

SPY

*Uncovering
Craig Williamson*



*Jonathan
Aker*

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Preface

When I left my parents' home at the end of 1995 I locked my treasured possessions in a cupboard and promptly lost the key. The cupboard remained shut for twenty years. A locksmith opened it recently and I fished out my cherished possessions: my first-ever published newspaper article; a call-up ordering me to report for military service; assorted letters; photos of my dogs from Zardoz (when I was 9) to Zak (when I left home); a certificate from the Yeoville Boys' Boxing Club; and a 12-page dot matrix printed essay titled 'First and Last'. I blew off the dust and read the essay that I wrote in 1995 when I was a journalism student at Rhodes University. The assignment was to write about a momentous day in South Africa's history. The ink has almost faded on the 22-year-old essay, in which I wrote about 17 August 1982, the day Ruth First was killed.

I had become fascinated with First. She was a political activist devoted to the liberation of South Africa, and she was also a brave journalist – the kind of journalist I wanted to be. She exposed the

slave-like conditions on potato farms in Bethal (a farming town in Mpumalanga), and went where few reporters dared to venture in the 1960s, writing about migrant labour, bus boycotts and the women's campaign against the imposition of passes.

Not long after I submitted the essay, Craig Williamson revealed that his Special Branch unit had been responsible for killing First as well as Jeanette Schoon and her six-year-old daughter Katryn two years later.

Until that point all I knew about Williamson was that he was considered apartheid's 'super-spy' because he had infiltrated the white left. I had been curious about how Williamson could lead a double life and betray people with whom he had formed friendships, and now I wondered what had made him graduate from spying to killing. To my mind at least, Williamson, who was English speaking and had matriculated from St John's College, didn't fit the profile of a typical apartheid agent.

I watched Williamson take his seat at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's amnesty hearing in 1998 and spin a well-rehearsed story about being a patriot who fought the communists. He didn't look like someone who was seeking forgiveness, but he managed to escape responsibility for the killings and for the damaged people he left in his wake. I was angry that he had got away scot-free.

While writing this book I contacted Williamson's former 'comrades' to ask for interviews. Invariably there would be a lengthy pause followed by a 'Why Williamson?'

The truth is that I hadn't given Williamson much thought until 2010, when I flew to Durban for work with a colleague, an up-and-coming journalist in his mid-twenties. We hired a car and made our way from King Shaka International Airport into the city centre. As I turned onto the Ruth First Freeway, I thought about Williamson. I remarked to my colleague that

I wondered what Craig Williamson thinks when he travels on the Ruth First Freeway.

My colleague looked at me blankly. 'Who is Craig Williamson?'

I realised then that while it's important to remember people like Ruth First who were killed in the struggle to bring about democracy, it's equally important that we don't allow the killers to slip into oblivion. If we forget them and what they did, they escape accountability for their actions because, as Milan Kundera's frequently repeated quote goes, 'The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.'

Chapter 1

A Place to Begin

How does one begin to understand a life, to account for the choices people make, the ways they behave, the causes they support, especially in the case of those who lied, dissembled, betrayed, killed, as Craig Williamson did? One suggestive story about Williamson's father, Herbert Tidby Williamson, may be a good place to begin.

In 1939, when war broke out, the 31-year-old Herbert Williamson, who had been born in Scotland but grown up in South Africa, sailed to England and joined the British army, enlisting with the 3rd King's Own Hussars. In 1941 his regiment was sent to Singapore, but when this British outpost fell to the Japanese, the Hussars were diverted to Java. On 8 March 1942, while fighting in Java and after being promoted to lieutenant just five days earlier, Williamson and his entire unit were captured by the Japanese. He became one of about 140,000 Allied prisoners of war who were put to work in factories, mines and construction sites across Japan during the Second World War. Here they endured unimaginable hardship and often brutal abuse at the hands of their captors. Reports describe the POWs in Japan mostly as 'skeletons in rags', their skin stretched over their bones. Those who didn't die from beatings, the hell ships or death marches often succumbed to diseases and malnutrition.

Williamson was sent to a prisoner camp in Fukuoka, where he was used as slave labour in a coal mine. In July 1944, a 22-year-old Japanese guard named Kunio Saruwatari, whom prisoners nicknamed ‘the Bastard’, assaulted Williamson as punishment for reporting a thrashing of a fellow inmate to the camp commandant. Williamson was repeatedly beaten and knocked to the ground, where the blows continued to rain down on him. Another guard, Sergeant Nishikawa Yonochi, joined in with punches and slaps for another ten minutes. After the war, Saruwatari was charged with violating the Geneva conventions of war for beating, mistreating and abusing numerous POWs, among them Williamson. He was found guilty and sentenced to twenty years’ hard labour.

Williamson was one of the few prisoners of war in Japan who survived. He even survived the ‘Fat Man’. On 9 August 1945, while he was in the Tanoura prison camp in Fukuoka, about 160 kilometres from Nagasaki, the US dropped a nuclear bomb – codenamed ‘Fat Man’ – that devastated the city and surrounds and persuaded Japan to surrender, finally ending the war. Five weeks after the bomb was dropped, Williamson and the other 392 POWs in his camp were rescued.¹

After the war, Williamson returned to South Africa and settled in Johannesburg, where he went to work at Williamson & Patterson, the successful tyre company his father had founded. In September 1948, he married South African-born Ruth Freda Darrall. In time he moved with his growing family to a 12-acre plot in Johannesburg’s northern suburbs. Later in life he was described as a tall, thin, handsome man with a neatly trimmed moustache and a no-nonsense stare. The Williamsons had three children: two daughters and a son, born on 23 April 1949: Craig Michael Williamson.

Chapter 2

School Days: ‘The One Good Thing about Williamson’

Like his father, Craig Williamson was sent to school at St John’s College in Johannesburg. St John’s is an elite private school in the Anglican tradition. It occupies a magnificent campus on the hill in Houghton, designed by the architectural firm of Herbert Baker in the English collegiate style, with stone cloisters and spacious quadrangles that provide an appropriate setting for the education of Johannesburg’s upper middle class. With tuition and boarding fees currently standing at R120,000 per year, it is an exclusive establishment and, in keeping with the times, it now admits pupils of all colours. When Williamson arrived in 1959, it took only white pupils. Another old boy, Hugh Lewin, who matriculated some years before Williamson, later described the ethos of the time:

Nobody ever explained to the all-male inmates that they were part of an abnormal environment ... Not a word. Just play up, lads, play the game ... Ignore what’s happening just beyond the cloisters, in the powder-keg of the unjust society outside. You’re tomorrow’s leaders, chaps, so play up, play up, and play the game.¹

In 1962 Williamson entered high school, which is known as ‘the Remove’, because the boys are removed from the top of the pile in the primary school, where they are big fish in a small pond, and dumped at the bottom of a new and much bigger pile. ‘In high school the Remove is the lowest position of humanity. They are lower than scum,’ says St John’s old boy Gus Powers, who was in the same boarding house as Williamson – Hill House.² According to Powers, the new boys are set what is called a Remove exam by the boarding house and school prefects. It required the boys to name all the teachers and the prefects, and know which sports they played and when their birthdays fell. Only when they passed the exam would they be considered members of the high school.

Another tradition to which the new initiates had to submit to was ‘fagging’. Boys would be forced to do chores for their masters, the senior pupils. Williamson would have had to polish his fag master’s shoes, cadet boots, and sword; make him toast and tea; and go to the tuckshop at break to buy him grub. If a boy didn’t perform these tasks satisfactorily the fag master would order him to bend over and aim his boot at his backside. Sometimes the fag master would kick the boy even if he did perform the tasks satisfactorily.³

Seen in this way, St John’s appears almost a caricature of the English public school, a sort of South African version of Greyfriars to which that fat and fatuous figure Billy Bunter belonged. And, indeed, Craig Williamson, because he was large and fat, became known to his fellow pupils as Bunter Williamson. I grew up on the Bunter stories and identified with Billy Bunter’s plight as an outsider. His comical attempts to dig himself out of deeper and deeper trouble with his schoolmates and the stern teachers endeared him to me. But in the views of Bunter Williamson’s fellows, there was little that was endearing about him.

One old boy tells me he was bullied by 'Bunter and his mates' in the senior common room. 'He called me in because I had been "cheeky". He made me bend over and kicked me. I was propelled into the furniture.'⁴ Another old boy kept his distance from Williamson because he was such a shock to the system. He was a mean rugger-bugger type; unimaginative and cruel, with a reputation for beating up pupils.⁵ Gus Powers, who was in Williamson's boarding house, hands me black-and-white photographs of the boarders taken each year at Hill House as they made their way up the forms to matric. Williamson is easy to spot: in most of the pictures he's in full scowl mode. He is oversized and awkward, as if he doesn't feel comfortable in his skin. He looks like a grown man dressed up as a school boy; a cross between Billy Bunter and the mischievous boy from the Richmal Crompton novels *Just William*. Powers says he disliked Williamson and Williamson disliked him. 'Bunter', says Powers, 'picked on one of my friends, Michael "Jobbie" Foreman. Jobbie was a bit of a brain. I suppose today you would call him a nerd. He had an arrangement with the geography teacher to use the classroom to study. There was a pile of *National Geographic* magazines and Jobbie would let a few of us come in and read them while he studied. It was a haven – a room where we could switch off. Then someone would bang on the door. It was Bunter, who would barge in and shout and push the chairs around and shove Jobbie around and make everything totally unpleasant. Bunter was just an oaf.'

Powers plants his thumb on Williamson's face in the photograph. 'Look at him, you can see he wasn't a nice person ... He's the type of guy who pushes in front of you in a queue. The truth is that Williamson was insignificant at school. I knew him because we knew everybody in our boarding house, but there was no reason why anyone would know him. He never

achieved anything. He didn't get a rank in cadets, he didn't act in the school plays and was a nothing at sport – he played prop in one of the minor rugby teams, the thirds or fourths. He never achieved anything.'

Indeed, it seems that Williamson managed to slide through St John's official life unnoticed. When I consult the school annuals, Williamson is conspicuous by his absence. I start with the 1962 *Johannian*, when 13-year-old Williamson was in the Remove. It documents a school outing to Soweto. This was at a time where government whites-only schools were in denial about township life. I wonder if Williamson went on one of these Soweto outings and saw the conditions black people lived under. The report concludes: 'Boys returning to school from an outing are always impressed by this huge and complicated world at their doorsteps; a world they scarcely knew existed.'

But of Williamson there is no trace in the pages of the annual. He wasn't 1962's 'smartest recruit' or 'best junior drummer'. I scan the surnames of the boys in the various teams and clubs, but no C.M. Williamson lurks among a flood of double-barrels: Chancellor-Maddison, Hayse-Greson, Harries-Jones and Wedderburn-Maxwell. I finally reach the annual that covers Williamson's final year at St John's: from 1962 to 1965 I haven't had a single sighting. I'm about to give up. I flip over the pages of the 1966 annual and spy a photo of a group of boys in school uniform with their hands raised. It's the report from the History Society about the school's own election following the country's general election that year.

'On the night of the election, four candidates were each allowed fifteen minutes in which to persuade the electorate. This proved difficult. A.G. Smurthwaite led, from the National Party, but he was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of his own supporters. A.H. Ashton's cultured assurances that the United Party had a policy

were howled down. In the prevailing pandemonium, he was once heard to refer to the Poqo palaces of the Transkei, but part of his time was lost while an over-enthusiastic UP man was expelled for hurling a broom-head at the Chairman. Perhaps his idea of a clean sweep of the whole proceedings, but he was not asked for his motive. M.B. Walker, Progressive, had some support in Mrs Susman's [*sic*] own constituency [of Houghton, where St John's was situated]. The next sentence gives me goosebumps: 'but the most effective speech came from C.M. Williamson, on behalf of the Republicans. He judged the temper of the meeting accurately, and confined himself to Van der Merwe jokes and questions about the advisability of multiracial marriages.'

After Williamson's speech the electorate 'solemnly' went to the vote in a secret ballot, the results of which were as follows:

C.M. Williamson, Republican Party, 50 votes

M.B. Walker, Progressive Party, 36 votes

A.G. Smurthwaite, National Party, 32 votes

A.H. Ashton, United Party, 22 votes.

The outcome of the election was that the bastion of liberal education in Johannesburg, St John's, voted for the Republican Party, a right-wing splinter from the Nationalists. The real elections were a little different and the Republican Party managed to secure just 22 of the 356 seats. Dr Verwoerd's National Party secured 154. The Progressive Party won 26 seats and barely kept Houghton, which was won by Helen Suzman with just 117 votes.

The report reflects on the school's election: 'Readers who are perturbed by this result may be reassured. It is more truly a tribute to the popularity of Williamson than an indication of the political opinions of the school.' Chris Albertyn, another St John's old boy, remembers the mock election and doesn't think Williamson won it on the strength of his Van der Merwe jokes.

