations on the future of South Africa (Convention for a Democratic South Africa - CODESA) commenced soon thereafter. Leon would have a ringside seat at the creation of the new South Africa as one of the DP's delegates to CODESA, but he would also come to appreciate the limits of liberal influence.

The ANC, like the National Party of de Klerk, had little interest in checks and balances so instrumental to a liberal democracy.

Federalism and limited government that the DP hoped for were, therefore, quickly jettisoned in favor of a strong, centralized government. The new Constitution that emerged from the negotiations was not without merits. But, it proved too weak to restrain abuses of power in the future, as the optimism and inclusive “rainbow nation” politics of Mandela’s presidency (1994–99) gave way to the race-based politics of his successor, the former deputy president, Thabo Mbeki (1999–2008).

It is, perhaps, ironic that liberals who strove for a majority rule in South Africa would spend the years following the birth of a multiracial democracy criticizing the supposed promoter of black aspirations—the African National Congress. Having been elected to lead the DP following that party’s dismal showing in the 1994 general elections, Leon would have a central part in this critique of the newly powerful.

In retrospect, Mandela’s one-term presidency was a relatively happy time. South Africa, having escaped the often-predicted civil war, basked in international accolades. After a decade of economic contraction, growth picked up (albeit at a slow pace) and the country embarked on a limited but welcome experiment with economic liberalization. The opposition was regularly consulted on matters pertaining to the government of the country and Parliament played an important role in scrutinizing the executive branch. Mandela’s years were not without their share of controversies, but Leon’s respect and affection for South Africa’s first democratically elected president is obvious.

The 1999 general election saw Leon’s DP increase its share of the vote from 1.73 percent to 9.55 percent, making Leon the leader of the opposition (a constitutionally defined role in South Africa). It also saw the elevation to the presidency of a man who would become Leon’s implacable political enemy for the next 8 years—Thabo Mbeki. Their relations prior to 1999 were courteous, even friendly. Following his election, however, Mbeki became detached, arrogant, megalomaniac, and, with time, paranoid.

The imperial nature of Mbeki’s presidency stood in stark contrast with that of his predecessors. “Shortly after I first came to parliament in 1990 I encountered President F. W. de Klerk leaving the Union Buildings in Pretoria as I was entering them. South Africa was involved in a low-intensity but deadly civil war and de Klerk was a marked man from Right and Left. Yet his entourage comprised two vehicles: his own Mercedes with a driver and bodyguard followed by a police chase

car. That was it,” Leon writes. “Any encounter with Mbeki was different. . . . When I saw President Mbeki’s entourage, I managed to count 12 vehicles, including an ambulance, before I lost track altogether.”

African, indeed world, history is littered with names of men and women who got drunk on power and received their comeuppance in due course. As Enoch Powell, the British parliamentarian once observed, “All political lives, unless they are cut off in midstream at a happy juncture, end in failure, because that is the nature of politics and of human affairs.” Indeed, Mbeki’s tenure in office would end ignominiously, with the president forced to resign a few months after Leon voluntarily stepped down from his leadership role in Parliament and party. Before that, however, the two engaged in many vitriolic struggles.

Perhaps the most significant conflict concerned Mbeki’s opposition to the distribution of the relatively inexpensive antiretroviral drugs to HIV-infected persons. The scale of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa is staggering. In 2007, the UN AIDS estimates, about 18 percent of adults between the ages of 15 and 49 were HIV-positive. Each day, some 960 people died from AIDS and AIDS-related diseases. Yet, for a number of crucial years, when the government could have slowed the spread of this deadly disease, it ignored the problem.

To justify his actions, Mbeki stated that “a virus cannot cause a syndrome” and that the link between the two was simply “a thesis.” The real clue to Mbeki’s disastrous tinkering with settled medical opinion lay in his racial hypersensitivity. When asked in Parliament about the linkage between South Africa’s high incidence of rape (more than 50,000 cases are reported annually) and the spread of HIV, Mbeki accused one of Leon’s fellow liberal MPs of being “corrupted by the disease of racism” and wishing to portray “us, the black people of South Africa, Africa and the world as being . . . lazy, liars, foul-smelling, diseased, corrupt, violent, amoral, sexually-depraved, animalistic, savage—and rapists.”

The two disagreed over South Africa’s foreign policy, which tended to favor dictatorships, such as Burma, Cuba, Libya, and Zimbabwe; over the role of Parliament, the effectiveness of which in overseeing the executive branch was undermined when Mbeki filled the government benches with his loyalists; and over the freedom of the media, which Mbeki tried to muzzle by equating criticism of his government with racism. Leon did not escape the racist charge—a particularly

painful accusation for a man who fought for majority rule. Then again, the political discourse in Mbeki's South Africa deteriorated to a point where even the legendary anti-apartheid activist Helen Suzman was accused of being a "lesser agent of colonialism."

In the end, it was Leon who had the last laugh. He left the political scene on his own terms—a respected figure of whom Mandela said, "Your contribution to democracy is enormous. You have far more support for all you have done than you might ever read about." Mbeki's presidency, in contrast, is widely considered to have been, by and large, a failure.

On the Contrary is a textbook case of an autobiography well done. It is funny, self-deprecating, informative, and insightful. It provides an excellent summary of South African history over the last 20 or so years. It should be widely read.

Marian L. Tupy
Cato Institute