‘Bunter was no fool,’ he says. ‘Bunter ran a brilliant campaign. He had posters all over the school, with shocking statements, like “Do you want your daughter to marry a kaffir?” They were racist and provocative. He was also excellent in the debate. Bunter’s victory was a testament to his deftness and forcefulness in winning the election. He was head and shoulders the best candidate.’ Albertyn never knew if Williamson’s own views were the same as those he was espousing as the Republican candidate, but he says he got a sense that he was very conservative and pro-government.

What little we do know about Williamson’s early political views comes from an anecdote he himself has told. One night in October 1962 Williamson went out of the dorm and stood on the rugby field and looked up. It was in the middle of the Cuban missile crisis – an anxious 13-day political and military standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union. Williamson wondered what the sky would look like if it were full of missiles and atom bombs. It was a turning point in his life – and marked the beginning of his lifelong obsession with the Cold War.⁶

According to Gus Powers, Williamson’s only leadership position at school was that he headed up Hill House’s Food Committee. The committee was meant to take up boys’ grievances about what they were served, which, according to Powers, was appalling: macaroni-and-cheese that didn’t fall off when you turned the plate upside down, bread pudding made from leftover sandwiches (full of old peanut butter and bits of polony), soup with beetles, and mince and rice that made you violently ill. ‘The food was so bad – and they gave you so little,’ he says.

But Williamson, it seems, didn’t take up food grievances. ‘The committee was useless,’ says Powers. ‘And Bunter was less than useless – we had to stage a protest to get better food.’ Their protest was to refuse to stand when the headmaster said grace.

Perhaps it's the memory of the terrible food that leaves a bitter taste, but suddenly Powers fires off a stream of angry volleys directed at Williamson. 'Old Fatso was a sloth. He was bolshy and arrogant and dislikeable – in appearance and in nature. He was a miserable bully.'

Well, was there nothing good about Williamson? I ask.

He thinks for a while. 'Actually,' he says, 'there was one good thing about Williamson.'

The one good thing about Williamson is that after a weekend at home he'd arrive back at the boarding school on Sunday evening with a roast chicken. Sunday dinner in the boarding house was an orange, coffee and bread. 'Southey [a mutual friend] would sit and chow this chicken with Williamson – and we would all drool. Afterwards Southey would bring me the carcass. It was a luxury. I used to strip every bone. Southey was sick one Sunday and Williamson came to me and handed me the chicken carcass. That's the only nice thing I can say about him. He was a monster.'

Was St John's perhaps the laboratory where the monster was made? Glenn Moss, a radical student activist from the 1970s who knew Williamson during their student days at the University of the Witwatersrand, recalls meeting a neighbour who boasted that as a St John's prefect he'd beaten 'Bunter' Williamson. Moss had a horrible picture of prefects flaying the fat boy. 'I thought you'd like that,' the neighbour told Moss. But Moss was horrified. 'You helped create a monster,' he yelled.⁷

Renfrew Christie, who went to the neighbouring King Edward VII School, believes Williamson developed a chip on his shoulder and points the finger at St John's. 'I knew a lot of St John's boys – the species that go on to own the country – and that is not Craig Williamson. He has an anger that I don't understand. It's fair to say that most St John's boys supported

apartheid and thought it part of the natural order – as did Williamson. But you cannot understand South Africa in race terms, you have to understand it in class terms – and St John's was the upper class. I have no idea where Craig's chip comes from, but it's very easy to have a chip at St John's where there are extremely rich kids and extremely clever kids – and if you feel in any way out of place they let you know it.⁸

Chapter 3

Agent RS 167 is Born

After finishing school, Williamson left South Africa for the first time and went on a Musgrove & Watson package tour of Europe. A Musgrove & Watson holiday was a two-month expedition that many St John's boys undertook after matric. Williamson travelled to the Netherlands, England, France, Italy and Austria, where he skied, drank and, according to a former St John's pupil, lost his virginity to a prostitute in Amsterdam. 'I heard she ate an apple throughout the episode, which must have been rather deflating for Bunter.'¹

From 1967 young white men on leaving school were conscripted into the South African Defence Force (SADF) and were required to serve nine months and then report for a camp for a month each year for the next ten years. An alternative to service in the SADF, though, was to join the police force, which involved a four-year commitment. In May 1968, Williamson joined the ranks of the South African Police and, at first, was issued with 'nothing more lethal than a pen'.² He spent six months at the police academy in Pretoria, emerging as a constable, and was then stationed at Parkview Police Station for six weeks before being sent to Randburg, where he was assigned to the Johannesburg North Housebreaking Squad. He spent his time doing lightweight Bobby-on-the-beat police work, taking

statements, telling partying teens to ‘keep it down’, and cruising the streets for traffic offenders.

When 17-year-old Barry Gilder’s parents left him and his sisters alone one evening in the late 1960s, the three of them threw a raucous party.³ The neighbours complained about the noise to the police, who arrived at the front door. Gilder is almost certain that one of the officers present was Williamson. After matriculating, Gilder went to the army and then to Wits, where he once again met Williamson, by then a student at the university. The memory of Williamson outside his house does not fade.

Philippe le Roux, who had been at St John’s with Williamson, was at a party in Sandown in 1970. On his way home he drove through a red traffic light at the bottom of Tyrwhitt Avenue. A large white unmarked police car followed him until he stopped outside his home in Melrose. The driver and the passenger got out. ‘The driver was a policeman who spoke to me in Afrikaans. Bunter was the passenger. I thought I was definitely going to be done for jumping the light (I am not sure whether drink driving was an offence back then). Bunter intervened and said he had been at school with me. I was let off with a warning.’⁴

Williamson wrote, and passed, his sergeant exams, which gave the police bosses ‘a little bit of a problem because they had a young kid who had passed his exams’ and was now superior in rank to the policemen older than him.⁵ Soon after earning his stripes, he received over the police car radio a ‘Code 4’ message, which was an order to return to the station immediately. There a group of men were waiting for him. ‘Are you Sergeant Williamson?’ one of them asked. Williamson nodded. ‘We’re from security and we’d like to talk to you.’⁶ His colleagues wondered what Sergeant Williamson had done to arouse attention from the police force’s most powerful division, the Special Branch. The security policemen took him to a park where they had a braai, and asked

him a lot of questions about himself.⁷

It was Colonel Johann Coetzee, Witwatersrand Special Branch head, who had recognised Williamson's spy potential. As he later told the journalist Denis Herbstein, he was familiar with Williamson's family background and realised that Williamson led the kind of upper-class life that was worth going into battle for. But most of all he knew Williamson's makeup and what the Germans call his *Weltanschauung* – his whole way of thinking. Coetzee felt that Williamson had the aptitude for the job.⁸ If anyone knew what qualities and characteristics made a good spy, it was Coetzee. He had been the handler for the highly successful secret agent Q018, aka Gerard Ludi, the Williamson prototype, who had infiltrated the South African Communist Party in the early 1960s and cracked the organisation wide open. As a result, the brilliant advocate and party general secretary, Bram Fischer, was sent to jail. 'After the revolution,' said Fischer, 'he [Coetzee] will be my garden boy.'⁹ Unhappily, Fischer's fantasy didn't come to fruition and he spent the rest of his life in jail, only being released a short while before his death from cancer.

After Ludi, Coetzee handled Cornelius John Brookes, who infiltrated the liberation movement, which had gone underground after its banning, and helped secure the conviction of the Durban lawyer Rowley Arenstein, a leader of the Congress of Democrats, which was aligned to the ANC.

In a *New York Times* profile on Coetzee, the journalist Alan Cowell once wrote that South Africans who had studied Coetzee's career used the word 'ruthless' to describe his abilities as an interrogator and security operative.¹⁰ As Glenn Moss, who was a recipient of Coetzee's unwanted attention, remarked: 'He fancied himself as the intellectual of the police establishment – he had a very high regard for his own opinion.' Coetzee made it known that he was an avid student of ancient

Greek philosophy, and claimed he had a PhD from the Rand Afrikaans University. This doctoral claim, says Moss, was an exaggeration. Investigation revealed that while Coetzee had a postgraduate degree, it was a master's.¹¹

Beginning as a young man in the late 1940s, Coetzee rose through the ranks until he took over as head of the police's Special Branch in 1979, making him one of the most powerful men in apartheid South Africa. Special Branch was a powerful and influential division within the South African Police, and had a reputation for cold-blooded efficiency. Under legislation promoted by the Minister of Justice B.J. Vorster, who later became Prime Minister, the Security Branch enjoyed the power to track down, detain and extract information from anyone they suspected of acting against the state. Anti-apartheid activists were routinely detained, interrogated and tortured. From 1963 they could be held without trial for 90 days at a time, and from 1967 for 180 days – and then rearrested, as Vorster boasted, 'until this side of eternity'.

Two days after the braai with the Special Branch members, Coetzee met Williamson and invited him to join its secret unit, Section 4, and infiltrate the left-wing student movement. Williamson was impressed. It all sounded exciting. The commander of the unit drove a military-green Citroën car with frog's-eye headlamps and a radio telephone, which in 1971 was straight out of James Bond. He could go to Wits University, they would pay his fees and he would receive a salary. It wasn't a difficult decision to make – and it only took him a minute to make it.¹² Agent RS 167 was thus born.

Coetzee and Williamson's bond would last a quarter of a century. After accepting the offer, Williamson embarked on an intensive spy-training programme and was taught about operational methodology like electronic bugging; sending

coded messages through dead drops or dead letter boxes; and exchanging information via cut-outs, which are mutually trusted intermediaries. However, his most important lesson was in personal security, making sure he kept his cover and wasn't caught out, such as being seen walking into the wrong building. Coetzee wanted to make certain that Williamson's cover would stand up to scrutiny, and he was taught to consider beforehand all his actions, where he went, what he did and who he spoke to.¹³

Section 4's headquarters was based on the top floor of a building in the Johannesburg suburb of Fordsburg, near the Oriental Plaza. It was from there that the police ran operations against the underground ANC and the SACP. Towards the end of 1971 Williamson 'resigned' from his job as a uniformed policeman. This was to ensure there'd be a break in his service – at least on paper – before he enrolled at Wits. To the rest of the world he became a layabout, spending six months before university opened for the 1972 academic year doing very little apart from growing his hair.¹⁴ A few months later, in February 1972, Agent RS 167 stepped onto Wits campus.

Chapter 4

‘Comrade’ Sergeant Craig Goes to Wits

In 1972, an overweight and bearded Williamson walked onto Wits campus, and enrolled to study law and politics. He had things that most of the other first-years didn’t: a car, a steady stream of income, and a rank in the South African Police.

Williamson’s police masters told him to take it easy initially since there would inevitably be suspicion that because he had come from the police he might still be working for them. The plan was that his presence and his known police service record would divert attention away from other police and government spies already on campus. He was meant to be a lightning conductor, a spy term for someone whose task it is to draw the heat away from the real spies. These included Derek Brune, of Special Branch, and Paul Sarbutt and Arthur McGiven, who were both agents of BOSS, the state intelligence agency established in 1968 under the notorious General Hendrik van den Bergh. Williamson’s orders were to get involved in the student activities and see what happened. ‘Be patient,’ his handler, Colonel Johann Coetzee, told him.

Williamson hadn’t told anybody he had been recruited into Special Branch’s Section 4. His mother and father were

concerned at his behaviour since he had ostensibly left the police. He had grown his hair and had come into money, which he said he had won at the horse races. Coetzee then met Herbert Williamson, told him that his son was a spy and reassured him that all was well. At the same time Williamson told his girlfriend, Ingrid Bacher, about his double life. She wasn't shocked, having suspected that he was still involved in police work in some way.¹

In his first year at university, Williamson joined the Arts Faculty Council and began his climb through the student movement. In his second year he was elected to the Student Representative Council (SRC). A quarter of that year's SRC was made up of spies. Of the 16 members, Williamson, Sarbutt, McGiven and Brune were agents. In 1973 Williamson was also elected to the Wits chapter of NUSAS, the national student union which was mainly represented on the English-speaking campuses of the country. From the 1960s NUSAS had become increasingly vocal in its opposition to apartheid, campaigning for 'free education in a free society' and 'the realisation of full human rights in South Africa'. In response, the state acted against a number of student leaders and in the 1970s, as student protests became more radical, attacked the organisation with renewed vigour.²

From the moment Williamson arrived on campus, some student activists were concerned about his bona fides. Indeed, Williamson was just one of many students whose stories didn't hold up. But it was difficult to prove that people were spies just as it was also difficult for people accused of being spies to prove that they weren't. The truth is that no one knew for sure. It was an era of paranoia – allegations flew about and some people were destroyed by them.³

Spies on campus were a fact of life: activists knew they existed and had to live with them. As a result the NUSAS leader Fink Haysom advised activists to 'confide your inner political

convictions only to your pillow ... and then only in the dark'.⁴ In fact, accusing student activists of being spies was part of the Security Branch's strategy to damage the student movement. The more the students pointed fingers at each other, the less effective they were at undermining the state. Besides, it also drew attention away from the actual agents.

As for Williamson, student activists struggled to make sense of his choosing to go into the police instead of the army. For those opposed to joining the apartheid war machine, the only way to get out of national service was to flee the country, go into hiding, be tried and go to jail or join the police. At that time politically conscious students who elected not to leave South Africa would go to the army because police officers had the reputation of being apartheid's storm troopers while the army was engaged in dealing with the enemy without.

Williamson had different versions of why he joined the police. Glenn Moss recalls Williamson telling him that he had failed matric and in a punitive measure his father sent him to the police force. Williamson told his 'friend' and fellow activist Julian Sturgeon that he went into the police as part of his teenage rebellion against his parents and St John's, which he described as a place for wimps. 'He said he'd fallen out with his father so decided to go to the opposite extreme and go hang out with Afrikaans people. That was his motivation to say, "Fuck the English." That's how he explained his movement away from his well-to-do St John's background and to the police.' Williamson told Sturgeon that after being in the police he had seen the light and had a Pauline conversion – and came back to his liberal sensibilities. Years later, in an interview with the ANC's Robert McBride, Williamson explained that he did the maths and decided that doing four years in the police in one go was better than nine months followed by a monthly camp each

year for the next decade in the army.

Williamson told his comrades that his time as a policeman had politicised him and shown him the evils of apartheid. When fellow students quizzed him about being a policeman, he'd say: 'Those sons of bitches are bad. What do you expect me to do? You don't know anything about it, you are just kids at varsity with theoretical knowledge. I've seen it in action. Have you arrested anybody for a pass offence?'⁵

For Cedric de Beer, a St John's old boy, Williamson's transformation from right-wing school boy to raving liberal student was just a little too good to be true. After all, De Beer had been in the audience when Williamson gave a tub-thumping racist speech in the 1966 school election.⁶ De Beer remembers bumping into Williamson on campus and Williamson going out of his way to justify his behaviour during the election episode. He told De Beer that he wanted to be part of the event and as all the other parties were taken, 'just for fun' he picked the Republican Party. Williamson had acted pre-emptively to try to squash De Beer's suspicions, but it only made De Beer more suspicious. All the same, De Beer had no hard evidence that could prove Williamson was a spy. He was reasonably sure he needed to be careful about what he said when Williamson was around and decided to keep certain things from him, but at the same time he was working on NUSAS campaigns with Williamson. Life carried on.

Despite the suspicions, Williamson was accepted into the student activist fold. While he provided information to Special Branch, there were no repercussions for the students or staff he was informing on. That was the difference between police and intelligence work – the police wanted evidence, to make arrests and secure convictions, which was the last thing intelligence agents wanted. They sought information – and the more credible

Williamson was at Wits, the more information he could get.

One of the members of the Wits staff whom Williamson reported on was Randy Speer, an American lecturer in the Political Studies Department. Speer was considered so extreme that the Security Branch asked Williamson to keep an eye on him and find out if he was a member of the South African Communist Party. Speer says that his political consciousness was formed in the crucible of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement in the States. At Wits, however, he was the most conservative person in the deeply Marxist politics department. While he was on campus Speer led a series of anti-Vietnam War rallies and other student activities that could be seen as anti-apartheid, but he was careful about expressing his criticism against South Africa openly. Speer recalls that although Williamson turned up at most political functions, he was not aware that Williamson was watching him. He considered Williamson just another ‘fubsy, unkempt, hirsute Witsie’, who didn’t stand out. Forty years later, he has no idea what information Williamson would have passed on that might have been of interest to Special Branch.⁷ Besides Speer, other academics and intellectual activists that Williamson observed during his career as a student spy were the Natal University political philosopher, Rick Turner, who was assassinated, probably by the security forces, in 1978; Steve Biko, founding member and leader of the Black Consciousness Movement; and Cosmas Desmond, a Catholic priest who was actively opposed to forced removals of black communities and whose exposé *The Discarded People* was banned by the government.⁸

Williamson was shrewd as a campus spy. He presented himself as political but not ‘politically political’. He didn’t join the student movement shouting communist slogans or trying to prove his radical credentials. Many left-wing activists at the

time had pretensions to being Marxists, but not Williamson; he knew he would not be able to pull it off. He represented himself as someone who was sympathetic to left politics but was not interested in political theory.⁹ He liked to be part of the action and was prominent in student protests, vigils, demonstrations and marches. He once even pushed a security police officer down some stairs during a police raid on the SRC offices at Wits.¹⁰

An incident in 1973 was characteristic of his preferred role. In that year the police intervened on an Anglo American mine on the Witwatersrand in response to a miners' strike. When the police action was over, 11 miners were left dead. The next day Wits students marched from campus over the Queen Elizabeth Bridge to Anglo American's head office in Main Street in downtown Johannesburg in support of the miners. When the students arrived at the building the door was locked. Williamson launched his weight at the door, forcing it open. The students took occupation of the company's head office. 'We shall overcome,' they sang.¹¹

Williamson was particularly useful when right-wing students from the conservative Rand Afrikaans University came to attack Wits students protesting on Jan Smuts Avenue. There would be clashes between the two groups and Williamson would beat the RAU students with placard sticks.¹² There was an element of physical aggression and thuggishness about Williamson, who stood in the front of protests, shouted the loudest and insulted the police. In this way he built strong credit in the struggle bank. Most of the left-wing students were intellectuals and weren't given to expressing themselves with physical violence. Williamson, however, seemed an expert in violence and impressed his comrades as fearless on the front lines. Of course, there was a very good reason that he was fearless – he had nothing to fear.

Julian Sturgeon thought Williamson was a very useful warrior in the cause because he'd come from the other side and was now with 'us'.¹³ He also recalls Williamson inciting the students to become more inflammatory. 'He was an agent provocateur, working in the background to spread mayhem by throwing petrol on the fire. He then stepped back from being in direct control but he was always available,' says Sturgeon.

Williamson's involvement in another prominent student protest is also instructive. On 27 October 1971 Ahmed Timol, who had been detained by the police under the Terrorism Act on charges of being a member of the ANC and Communist Party, fell to his death out of a window on the 10th floor of John Vorster Square in Johannesburg. Though there were strong suspicions about this act of defenestration, the police claimed he had committed suicide. In July 1972, soon after an official inquest found that no one was to blame for Timol's death, Wits students gathered on Jan Smuts Avenue, outside the campus, to embark on a massive protest.¹⁴

Special Branch monitored the event. They lined up on the pavement and on the island in the middle of the road. Press photographs revealed later in court would show the Special Branch officers had batons up their sleeves. The students were given an order to disperse within three minutes. The police then charged the students, beating up a few and arresting about 50 of them, including Denis Beckett, later a prominent journalist, and Colin Lamont, who as a judge in 2016 put the Czech fugitive Radovan Krejčíř behind bars for a long time. Among the arrested students were Williamson and his sister Lisa-Jane.¹⁵

Williamson's masters had told him not to avoid being arrested. The officer who arrested him was not amused that an ex-colleague was involved in a demonstration. He chased Williamson across Wits campus, calling him a '*bleddie verraaiër*

bliksem' (a bloody betraying shit) and gave him a few heavy smacks with a baton. When Williamson was being processed at the police station, a policeman noticed he had a handcuff key on his keyring and accused him of planning to escape. The students spent a few days in jail before they were charged with 'riotous assembly' and failing to disperse, and were released on bail. The trial that ensued lasted almost a year.¹⁶

Advocate Denis Kuny, instructed by Raymond Tucker, defended the students. When the state concluded its case, the defence applied to have charges dropped against some of the students. Williamson's sister was the only one who was discharged – even though she wasn't one of the students whom the defence had applied to be discharged.¹⁷ In the end the state realised it wouldn't be able to secure a conviction and dropped all charges against the students.

Within a short space of time, Williamson had found his niche in student politics. Besides his prominent role in public protests, he understood finances and was administratively competent; he had organisational skills and could get things done. He was prepared to do the non-glamorous tasks that student activists weren't interested in taking on: organising events, balancing the books, handing out flyers and putting up posters. Williamson's financial expertise and efficiency saw him being elected SRC treasurer in 1974.¹⁸ Later he played a similar role in NUSAS and was widely credited with having nursed the national student body, which was on the brink of bankruptcy, back to financial health.¹⁹

Being the money man for both the SRC and NUSAS was a carefully conceived strategy because it gave Williamson complete knowledge of everything that was going on in the movement. It also gave him an opportunity to create links with the funders, especially the overseas funders, of the student movement and provided a platform for him to exploit these connections at a

later stage in his spying career.

Williamson, it appears, had learned to balance the books by assisting in the Danish Confectionery, a cosy bun and coffee bakery in Smal Street in Johannesburg's CBD, which was owned by his fiancée's family. On the face of it Ingrid Bacher, a slender brunette, was an asset to Williamson. She was refined and cerebral and had a level of sophistication he lacked. A microbiologist, she worked for the South African Institute for Medical Research in Braamfontein.²⁰ In 1974 Williamson interrupted a NUSAS leadership meeting to tell his comrades that he had got married, and handed round bottles of champagne. 'I got married,' he told his comrades. 'Let's celebrate.' Glenn Moss, who was present, was surprised that Williamson hadn't invited him or any of the other student leaders to the wedding. No doubt if they had, they would have been surprised to meet Johann Coetzee and other Special Branch officers who were present.²¹

On this occasion Williamson made sure his cover was not blown. But there were times when he almost gave himself away. Williamson was a heavy drinker and, once at a NUSAS party, for no reason that anyone could ever establish, he turned on Ian Kitai, a medical student on the SRC. He held him up against the wall and pushed, shoved and hit him. He also hurled racial epithets, calling him a '*kaffirboetie*', a term completely unacceptable to the student left.²²

Dr Ian Kitai, now a specialist in paediatric medicine in Toronto, recalls the incident. He remembers seeing Williamson at the student orientation week dressed as a hippie wearing a colourful bandana. Kitai was suspicious of Williamson because he seemed so desperate to fit in, and he let it be known that he believed Williamson was a spy. This, Kitai believes, is what led to Williamson attacking him.²³

Williamson apologised to Kitai the next day, blaming his

behaviour on the alcohol. He said he had been under stress and confessed that he had an alcohol abuse problem. He promised to deal with it. In fact, he did because afterwards he took to soda water. Williamson's behaviour when he was inebriated was threatening to expose him, and his handlers in the Security Branch instructed him to stop drinking.²⁴

Later, Williamson would tell the NUSAS leader Karel Tip that the reason he stopped drinking was because he had been involved in a car crash while driving under the influence. He also told Julian Sturgeon that he decided to sober up when he came to Wits because he wanted to get into shape. 'He said he gave up booze and started pumping iron and lifting weights,' says Sturgeon. Even later – in 1981, after he was exposed as a spy – he told a journalist writing a profile on him that when he found himself in rooms with marijuana-smoking students he declined their joints, telling them with much political correctness that he resisted dagga and liquor because they were bourgeois means to deaden the horrors of capitalism.²⁵ He also claimed that he justified his abstinence by saying that not a drop of alcohol would cross his lips until liberation.²⁶

The incident with Kitai was not Williamson's only close shave of being exposed. When he began his spying career, the police gave him a clapped-out Volkswagen Beetle that had come from Germany, complete with left-hand drive. On the first day he drove it he pulled the sun visor down and out fell a police card, of the kind the police used to put in their windshield when they parked so that traffic officers wouldn't give them a ticket. On another occasion he was hosting a NUSAS meeting at his flat in Braamfontein and the Security Branch had sent a pair of bugging technicians to instal devices to record the meeting. The students arrived early and the technicians had to stay in the cupboard throughout the meeting.²⁷

After the incident with Kitai, Williamson redoubled his efforts to prove he was a legitimate student activist and made himself even more useful. A group of students attached to the NUSAS-linked Wages Commission, including Glenn Moss and Jenny Curtis, established an advice bureau in Johannesburg for workers called the Industrial Aid Society. Williamson helped them set it up. He carried furniture and brought a spare typewriter from the SRC. He also helped with the bookkeeping system. 'Jenny had no sense that this was a dangerous man,' says Moss.²⁸ Even though Williamson was useful, Moss felt more comfortable when he wasn't around. Although there was no official attempt to exclude him, Moss's circle of student radicals choose to spend as little time with Williamson as possible.

Chapter 5

Spying on NUSAS

In 1974, at the annual NUSAS congress, a new national executive was elected for the organisation. Karel Tip was chosen as NUSAS president and Craig Williamson was voted onto the executive as the finance officer, a full-time paid position. Williamson's nomination, which was supported by the Wits delegation, was unopposed – perhaps unsurprisingly because the position was the least exciting one on the executive. 'It was not that easy to get competent people to take up that post, so Williamson's willingness was welcomed,' says Tip. Tip thought that although Williamson might be a bit conservative in his views, he was sufficiently opposed to apartheid to make his involvement with the student left credible.¹

Williamson was the first government spy to be elected onto the NUSAS executive. As a member, he participated in discussions around NUSAS programmes and policies and was part of the decision-making processes. As a result, the Special Branch acquired a front-row seat to the inner workings and decisions of the South African student left.

According to the student activist Gerry Maré, after the NUSAS congress some student leaders met to discuss 'what the hell are we going to do with Williamson?' He was not overtly political in the same way as the rest of the NUSAS faithful,

but he had been put forward by Wits, and if they refused to work with him, NUSAS could be split. The students felt the consequences of rejecting him would be too severe. 'We decided to go along with him on the exec – after all, we had no evidence that he was a spy, just rumours,' says Maré.²

As a member of the executive Williamson left Wits and relocated to NUSAS's head office in Cape Town to run the organisation's financial affairs. He abandoned full-time studies at Wits but continued studying by correspondence with Unisa, taking a course in criminology. In addition to his police salary he received a second salary from NUSAS. His wife Ingrid joined him in Cape Town and secured a job at Groote Schuur Hospital. Initially, they lived in a commune with a group of student activists, including Charles Nupen, and then moved into their own flat in Rondebosch.

The student Guy Berger went to visit Williamson in his flat and was surprised that he couldn't access it directly but had to press a buzzer downstairs to be let in. He had never seen the device before – that kind of security wasn't very common in those days. 'Now, in retrospect, this obviously suited him because it meant he could not be surprised by people in the student movement popping in unexpectedly,' says Berger.³

The NUSAS contingent in Cape Town found Williamson convivial and entertaining, and he and Ingrid became part of the left-wing social circle. 'He always seemed to be perfectly at ease,' says Tip. 'Ingrid was often present and she was similarly very sociable.'

The NUSAS office was situated in the Cape Town CBD, opposite the Long Street Baths. Rent was cheap because the landlord couldn't fill the building. Activists between homes would often sleep in the office. When they did, they would be woken at 2 a.m. when all the phones in the office started ringing

at the same time – it was the security police phoning to make some kind of point.

Williamson's role on the NUSAS executive was to keep the primary books of account, reconcile bank statements, prepare payment vouchers, pay salaries, deal with employee-related matters, provide assistance with the management of the South African Students' Travel Service, and engage in some fund-raising correspondence.⁴

There had been previous incidents when he was nearly exposed as a spy, but he also had a close shave involving his own people. Soon after he arrived in Cape Town a local Security Branch member decided that Williamson was a nuisance and planned to sabotage his car's brakes. Fortunately for Williamson, his boss, Johann Coetzee, had his ear to the ground and intervened.⁵

Williamson had pinned on the noticeboard next to his desk a piece of paper with a quote on it: 'There are two kinds of truths – the truth that is for us and the truth that is against us. And if there are any truths that are against us, it's too bad for those truths.'⁶ Williamson told Barry Gilder, NUSAS's cultural officer based in the same Cape Town office, that it was a quote from Stalin. This surprised Gilder because even if some of the students were communists, they were certainly not Stalinists and more likely to be part of the New Left. As it turns out, it was not even a quote from Stalin.

Chapter 6

Breytenbach and Biko

While Craig Williamson was settling into his position on the NUSAS executive, a French businessman called Christian Galaska slipped into South Africa. His arrival was to mark a turning point in the world of student politics. Galaska was, in fact, the Afrikaans poet and self-styled albino terrorist Breyten Breytenbach, who had gone into exile in the early 1960s. He had returned to South Africa on a secret mission to recruit white left-wing sympathisers and trade unionists into Okhela, an organisation committed to overthrowing the government.

At the time, August 1975, the student activist Gerry Maré was busy with a master's degree in comparative literature on Breytenbach, specifically eroticism and religion in Breytenbach's poetry. Maré was passionate about Breytenbach and, when the Wits Afrikaans academic Ampie Coetzee told him he had a thesis to send him, Maré assumed it was a paper on Breytenbach. He arranged to meet the person delivering the thesis on UCT's Jammie Steps. 'It's raining and I saw this guy with a long black coat and orange shoes. I knew immediately who he was. I was mature enough not to go into hero worship mode but this guy stood for a lot of things – some of it romantic, a lot of it serious. Breyten said almost immediately, "I'm here to recruit you into Okhela." I was interested. We arranged to meet

again. I gave him a lift on my motorbike back to his hotel in Sea Point where he was staying. When you have a passenger on the back of a motorbike and they're scared – you can feel it. Breyten was scared.'¹

At their next meeting Breytenbach gave Maré the Okhela manifesto and told him he had discussed his plan to recruit whites into Okhela with Oliver Tambo and the ANC representative in Algeria, Johnny Makhathini. Okhela, which was linked to the ANC, wanted to recruit a group of the white left who were outside the Communist Party. Breytenbach proposed that Maré leave South Africa and join them. 'I said I'm willing to work with Okhela in South Africa, but I don't want to leave the country. I didn't want to live in exile. I offered to supply them with material about what was going on in South Africa.' Breytenbach then told Maré he had money for publications, which was what his friend Glenn Moss was engaged in, so Maré thought, Well, why doesn't Breytenbach speak to Moss? From the NUSAS office in Cape Town, Maré phoned Moss, who was then in Johannesburg, and asked him to come to Cape Town to meet a comrade. 'And that's where things went wrong. That's where Williamson comes in. I guess he had listened to my conversation with Glenn in which I'd asked him to meet someone. The Security Branch knew Breyten was already in the country.'

Williamson himself was warned by his colleagues in the police not to go anywhere near 'this foreign guy who is in the country' because they had been ordered to arrest anyone with whom he came into contact. 'If you're seen with him, we'll have to arrest you as well. Stay out. We've got this situation covered,' he was told.²

Maré arranged to meet Breytenbach in a cinema in Sea Point. Maré arrived at the cinema where *Badlands* was showing. But he had an uneasy feeling about two young men standing

behind him in the queue, so he abandoned the plan and instead arranged to pick Breytenbach up in the city. Maré took the NUSAS car, a yellow Volkswagen Beetle, and, with Moss, who had flown in from Johannesburg, drove to an intersection in the CBD where Breytenbach got in. A few minutes later Maré glanced in the rear-view mirror and noticed they were being followed. A Hollywood-style white-knuckle car chase ensued through Cape Town's CBD as Maré tried to shake the tail. He drove slowly, then accelerated, swung in front of oncoming traffic and turned down narrow side streets. It was storming at the time and gusts of wind lashed the Beetle, threatening to blow it off the road. A fleet of cars pursued them. Maré headed onto De Waal Drive, speeding down the M3, and then on to Rhodes Drive past Kirstenbosch Gardens. No one in the car spoke. Maré turned a corner and found the road blocked by a massive tree that had been uprooted in the storm. He braked hard, doing a U-turn, and passing the cars that were following them. The trio returned to the centre of Cape Town. Breytenbach told Maré to drop him outside a supermarket. Maré stopped the car and warned Breytenbach to leave the country as soon as possible. When Breytenbach got out of the car, two men jumped out of one of the cars tailing them and pursued Breytenbach on foot.³ On that day Breytenbach managed to evade the security police, but he knew that if he didn't get out of the country soon, it would be only a matter of time before they caught him.

A few days after the car chase, Barry Gilder and Maré set out in Gilder's beach buggy to Durban – the first stop of a NUSAS trip to various campuses around the country. While Maré was addressing students at Pietermaritzburg campus, the security police walked into the room and arrested him and Gilder. The officers decided to take Gilder's beach buggy to the police station to search it, but it wouldn't start. Maré looked

out from the police van he had just been thrown into and saw the security police pushing the beach buggy. A few days later on his way from Durban to Special Branch headquarters in Pretoria, where he was told that the notorious interrogator-in-chief Spyker van Wyk was waiting for him, Maré looked out of the car window and saw a newspaper poster on a lamppost that read: '*Breytenbach Gevang*' (Breytenbach Caught).

Breytenbach hadn't managed to get out of the country after all. He was in fact arrested and the Special Branch seized on the Breytenbach affair as an opportunity to deliver a series of blows to NUSAS. They swooped on the leadership, with the exception of Comrade Craig. They already had got Maré. They picked up Karel Tip, who had also met with Breytenbach, Glenn Moss, Gordon Young, Horst Kleinschmidt and Jeanette Curtis. The students were held under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act, which allowed for their detention for 180 days.

With the leadership in jail, Williamson was left in charge of NUSAS. He headed up the campaign to release the NUSAS leaders – students whom he helped put in jail. A thousand students at UCT marched, at Wits twice that number formed a picket line along Jan Smuts Avenue, and about 6,000 students attended an assembly called by the Wits Vice-Chancellor demanding the release of the detained students. In September a motorcade of Wits students, led by Williamson, made their way to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. When they arrived they were confronted by conservative students from Pretoria University, who pelted them with eggs.⁴

Williamson went from campus to campus, shouting slogans and making rabble-rousing speeches with Helen Suzman, the Progressive MP. 'Release our comrades,' he demanded. He also led a NUSAS delegation to see the Minister of Justice and the Police, Jimmy Kruger. Williamson's Special Branch colleagues

thought this was uproarious because while Williamson sat with the delegation demanding the release of their comrades, the paperwork for his promotion to lieutenant was on the minister's desk.

While the students were being held, the wedding of Charles Nupen, the 1974 NUSAS president, took place. The occasion, recalled Nupen, was marked by a sense of loss and a sense of solidarity with the jailed students. 'Being suitably outraged was one Craig Williamson,' says Nupen.⁵

Shortly after Nupen's wedding Breytenbach was charged under the Terrorism Act. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment. The NUSAS leaders were released from detention after two months and were not charged.

Because of the high profile Williamson gained during the campaign to free the NUSAS leaders, students caucused to elect him president of NUSAS at the congress to appoint the 1975/76 leadership. While he was at the congress he received a call from his handler, Johann Coetzee. 'Under no circumstance are you to become the president,' the Security Branch head told his protégé. 'If you do, then we're running the organisation and we're agents provocateurs. Then it's big problems.'⁶ Instead, Williamson was elected vice-president of NUSAS for 1975/76.

Joining Williamson on the executive were Cedric de Beer, Sean Moroney and the new president, Mike Stent, whom I worked with forty years later as a freelance copy editor at Cape Town's *Weekend Argus* newspaper. Stent entered Rhodes University in 1970 to study theology and joined the University Christian Movement (UCM), a radical non-racial Christian organisation, through which he was introduced to Black Consciousness activists like Steve Biko and Barney Pityana.⁷ As a result of a government banning, UCM closed down in 1972 and 'I needed a political home so I joined NUSAS and met

Craig. He was an upper-middle-class Englishman. We weren't mates but we hung out,' says Stent.

Stent says that, unlike most NUSAS activists, he and Williamson weren't obsessed with Marxism and were interested in doing practical work, not just talking. He says he introduced Williamson to Biko – something which haunts him. 'I knew the Black Consciousness Movement needed money but I can't remember if Biko asked me to introduce him to Craig or if Craig asked me to introduce him to Biko or if it was my own intervention. Biko trusted me. I trusted Craig. We were on the veranda at Biko's home in King William's Town. I went for a walk and the two of them talked. I didn't ask what they talked about.'

Although Williamson was vice-president of NUSAS, many people still harboured suspicions about him. One was Barry Gilder, NUSAS's cultural officer, who was at the organisation's head office when his mother called to tell him the military police were looking for him as he had evaded a compulsory period of service in the defence force.⁸ After reassuring his mother, Gilder got up to speak to Stent about what he should do. He remembers passing Williamson, who looked up at Gilder and smiled. Gilder, who was in a state of shock because he realised he might have to leave the country, managed to smile back. The memory of Williamson in a police van outside his house as a young man was still fresh in Gilder's memory; and there was no way he was going to let him see his anxiety. He had no proof that Williamson was working for the other side, but there was just something about him that, to Gilder, didn't fit the profile of a left-wing student.

Another doubter was Cedric de Beer, who had also been elected to the NUSAS executive. Over time De Beer came to realise that Williamson as NUSAS vice-president was developing a whole range of contacts, with the Black

Consciousness Movement and with the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF), based in Geneva, which was later to play a major part in the Williamson story. De Beer noticed that Williamson and Karl Edwards, who was NUSAS's national officer, were involved in couriering messages, people and money and increasingly representing themselves as doing so on behalf of the IUEF (and, later, even the ANC). De Beer thought that if he knew what Williamson and Edwards were up to, then surely the security police also knew, and if the security police knew, then Williamson and Edwards ought to be detained – but they weren't. It was at that point that De Beer began to be certain that Williamson was a police agent.

In October 1975 Williamson and Stent travelled to Europe, ostensibly to participate in a student conference in Istanbul on behalf of the SA Students' Travel Service. They then went their separate ways and later reconnected in London. In an interview with the *Sunday Times* journalist Ken Owen five years later, Williamson said that it was while he was in London on the NUSAS trip that he met the head of the IUEF, Lars-Gunnar Eriksson, who introduced him to high-ranking members of the ANC, specifically Reg September, who then served as the ANC's chief representative in London and Western Europe, and Thomas Nkobi, the ANC's treasurer-general.⁹ Meeting them was all James Bond and trenchcoats, Williamson said. 'I knew then I was on my way. I really knew I had hit the jackpot.'¹⁰

It was also on this trip that Eriksson decided to use Williamson to help move IUEF donor money into the country after the South African government had passed the Affected Organisations Act in 1974 in a bid to cut off overseas funding to anti-apartheid groups. The IUEF plan was to separate projects from NUSAS and put them under different trusts – such as for prisoner education and adult education – and fund

them independently. 'Craig and I were in line to be the money launderers,' says Stent. 'They liked Craig, not me, which turned out to be a bad mistake for them.'

Stent and Williamson returned to South Africa to find NUSAS in turmoil. Conservative-minded students who thought NUSAS was too radical had made a bid to take over the organisation. They wanted the individual university campus SRCs to have more power, effectively transforming NUSAS from an organisation into a confederation. Stent initiated a process to redraft NUSAS's constitution, and referendums were held on each campus. The progressive students won UCT and Wits but lost Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Rhodes. As a result, the entire NUSAS executive – including Stent and Williamson – resigned on 1 May 1976 to make way for less radical leaders.¹¹ At the 1976 NUSAS congress, held in July, Williamson was appointed an honorary life member of NUSAS for 'dedicated work in its service'.

Chapter 7

The NUSAS Five Trial

The Johannesburg Regional Court was packed with security policemen. Even the Security Branch boss Johann Coetzee was in court. For the security establishment this was a moment of triumph. The case being heard had become known as ‘the NUSAS Trial’, which had started in December 1975. There was a great deal of drama as a secret agent was due to be called to give evidence. The five people in the dock on charges of terrorism were anxious to see who would take the stand. The prosecution let it slip that they had a key witness up their sleeve, someone who had damaging evidence which would secure the conviction of the activists.

The five on trial were Charles Nupen, arrested three months after his wedding, Karel Tip and Glenn Moss, whose freedom after their spell in detention over the Breytenbach saga had been short-lived, Cedric de Beer and Eddie Webster. Webster was a lecturer at Wits, not a student, but he was a good friend of NUSAS. The accused, known as the NUSAS Five, were charged under the Suppression of Communism Act for conspiring to further the aims of communism and of the ANC and, ultimately, attempting to overthrow the state.

One of the reasons for the charges was that they had called for the release of political prisoners. The state argued that by

making that call, they were furthering the aims of the ANC, an unlawful organisation. The accused countered that if there was to be a peaceful resolution to the looming conflict in the country, there had to be negotiations involving the real leaders of the people and, whether the government liked it or not, the real leaders were in jail. They argued that far from supporting the armed struggle, they were, in fact, trying to prevent a bloody war. According to Nupen, the NUSAS trial was essentially a trial of ideas; ‘and certainly we propagated those ideas, but we propagated them openly’.¹

The spy who would give evidence was just one of the three ‘star’ witnesses the state produced to testify against the accused. First was Bartholomew Hlapane, a former member of the South African Communist Party (SACP) who, after being detained in 1964, became a ‘professional’ state witness. His role was to somehow connect the NUSAS trial to previous conspiracy trials involving underground ANC, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and SACP activities.² As it turned out, he seemed to want to settle old scores and, according to Geoff Budlender, one of the lawyers defending the students, his evidence was far from convincing.³

Next to take the stand was Professor Andrew Murray, an anti-communist crusader, who analysed a number of papers and speeches by the students to show they were communist or communist-inspired. Murray, who taught political philosophy at the University of Cape Town, was often used by the state to identify communists – he was their red setter. He was brought out in the 1956–61 Treason Trial to inspect writings and reading material confiscated from the accused, who ranged from Nelson Mandela to Ruth First. In that trial, the defence tricked Murray into labelling his own writings from the 1930s as ‘communist’. It was ‘an episode that has gone down gleefully ever since in the history of South African anti-apartheid activism’.⁴ Murray was

just as poor a witness in the NUSAS Five trial.

Budlender became the defence team's 'Murray person' and read everything Murray had ever written. The defence's senior advocate, Arthur Chaskalson, proceeded to turn Murray into a defence witness. Chaskalson put six propositions to Murray, which Murray disagreed with, and each time Murray disagreed, Chaskalson would say, 'Let me show you who wrote it.' It was Murray himself. Soon Murray no longer knew what he had or hadn't written.

'Murray was pathetic,' recalls Nupen. 'Arthur destroyed him.'

That was the end of Murray's career in the box – he was never called as an expert witness again. More importantly for the accused, that part of the state's case largely collapsed.

With two of their three key witnesses doing little to damage the accused, the state needed its spy to rescue its case. According to Cedric de Beer, the police were 'very cocky' at the beginning of the trial because of their trump card, the secret key witness, the spy with the damaging evidence. De Beer was convinced it was Craig Williamson. Williamson had been quite tense in the period leading up to the trial and De Beer wondered if that was because he was being lined up to testify.⁵ But when the secret witness finally made his way to the stand, Tip was startled to see it was the former Wits student and Security Branch agent Captain Derek Brune, who took his place in the witness stand and swore to tell the truth. Williamson, who was also in court, feigned amazement when Brune took the stand.

The state, it seems, had decided not to play its Williamson card after all. This could have been because Williamson was on a trajectory and destined for greater things as an undercover agent. Perhaps his bosses in the security police figured it wasn't worth exposing him for the students, who weren't so important

in the greater scheme of crushing the ANC, or because the prosecution knew its case was weak and they weren't going to win a conviction even with Williamson, so they might as well spare him. Either way, the state wheeled out Brune, a standard-grade version of Williamson.

Brune had been a member of the Wits Student Representative Council and, at one stage, its vice-president. Glenn Moss wasn't surprised when Brune was unmasked. A few weeks before Brune entered the witness box, Moss was standing outside Pops Café on Jan Smuts Avenue when he looked up and saw Brune in a car with men who were known security police officers. In addition, in preparing for the trial the state had labelled a range of exhibits with the initials 'DB'.

The former Wits University politics lecturer Randy Speer remembers Brune as blending into the woodwork, never asking a question in an otherwise pretty lively class. However, one thing about Brune that was unique was that he taped the lectures, at a time when this was highly uncommon. 'There he sat, day after day, with his little tape recorder propped up on his desk. This quiet individual would sit at his perch, seemingly uninterested in what was going on, and almost always with his head down on his desk. I recall once getting pretty ticked off at this near-insulting behaviour, and asked him (and this is a direct quote from that day): 'MR BRUNE, IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG WITH YER BLOODY NECK? Would it be asking TOO MUCH of you that you MAYBE act as if you're a part of this class?'⁶

The five accused in the NUSAS trial weren't concerned with what Brune knew but with how he might interpret events and possibly fabricate evidence. Moss was particularly worried because Brune had a grudge against him, which related to an affair of the heart ('his heart', Moss is quick to add). But once again Arthur Chaskalson tore the state's witness to pieces,

getting Brune to admit that he was skilled at lying and deception. Budlender recalls the security policemen in the gallery melting away and leaving as Chaskalson hammered Brune on the stand. Nearly forty years later, Budlender says that Brune was one of the most dismal witnesses he has ever encountered.

The defence's strategy was to argue that Brune had fooled the students completely: they hadn't known he was an agent. If Brune had been in the heart of the beast for three years, he would have known everything that was going on, but despite all his huffing and puffing he was unable to establish a link between NUSAS and the SACP or the ANC, and his evidence was unable to advance the state's case.

Advocate George Bizos, who was also part of the defence's legal team, suggested to his colleagues that they call Williamson to testify as a witness for the accused to negate the state's claim that the five in the dock were crypto-communists. 'I thought he may be a useful witness, but Moss was absolutely against it. I remember his words: "He's a spy and has contacts with the security police."⁷ In the end the defence did not call Williamson to the stand.

On 2 December 1976, after a year-long trial, the NUSAS Five were acquitted.

Williamson knew the trialists better than any of the other campus spies and would have given the prosecution context, background and insight. However, even if he had given evidence against the students they would still probably have been acquitted. NUSAS may have been a left-wing organisation, even a radical organisation in the context of the time, but it wasn't involved in the underground liberation movement.

Chapter 8

A Long Walk to 'Freedom'

Not long after Charles Nupen was acquitted in the NUSAS Five trial, he received a call from Craig Williamson. Williamson was upset and urged Nupen to come to his flat as soon as possible. Nupen arrived at Williamson's flat to find his friend pacing up and down. 'I've just been raided by the security police,' Williamson told Nupen. 'They've taken my passport.'¹ Nupen consoled him – it was the least he could do. While Nupen had been on trial in Johannesburg, Williamson and his wife Ingrid extended the hand of friendship to Dren, Nupen's wife, who was studying at the University of Cape Town. They took her out for dinner and checked in with her from time to time to make sure she was okay.

After resigning from the NUSAS executive in May 1976, Williamson became a free-floating permanent political activist. It was a new phase in his life. The Security Branch's intention was to get Williamson as deep as possible into the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF), which would provide it with information about a whole range of anti-apartheid organisations and activities, both in South Africa and overseas. Launched in 1961 as an agency to promote student exchange programmes and provide scholarships and assistance for refugees, its headquarters were in Geneva.² The IUEF interpreted its mandate to assist refugees and their organisations to include

liberation movements. 'The organisation has deliberately and consciously insisted that its work of assisting refugees, even the granting of individual scholarships, has political implications. It has offered educational assistance to refugees and their organisations with the hope of helping to achieve certain political objectives – in southern Africa the ending of racist minority and colonial oppression.'³ Scholarships, funded largely by the Swedish government, were the IUEF's major concern, and southern African students were the first recipients of these scholarships. The IUEF also supported projects inside South Africa, such as SACHED Trust, which was an adult education programme, and the NUSAS-led prison education programme, which helped political prisoners study and provided financial relief to their families. For all these reasons the IUEF became an important target of the Special Branch.

From the 1970s all contacts on politically sensitive programmes in South Africa took place between the president of NUSAS and the director of the IUEF, Lars-Gunnar Eriksson, who had been appointed to that position in 1965.⁴ Eriksson was a large, dark-haired man, somewhat dissolute in appearance, who had powerful connections in the Swedish socialist movement, particularly the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SDP).⁵ As a student Eriksson had been editor of the student newspaper at Stockholm University, and a left-wing social democrat, part of a group of Young Turks within the Swedish SDP. A passionate young socialist, he travelled to Cuba and forged links with all sorts of left-wing organisations, though he was not a communist and was opposed to communism.⁶

As the NUSAS treasurer Williamson had interacted with the IUEF, which was one of the organisation's main backers, and as NUSAS vice-president he had met Eriksson in 1975 when he and Mike Stent, then NUSAS president, had travelled

overseas. It was during that meeting that Eriksson formed a favourable impression of Williamson as a person of 'political and personal competence'.⁷

Eriksson knew Neville Rubin, a former NUSAS president who had gone into exile and become a researcher for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva. Eriksson asked Rubin to meet the two members of NUSAS and report back as to what he thought of them. Eriksson told Rubin he was thinking of recruiting one of them to assist him in the IUEF. Rubin took Stent and Williamson to lunch for this informal interview. He found Stent articulate, forthcoming and easy-going. Williamson didn't create any impression on him. 'I told Eriksson that Mike Stent was the person he should liaise with. He said, "Well, that's interesting. I'm getting the exact opposite recommendation from Cape Town."'”⁸

Eriksson said he asked the former NUSAS president Karel Tip to identify someone whom he could trust politically and who had administrative skills. According to a later report of a commission of inquiry into the IUEF, this was Williamson. In other words, Tip had vouched for Williamson.

However, this is not how Tip remembers it. He recalls receiving a phone call from Eriksson, who said he was considering employing Williamson and asked Tip whether he trusted him. 'My response was that I was unaware of any reason not to and that I considered him trustworthy although, I remarked, I'd had very little to do with him before he was elected onto the NUSAS executive. I confirmed that Williamson had been the finance officer and he'd done that work and some administrative tasks competently and I'd been quite satisfied with his performance. To the extent that the report suggests I'd identified or proposed Williamson to Lars-Gunnar, I would disagree.'⁹

In any event Williamson became Eriksson's go-to man and,

as Stent described it, the IUEF's money launderer, acting as the IUEF's South African contact for their projects, with access to a steady stream of money, which he distributed liberally. He gave Cape Town NUSAS member Julian Sturgeon R2,000 to run the Information Riot Service (IRS), which circulated a newsletter documenting police brutality.¹⁰ He gave student activist Alan Fine R200, which was about two months' salary in 1976, to write a booklet on some of the political trials taking place at the time.¹¹ He also distributed funds to Black Consciousness groups, meeting with BC activists in the Eastern Cape, and ran a pipeline to help black and white activists escape across the border into Botswana.

After the June 16 Soweto Uprising thousands of young black South Africans were determined to flee the country to become soldiers in uMkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's army, or to join the Pan Africanist Congress's military wing, APLA. Among those Williamson helped to escape were Cecilia Masondo, the wife of the senior MK leader Andrew Masondo, and several members of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) from Cape Town. He developed a reputation for being able to take activists over the border fence.¹²

The escape network, which was known in the ANC as the 'underground railway', and which Williamson and his Special Branch colleagues nicknamed 'Troublemakers Export Incorporated', proved profitable to Special Branch. The anti-apartheid cleric the Rev. Theo Kotze paid Williamson R600 in cash in advance to help him flee the country. Williamson took the money but never actually helped Kotze.¹³ Kotze, who was banned and whose house was shot up by the police, eventually left South Africa on 14 July 1978 in the boot of an ambassadorial vehicle.¹⁴

To provide logistical support for the pipeline, Williamson recruited the Asmussen brothers, Paul and Marc, friends he had made at St John's College. The brothers had a property near

Lanseria Airport outside Johannesburg, where they housed activists before they drove them out of the country.¹⁵ This was a sophisticated operation, both inside and outside the country. Everyone got across safely because, unbeknown to them, they had security police protection to make sure they weren't caught.

It may seem odd that the security police had a hand in helping their enemies escape, but there were three reasons why they did it: firstly, to cement their agent's credibility as an activist; secondly, to keep tabs on the people who were going into exile; and, thirdly, the young activists whom Williamson helped escape would eventually move up the ranks of their organisation and would be indebted to him. Besides, it wasn't much of a victory for the government if an activist was caught trying to slip out the country. The activist would get a six-month jail sentence and that would be that.¹⁶

Williamson himself made use of the pipeline. In July 1976, he slipped into Botswana 'illegally' where he met Lars-Gunnar Eriksson. He told Eriksson that the security police had seized his passport and were watching him and said he needed to leave South Africa to avoid 'political emasculation'. Eriksson encouraged Williamson to flee South Africa and promised to help him, either in the form of a scholarship or possibly a job with the IUEF in Geneva.¹⁷

Eriksson then phoned Harry Nengwekhulu, who was living in exile in Botswana. Nengwekhulu had helped establish SASO with Steve Biko and was the first senior Black Consciousness activist to go into exile. Eriksson asked him to pick up someone from a safe house and take him to the border. 'Lars-Gunnar told me the guy had jumped the fence and wanted to go back. The person was Craig Williamson. At 3 a.m. I picked him up and we started to drive. I felt very uncomfortable. I had never taken anyone to do a border crossing before and I didn't know this person – what

if he's a cop, I thought. We approached the centre of Gaborone at 3.30 a.m. and I told him that I was uncomfortable. Craig said, "Don't worry, just drop me here." We were near the American embassy. I was very surprised at how casual he was. I mean, you would think that someone who had jumped the border would be anxious. The next day I told Eriksson what had happened and that I had left him in the city centre. He said, Don't worry, he's an activist, he would find his way.¹⁸

Williamson, of course, did find his way. Back in South Africa, he and his handler, Johann Coetzee, celebrated the good news. Coetzee's investment in Williamson's student career had paid off. His struggle credentials and his background in left-wing student politics had seen Williamson potentially being offered a job that would give him insight into organisations belonging to the anti-apartheid movement and access to the decisions being made in them. All he needed now was a theatrical exit from South Africa. This was engineered with the unwitting assistance of Eric Abraham, a Cape Town activist and journalist on the fringes of NUSAS.

In 1972 Abraham, as an 18-year-old first year student at UCT, had joined a group of students protesting against apartheid's unfair education system. The peaceful protesters – one of whom was Abraham's close friend and housemate Jenny Curtis – stood on the steps of St George's Cathedral when suddenly the police pounced and 'beat the shit out of us'.¹⁹ When police pressure on student activists grew, Abraham left the country and went to work for Amnesty International in the United Kingdom, organising its first global campaign to abolish torture.

After 18 months, Abraham decided it was time to return to South Africa. Jenny Curtis picked him up from the airport in Johannesburg and took him to her office at the NUSAS-linked Wages Commission. And there, remembers Abraham, was

Williamson, large and bull-like, looking more like one of the security policemen who had harassed him than an anti-apartheid activist. Although this was the first time the two men had met, Williamson behaved very familiarly towards Abraham, which struck him as odd.

Abraham made his way from Johannesburg to Cape Town, where he shared a flat with the student labour worker Gordon Young. One evening a posse of Security Branch members stormed into the flat and searched it, before arresting Young, who spent almost a year in detention. Abraham was angry and started to write articles on human rights abuses for the international media. Having worked for Amnesty, he knew that exposure to highlight the plight of opponents of apartheid afforded victims some protection and gave people being oppressed a sense that somebody cared about what happened to them. Abraham felt there was a need for an alternative news agency since most foreign correspondents were not South African citizens and faced deportation if they stepped out of line. He then started the South African News Agency (SANA), appointing a network of correspondents and issuing regular press bulletins, which covered black political organisations and politics and developments in black communities, all of which were ignored by the mainstream press.

Soon after SANA was launched, Williamson and Abraham met near the Cape Town planetarium for lunch. Williamson came with IUEF money to help SANA grow. However, what was given with one hand was taken away with the other. Because SANA was causing the government embarrassment, the Publications Control Board banned SANA bulletins, claiming they were prejudicial to the internal security of South Africa. Abraham was served with banning orders and placed under house arrest. It was illegal for Abraham to continue with SANA,

so he handed the agency to Mike Stent.

Abraham was confined to a one-room ground-floor studio flat, and regular police patrols would check to see he was there. He was also the target of a campaign by a right-wing extremist group called Scorpio, which sent him death threats. Being under house arrest made him an easy target, so Amnesty International sent an armed bodyguard to sit outside his flat. It was a terrifying time for 22-year-old Abraham. He was only one of two people banned and under house arrest in the Cape Town area – Neville Alexander, recently off Robben Island, was the other. In addition, Abraham's friends were afraid of having any contact with him.

Isolated, unemployed, and fearing he could be charged with contravening security legislation at any moment, Abraham decided it was time to leave the country. He applied for an exit visa, but this was denied. At that point Williamson approached Abraham and asked to meet him at the Pig & Whistle in Rondebosch. Here Williamson told Abraham that if he wanted to get out the country, the IUEF would assist him. 'Yes, please,' Abraham told Williamson, 'get me out.'

'In retrospect, it seems crazy not to have questioned Williamson's credibility, especially since he had seemed like an unlikely anti-apartheid activist. But it was an intense time and many student leaders I knew and respected appeared to accept Williamson's bona fides,' says Abraham.

Williamson put his plan into operation. He told Abraham that when he received a telegram that read 'Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Regards Paul', he must leave his apartment, taking nothing with him, and wait near Rhodes Memorial where a Ford Cortina would pick him up. The telegram arrived and the date for the exit was set for 2 January 1977. The 2nd of January, known as Tweede Nuwejaar (Second New Year), is a Cape Town tradition which stems from the previous centuries

when Cape slaves were given a day off on 2 January. Tweede Nuwejaar was chosen because most people would be off work and celebrating, including the police, and Abraham would be able to give them the slip.

At 6 a.m. Abraham left his flat and made his way to the rendezvous. He ran the risk of a year in prison if he breached any of the terms of his house arrest orders. Williamson's plan was for Abraham to fly from Cape Town to Johannesburg, where he would meet him, and then they would drive as close as they dared to the Botswana border. It was a risky plan because Abraham was on a list of banned people to watch at the airport. At Rhodes Memorial, he got into the Ford Cortina, which was driven by one of Williamson's friends, probably Karl Edwards. Abraham was handed a pair of dark glasses and taken to a barber shop, where he had a haircut. He then went to a bottle store. Bigger this, he thought: 'If I'm going for good, then I'm taking two bottles of decent red wine with me.' He bought two bottles of Nederburg Vintage Cabernet '72.

Abraham was taken to the airport and went to check in for his flight to Johannesburg. Williamson had bought a ticket for him in the name of Chris Woods, another activist, which was obviously Williamson's idea of a joke. The plane was delayed, which made Abraham anxious. While he was waiting to board he went to the toilet, locked the door, uncorked one of the bottles of wine, and got completely 'blotto'. But there was nothing sinister about the delay and Abraham flew to Johannesburg without any incidents. He landed at Jan Smuts Airport, as it was then known, and was met by someone who escorted him to another car. He got in and lay down on the back seat under a blanket and was taken to a farm on the outskirts of Johannesburg – probably the one owned by the Asmussen brothers.

Abraham knew that at 6 p.m. the police would discover he

was missing and a manhunt would be launched. At about 11 p.m. Williamson arrived at the farmhouse. He and Abraham climbed into a car and set off for the Botswana border. After a few hours the car came to a halt. 'Right,' said Williamson, 'this is where we walk.' The two men got out and walked into the darkness. They had been walking for about three hours when Williamson suddenly produced a knife. Abraham put his hand in his pocket and found his flat keys. He threaded a key in each finger as a potential knuckleduster. But the knife wasn't for Abraham. Abraham then thought that perhaps Williamson was planning to slit a sentry's throat, but the knife, Williamson explained, was for a nearby dog patrol. Fortunately for the two men, they were upwind and the dogs couldn't smell them.

The two fugitives continued until they eventually came to the border, which amounted to no more than a couple of strands of barbed wire. They climbed over into no man's land and then scrambled over a few more strands of wire into Botswana. The sun was rising and Abraham looked back and thought, When are the credits going to roll? When is it time to go home? The British High Commission had been alerted that Abraham was in Botswana and an official car whisked him away to the President's Hotel. Meanwhile, Williamson went his own way. Fearing Abraham might be snatched by the South African government in Gaborone, the British government wanted to get him out of Botswana as quickly as possible. They put him on a plane to London, where he was given political asylum.

When Abraham landed at Heathrow Airport, he held a massive press conference about his – and Williamson's – long walk to freedom. Abraham's story about his daring escape went around the world, unwittingly helping to build Williamson's credibility. The Security Branch's plan had succeeded: their 'exiled' agent was now even deeper behind enemy lines.

Chapter 9

Infiltrating the International University Exchange Fund

A week after he and Eric Abraham had crossed the border into Botswana, Craig Williamson made his way to Geneva. Although he didn't have a passport he managed to leave Botswana quickly, thanks to the IUEF fast-tracking his travel documents. Williamson spent the first weeks after he arrived in Geneva writing reports about how he'd handed over the coordination of the IUEF projects in South Africa to Karl Edwards, who, Williamson explained, was an anti-apartheid activist.¹ In fact, as we have seen, Edwards was also a spy, working for BOSS. He had followed a similar trajectory to Williamson from the police force to NUSAS.

Williamson made plans for his wife, Ingrid, to join him in Geneva. She travelled freely between Switzerland and South Africa. Thanks to Neville Rubin, the former NUSAS president then working in Geneva for the International Labour Organization, Ingrid secured a job at the World Health Organization. The couple rented a modest two-bedroomed apartment for the equivalent of R400 a month, which was very comfortable and middle-class. It was tastefully furnished, though somewhat bland.²

As it was IUEF policy not to employ refugees, the director Lars-Gunnar Eriksson foresaw trouble if he employed a white South African. However, he needed someone who was au fait with the anti-apartheid movement and understood the nuances of the various anti-apartheid organisations in South Africa and their politics. Williamson knew how the IUEF worked and was 'credible'. Besides, Eriksson and Williamson got on well. Six months before Williamson 'fled' South Africa, Eriksson had told the secret agent the job was as good as his. Eriksson hired Williamson as the IUEF's information officer and informed the IUEF's board of Williamson's appointment, effective as of 1 January 1977.³

The IUEF had an extensive global network and, by infiltrating the IUEF, Williamson would be able to help the Security Branch understand the international dynamics behind support for the anti-apartheid movement – and perhaps help sabotage it. One of his instructions from his Security Branch bosses was to use his position to cause in-fighting between the different groups in the anti-apartheid movement.⁴ The job also gave Williamson the perfect cover to gather intelligence on anti-apartheid activists and groups, and keep tabs especially on what was going on in the ANC in exile. He could also use his position with the IUEF and take advantage of his 'radical' student credentials to win the confidence of anti-apartheid leaders and tackle his ultimate mission: to penetrate the ANC.

Williamson was given special responsibilities for the IUEF's internal South African programmes, and Eriksson increasingly relied on Williamson for advice on South Africa. He represented the IUEF at important anti-apartheid meetings, conferences and seminars and played a prominent role in the Sub-Committee on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Apartheid and Decolonisation of the Special NGO Committee on Human Rights at Geneva.

He was also an important link between the IUEF and the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid and the UN Centre Against Apartheid, and was seconded to the UN's World Conference for Action Against Apartheid in Lagos in 1977.⁵

With their agent successfully inside the IUEF, the Special Branch decided the best way for Williamson to brief Johann Coetzee was in person. Coetzee would fly to Europe where the two met at hotels. Coetzee also arranged a courier system by means of which Williamson sent back to South Africa a copy of every document he received as well as reports of meetings and conversations he'd had with anti-apartheid exiles and from struggle leaders from inside South Africa who came to Europe.⁶

Williamson's IUEF colleagues thought he was outgoing, popular and easy to get on with.⁷ He certainly was likeable, says Tad Matsui, one of Williamson's friends in Geneva. At the time Matsui, a Japanese clergyman, was in charge of African projects for the World University Service (WUS), an international NGO which funded education and was also a source of money for NUSAS.⁸

Matsui met Williamson in Lesotho in 1975 and Williamson became Matsui's contact in managing WUS projects in South Africa, to which WUS channelled thousands of rands every year. The two men were reunited in Geneva, where Matsui was based after his stint in Lesotho. 'I was pleased to meet up with Craig again because I thought he was a really nice guy and I was also curious about what was happening in South Africa and what was happening to specific people, and he was extremely knowledgeable. Of course, in hindsight, he was knowledgeable about what was going on because he had a police network.'

Matsui and Williamson became good friends in Geneva. They enjoyed each other's company and met often for dinner. Williamson came to Matsui's apartment and Matsui took him

to dinner in what was then the only Japanese restaurant in Switzerland. 'Craig was always very friendly and he loved to eat. He would complain about the size of the steak in Switzerland. He used to say that in Switzerland the steak is this big and bring his hands close together, but in South Africa the steak is *THIS* big – you know, like a fishing story. He never touched alcohol, which was odd because the left-wing South Africans I met in Switzerland were all drinkers.' Matsui never had suspicions about him. 'I'm a clergyman and my natural tendency is to trust everybody. That was my training.'

Williamson asked Matsui, who was well connected, to introduce him to influential people, one of whom was Desmond Tutu, who was then working for the World Council of Churches in London. Matsui and Tutu had met in Lesotho where Tutu was lecturing in the university's theology department. They remained friends and their paths crossed often because of their connections in South Africa, Lesotho and Switzerland. When Tutu came to Switzerland, Matsui set up a meeting with him and Williamson.

'I invited Craig to join me and Desmond for dinner at a restaurant near the airport. Desmond listened to Craig talk about his view of what was happening in South Africa. I deeply regret introducing Craig to Desmond even though nothing came of it.'

As the months and years went by, Williamson increased his influence inside the IUEF. He had become Eriksson's 'point man' for South Africa. To the outside world, Williamson was an Eriksson protégé but, in actual fact, he was beginning to exert influence over his boss.

Chapter 10

The Subversion of the IUEF

At IUEF Williamson was in charge of funding scholarships and community-based projects in South Africa out of IUEF's multimillion-dollar budget. He was able to take advantage of this money because of the need for a clandestine way to bypass the South African government's Affected Organisations Act, which outlawed funding to specific anti-apartheid organisations. As a result, money wasn't always strictly accounted for. It also helped that the IUEF's director, Eriksson, had a casual approach to balancing the books.

At Eriksson's behest, Neville Rubin created Southern Futures Anstalt (SFA) in October 1976 in Liechtenstein.¹ The SFA was meant to be a mechanism by which, through a series of trusts and intermediaries, the IUEF could transfer money from donors in Sweden, Denmark and Canada to anti-apartheid groups in South Africa. Though the money made its way into South Africa, it didn't always get to the people it was intended for. Williamson essentially used it as his personal slush fund. He diverted considerable sums of money meant for humanitarian projects and funding accused in political trials in South Africa to the security police.² When Williamson broke cover in January 1980, he took the SFA files with him, so it's unclear how much money he managed to steal for the security police (and perhaps for himself).

According to the investigative journalist Tor Sellström, auditors established that in Denmark alone Williamson had received 500,000 Swiss francs from Southern Futures. In 1980, 500,000 Swiss francs was about R16 million, which in 2016 would be about R380 million.³ Some of this money was used to buy Daisy Farm, about 20 kilometres west of Pretoria, which became the police's spy school. It was situated next to Vlakplaas, the headquarters of the security police's infamous death squad.⁴ Poul Brandrup, a Danish anti-apartheid activist, lived on Daisy Farm for a while, believing it was a secret IUEF base for training activists.⁵ The irony of ironies: donor money meant for anti-apartheid activities was funding apartheid activities against anti-apartheid activists. Williamson once boasted that he bought biltong for 'our boys on the border' with IUEF money. 'It was Christmas 1978. I gave it to a South African agent, probably Karl Edwards or my sister, in cash in Gaborone.' He bought about R50,000 worth of biltong for the South African Defence Force troops then fighting a counterinsurgency war against the liberation movement SWAPO on the border of South African-occupied Namibia.⁶

While left-wing activists were being hosted on Daisy Farm, Williamson was hosting left-wing South Africans flying into Geneva. Among his guests was Julian Sturgeon, who had become Williamson's unofficial *handlanger* (assistant) since Williamson, in one of his first tasks in 'exile', came to Sturgeon's assistance after the NUSAS activist fled South Africa to avoid military service. Sturgeon believes Williamson had something to do with the knock he received on the door of his house in Johannesburg in late 1976 after graduating from university. A military policeman turned up on his doorstep with papers calling him up to attend a camp. Sturgeon had completed his national service in 1970 but had avoided subsequent drafts to report for camps. He hadn't told the military where he was,

but all of a sudden they had tracked him down. ‘Obviously, in hindsight, through Williamson,’ he says. He wasn’t prepared to spend time in detention barracks and felt his only option was to get out of the country. In January 1977, he borrowed money from his girlfriend’s mother and drove to Swaziland, where he hired a private plane to fly him to Gaborone. When he landed he declared himself a refugee. He was interrogated by the Botswana security police, who put him in detention while they figured out what to do with him. At that time there were about 20,000 Soweto refugees in Botswana who had fled South Africa following the June 16 Uprising. On his third day in jail Sturgeon was informed that he had a visitor. It was Williamson, who had come to set up a branch of the IUEF in Botswana. ‘Don’t worry,’ Williamson told Sturgeon, ‘I’ll sort this lot out.’ Within a few days Williamson had organised a United Nations travel document for Sturgeon from the UN’s refugee agency.⁷

After his escape Sturgeon planned to study in London, but Williamson invited him to Geneva to meet with Eriksson and Cedric de Beer to discuss resurrecting the news service SANA in Botswana. When Eric Abraham was house-arrested, Mike Stent took over SANA and ran it from Johannesburg. This was in the aftermath of the June 16 Uprising, when there was a clampdown on the media, and several SANA reporters were arrested. On 4 December 1976 the security police, led by ex-Wits SRC vice-president Derek Brune, raided SANA’s offices. Brune told Stent to find a new job and said he could not be held responsible if he ignored his advice. The security police removed every piece of paper in the SANA offices, including the contents of dustbins. SANA’s entire records were gone.⁸

Stent had had enough: he was not prepared to clash with the security police. He resigned and SANA collapsed.⁹ Sturgeon accepted Williamson’s proposal to run SANA in Botswana, and

the IUEF agreed to fund the agency, providing it with R20,000 each month. Sturgeon moved into a house in a settlement in Bontleng, outside Gaborone. There was no running water and the IUEF paid to have an electricity connection installed.

Sturgeon's task at SANA was to assemble reports about detentions, marches, strikes and killings, and compile them into an A4 newsletter, a copy of which would be sent on to Williamson. Williamson would then take his copy all over the world and present it as the latest uncensored news about what was really going on in South Africa. This was Williamson's calling card; something to get him inside organisations and to meet important people, and so further the aims of the Special Branch in its fight against the anti-apartheid movement.

Chapter 11

Undermining the Black Consciousness Movement

After the ANC was banned in 1960 and its leaders either went into exile or were imprisoned, the organisation became more or less moribund within the country. It took a long time for the ANC to re-establish itself in exile, build new structures, develop a diplomatic presence in the West, and organise and train its armed wing, MK. In the vacuum left by the ANC's departure, a new movement grew up in the late 1960s, organised and led by a new generation of young people, predominantly students, who, while publicly eschewing armed struggle, set about restoring black dignity and identity as a precondition for black liberation. This was the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which gained ground in South Africa in the early 1970s. At first, the ANC was hostile to the BCM, seeing it as a rival, but after the Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976, which to a large extent had been inspired by BC ideas and thinking, if not initiated by the BCM itself, the ANC began to put out feelers and became more conciliatory towards the movement.

The South African government's attitude towards the BCM also underwent changes. At first, it welcomed the movement's commitment to strengthening black identity as an extension of

its own policy of separate development, whereby the different races and ethnic groups in South Africa would live apart in political, social and cultural terms. But as the BCM grew in strength and support, the government became more wary of it, and was especially concerned at the prospect that the BCM and the ANC might come together in a united front. In 1977, the regime took decisive action against the movement, which till then it had merely harassed by detaining individual leaders and restricting their movements. In September 1977, the BCM's charismatic leader Steve Biko was arrested and then killed in detention, and shortly afterwards the BCM itself was banned.

But in the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s the BCM operated legally and above ground in South Africa. Many of its leaders emerged from the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), which had broken away from NUSAS in 1968. At an individual level strong ties remained between white student leaders in NUSAS and black student leaders in SASO and the BCM. As we have seen, it was through NUSAS that Craig Williamson met Steve Biko and other BC activists. Moreover, from early on the IUEF provided funding to a number of the movement's projects, which were run by its developmental arm, Black Community Programmes (BCP). Indeed, the IUEF became the BCM's biggest source of funding.

When he was appointed to the IUEF, Williamson's position towards the BCM and to the ANC seems to have been strategic and pragmatic and to have shifted according to the political priorities and needs of the apartheid regime. Another element in his game over time seems to have been to try to play the BCM and the ANC off against the other. At some stage after 1976, the student activist Paula Ensor, who was then living in exile in London and working for the ANC-aligned trade union federation SACTU, heard that Williamson and the IUEF were

promoting a 'third force' as an alternative to the ANC, built around the Black Consciousness Movement. 'The rumour was that [the IUEF] was trying to find a point of opposition to the ANC,' recalls Ensor. 'There was a rumour circulating that Craig was involved in that.' Ensor was a good friend of Jenny Schoon and knew that Williamson stayed with Jenny and her husband Marius, who were involved in the ANC in Botswana, when he visited that country. She wrote to the Schoons to warn them of these rumours. She believes the Schoons raised her concerns with Williamson because she received a letter from him denying that the IUEF was promoting a third force.¹

As the Black Consciousness Movement grew stronger in South Africa in the 1970s and began to represent a real threat to the apartheid regime, the Security Branch became more alarmed and Williamson was told to encourage the IUEF to stop backing the movement. It was feared that the more money and support the BCM received, the more difficult it would be to control. Williamson then began pushing the IUEF to recognise the ANC as the sole liberation movement. This would both weaken the movement by withdrawing funds from it, and also snub both the BCM and other liberation groups like the Pan Africanist Congress. This created tension between the BCM and the ANC. The plan would also assist Williamson in getting closer to the ANC, which was one of the Special Branch's long-term goals for their spy. One way he could do that was to distance the IUEF from the Black Consciousness Movement. Nevertheless, despite moving the IUEF and himself closer to the ANC, Williamson continued to maintain links with the Black Consciousness leadership, thus playing a double game. He represented himself in some circles as being pro-ANC and in others as anti-ANC.²

When unification talks between the ANC and the BCM were mooted in 1977, the Special Branch was presented with an

unwelcome prospect. The Security Branch feared that a united Black Consciousness Movement and the ANC would form a powerful front against the government, and so it spent a lot of effort to make sure the two groups didn't get together. The Security Branch regarded such a partnership as dangerous, one that would give the ANC a massive boost internally.³ According to Harry Nengwekhulu, the Black Consciousness leader and the IUEF's representative in Botswana, Williamson approached him at this time and told him to ignore the ANC and the PAC, and rather liaise with young whites in the struggle. 'He was trying to play different groups against each other,' says Nengwekhulu.⁴

According to Nengwekhulu, the intention was to bring Steve Biko into exile for a meeting to facilitate unification talks between the ANC and the BCM. On 18 August 1977, two weeks before the scheduled meeting, Biko was making his way back from the Western Cape to the Eastern Cape when he was stopped at a police roadblock. He was arrested and taken to security police headquarters in Port Elizabeth, where, in an attempt to break and humiliate him, he was kept naked and in chains. He sustained serious head injuries during interrogation. On 11 September 1977, Biko was driven over a thousand kilometres to Pretoria but died the next day.

One question that often surfaces is whether Williamson had any involvement in Biko's murder. 'Craig knew about these talks,' says Nengwekhulu. 'My suspicion is that Steve was stopped at the roadblock on the basis of information Craig passed on – and I think police were trying to push Steve to confirm that he was going to go into exile for unification talks.' Williamson's involvement was also raised by Thabo Mbeki. At the funeral of the activist Cedric Mayson in May 2015, the former president spoke about the attempt to organise the ANC and BCM meeting and how Mayson planned to secretly fly Biko into Botswana and

then back to South Africa. Mbeki said the finger of blame in connection to the murder of Biko pointed at Williamson.

As the IUEF was also involved in trying to set up the meeting between ANC president Oliver Tambo and Biko, Williamson would have been kept in the loop. Williamson confirmed this to Robert McBride in 1995 and to the journalist Tor Sellström a year later. He said he had provided the security police with information about the meeting but did not know if the police assaulted and killed Biko because of the information he had given them. 'I, as a matter of course, *obviously* reported that he [Biko] was coming and that the planning was being done,' Williamson told McBride.⁵

After Biko's death in September 1977, Williamson called his friend Tad Matsui, who was in charge of African projects for the World University Service (WUS), to tell him the news.⁶ Matsui was devastated. He had met Biko at a conference in the early 1970s and had remained in contact with him because the WUS was funding SASO and the BCP projects that Biko was implementing from his base in King William's Town. 'At some point I wanted someone [from WUS] to see Steve personally. My boss, Richard Taylor, went to South Africa and made his way to King William's Town to see Steve. The whole trip was organised by Williamson.' According to Matsui, Williamson called with news that Biko was dead only a few hours after he was killed. 'I didn't know how he had discovered it. Of course, at the time I didn't know he had anything to do with his death.'

Neville Rubin and his wife had gone away during the weekend of Biko's death and had asked Williamson and Ingrid to babysit their two sons. 'When we returned home Craig did the whole crocodile tears thing, saying what a wonderful chap Biko was, what a brilliant guy he had been, what a tragedy it was. He was full of fake remorse.'⁷

Contrary to Mbeki's and Nengwekhulu's views, Mamphela Ramphele, a co-founder of the Black Consciousness Movement who was romantically involved with Biko, believes the arrest of Biko was fortuitous on the police's part. 'Williamson was privy to the plans for Steve to be whisked out of the country to meet with Tambo in Botswana, but I don't believe the security police laid a trap for Steve,' she says.⁸

Three days after Biko's death Williamson, on behalf of the IUEF, issued a statement.

Statement on the Death of Steve Biko

Steve was a true leader of his people and a true fighter for liberation and he never faltered no matter how hard the struggle. Despite all the efforts of the South African authorities, Steve and his fellow workers in the various Black Consciousness organisations carried on regardless and if anything with increased determination. Like all those who oppose the apartheid system, Steve suffered legal harassment, detention, arrest, assault, terrorism, insult, threats and the murder of his friends, but never flinched, despite his suffering. As a leader, Steve suffered even more than most in South Africa because the authorities sought a way to break him and his influence amongst his people.

A few short weeks ago Steve phoned the IUEF and told of his latest arrest and courage for breaking his banning order. He then said, 'They are really desperate to get me,' and he laughed. We will not easily forget the courage of Steve and we are convinced that Steve's death was the only way that the South African authorities could succeed in stopping his personal activity in pursuance of liberation.

But Steve's death will not set back liberation in South Africa and will spur those who are left behind to greater efforts. His

death will spur the IUEF to ever greater support to those working and fighting for liberation in South Africa. To the IUEF, Steve was more than an admired leader of his people – he was also a close friend.

Steve Biko was a great African, a great Human Being and person to whom the freedom of his people and the liberation of the last corner of his continent meant enough for him to give his life. We warn the South African authorities that his death will not go unavenged and his example is an inspiration to all those who wish to see South Africa free. The South African authorities know that against such people they cannot hope to win.

Ramphele says we will never know how many people were killed because of the intelligence information that Williamson shared with the security police when he was undercover.

A year after Biko's death, Ramphele, who had been banished to Tzaneen in what was then the northern Transvaal, came home for lunch from her work at a nearby clinic she had established to find 9-month-old Hlumelo, the son she had with Biko, on the knee of a woman in a beret. The woman introduced herself as Lisa-Jane Williamson, Craig's sister. She was with a young black man, whom she introduced as her comrade. 'She said they'd just come to see how I was doing. A lot of people came to visit me – it wasn't remarkable. So we sat around and had lunch and then she said she's carrying greetings from Craig,' says Ramphele. Ramphele had never met Williamson and only knew him by reputation. 'I knew him as an exile figure and committed student leader, who was now working in the IUEF to support the work that we were doing.'

Lisa-Jane offered Ramphele money. 'She said Craig sent her to find out how I was doing because he was a friend of Steve's and concerned about my safety now that Steve was gone. She

asked if I needed help to go to a safe place and leave the country. I said, no. I refused to leave; I was going to be a pain in the bum until I died or became free. I told her I was not going anywhere. I didn't realise I was delivering the message to the Security Branch directly. The reason I didn't buy into his sister's offer of help was purely because it was clear to me that my role was going to be internal. I wasn't going to be persuaded by anybody to go into exile. I was also annoyed that someone arrived that I don't know from a bar of soap – it doesn't matter whose sister she is – and suggests that I need help. I told her if I want to skip the country I can do that; I didn't need her help.' Lisa-Jane Williamson and her comrade then left and never returned.

Ramphela said her rebellious nature protected her. 'They must have decided that I was a lost cause. They sent me to a godforsaken place, thinking that I would give up or become an alcoholic and vanish – but what horrified them was that I was still active; I had opened a clinic and set up a mobile clinic.'

After driving a wedge between the IUEF and the Black Consciousness Movement, Williamson continued with his plan to move closer to the ANC. The difficulty with that plan was that his boss, Lars-Gunnar Eriksson, a social democrat and anti-communist, was wary of the ANC's alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP).⁹ Williamson had to be shrewd to convince Eriksson to plump for the ANC. At the IUEF's conference in 1978 Williamson successfully pushed through the policy that the IUEF officially support the ANC.¹⁰

As a result, the Security Branch's master plan for Williamson, under cover of the IUEF, to penetrate the ANC was advanced one step further.¹¹

Chapter 12

‘How I Cracked the ANC’

How close did Craig Williamson get to the ANC? According to Paula Ensor, Williamson was embraced by the ANC leadership in exile and even appeared on platforms with them.¹ According to Williamson, in an article he wrote for the South African Police magazine *Servamus* in 1981, he practically ran the movement. In his view, being recruited into the ANC was as simple as having the IUEF director, Lars-Gunnar Eriksson, introduce him to the ANC in London during his trip to Europe as NUSAS vice-president with Mike Stent in 1975. If we can believe him, the ANC assigned him a mission to establish his own cell back in South Africa and gather political intelligence and organise the distribution of ANC propaganda. ‘My introduction to the ANC–SACP spy world was complete. False names, cover addresses, secret writing techniques, counter-surveillance training and clandestine meetings in parks and underground tube stations became routine, all of which are classic intelligence techniques with the unmistakable KGB stamp.’²

In his testimony against Barbara Hogan in her treason trial a few years after he was unmasked as a spy, Williamson expanded on his training in ANC policy and operations, which he said was conducted by Aziz Pahad and Ronnie Kasrils. He was taught secret communication methods, using dead letter boxes and

book codes to get messages across. 'A book code,' he explained to the court, 'can either be a very simple or a very complicated device. In the beginning I was taught a very simple method, the essence of which is that the two parties who wish to communicate must be in possession of the same book, then through a series of numerals written onto a piece of paper you can indicate a message by indicating a page number of that book and then a line number and then a word number or a letter number.' He testified that the more complicated method involved the construction of various vertical or linear scales, using letters and numerals. He said this method was so sophisticated that it was virtually unbreakable.

According to Williamson, it was the ANC activist Stephanie Kemp, whom he described as 'infamous and beautiful', who gave him his first instructions for an ANC-SACP operation at a secret meeting in an airport waiting room. This was to smuggle ANC propaganda back into South Africa in a suitcase and then distribute it clandestinely in South Africa. 'Stephanie, perhaps because she is a physiotherapist, is very good with her hands and is responsible for the manufacture of false-bottomed suitcases packed with leaflets,' he wrote, adding that the joke was on the ANC because the propaganda material went directly into the police archives.

Williamson also testified that he was given the uMkhonto we Sizwe code name Paul Newman: the implication of having a code name, he said, was that the person was involved in conspiracy work for the ANC.

Williamson said his responsibilities were expanded from gathering information and distributing propaganda, to influencing international attitudes towards the ANC, raising funds for the organisation and its internal projects, and recruiting young whites into uMkhonto we Sizwe and training them to carry out acts of sabotage. He was also shown how to

manufacture explosive devices.

Williamson returned to South Africa and reported his breakthrough to his handler, Colonel Johann Coetzee. '[Coetzee's] predictions of three years earlier had proved unfailingly accurate. My cover and record were so perfect that despite the drawback of my known police service, the fish had accepted the bait. At that stage the Brigadier ordered us to strike in order to firmly hook our prey. To achieve this I established the cell as instructed but it was comprised entirely of security officials [including Karl Edwards and Paul Asmussen]. The cell was operationally successful from the very beginning, for obvious reasons. Brilliantly manufactured political intelligence was provided for the cell and this was transmitted to the ANC-SACP, who were soon clamouring for more. For a year we played our prey until we were sure that they were hooked.'

Williamson wrote that while his ANC unit was hooking its prey, the state was smashing genuine ANC-SACP underground networks within South Africa involved in the distribution of ANC-SACP propaganda. This resulted in convictions for Anthony Holiday, Jeremy Cronin, Stephen Lee, Timothy Jenkin, and Sue and David Rabkin. These activists were charged with various offences under the Terrorism Act and the Internal Security Act. In 1976 Holiday was sentenced to six years in jail, Cronin to seven, David Rabkin to ten and Susan Rabkin to one year, of which eleven months were suspended because she was pregnant. In 1978 Lee was sentenced to eight years behind bars and Jenkin to twelve.

After Williamson left South Africa 'illegally' in 1977 and secured his position at the IUEF, his relationship with the ANC continued. According to Williamson, when Eriksson offered him a job with the IUEF, it was the ANC who instructed him to take it so 'I could play a dual role as an ANC-SACP agent of influence

as well as a direct role in their underground activities'. 'My position at the IUEF was there under ANC discipline, as what is called an Agent of Influence.'³ At the Hogan trial Williamson described what it meant to be under ANC discipline. 'If one is working under ANC discipline, one is either a member or an active supporter of the organisation, working on the instructions of the organisation and usually under the direct supervision of a more senior member. My relationship with the ANC continued up until the moment that it was confirmed to them that I was a member of the South African Police in January 1980.'

After his unmasking, Williamson boasted that the South African state had infiltrated the liberation movement to such an extent that at an ANC–SACP meeting in London in 1979, 60 per cent of the participants were security officials. 'I doubt we could have penetrated the SACP–ANC much further without having to take it over lock, stock and barrel.'⁴ Unsurprisingly, the ANC has a somewhat different take on how close Williamson actually got to the organisation.

Chapter 13

‘Paul Newman’ Joins the ANC

Three leading ANC–SACP members who worked with Craig Williamson in London have interesting stories to tell. They are Ronnie Kasrils, who held various ministerial posts in the post-1994 ANC administrations, including Minister of Intelligence Services; Mac Maharaj, who became Minister of Transport and then President Jacob Zuma’s spin doctor; and Aziz Pahad, who held the post of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Not all of their recollections about Craig Williamson seem to agree with each other.

According to Ronnie Kasrils, Williamson’s job with the IUEF was his business card, which he used to make contact with the ANC at quite a high level. ‘He met with Thomas Nkobi, the ANC treasurer, Reg September in the London office, and Mac Maharaj and Aziz Pahad,’ says Kasrils.¹ Kasrils says that the ANC was attracted to Williamson because the money he was offering on behalf of the IUEF came from the Scandinavian governments, and it helped a number of the youth involved in the 1976 Soweto Uprising to flee South Africa and study abroad. His offer of funding was a way for Williamson to inveigle himself into the movement. For Kasrils, more important than the bursaries was Williamson’s offer to help fund the ANC’s underground. ‘I was interested because

Williamson told me he could help the underground and I was very keen to build underground connections from London that would be focused on spreading propaganda in South Africa, recruiting and training comrades, smuggling material into the country and directing operations.'

Kasrils met Williamson in London and says that right away he didn't think Williamson was quite right. 'I'm not saying this to be wise after the event. He had his story pat. It was almost too pat. It made me suspicious of him. It just didn't ring true. The white lefties who arrived in exile tended to be very passionate and came across in a very genuine way with their emotions and their depth of understanding and keenness of analysis, but he came across like a cold fish. He was tightly in control of himself, which was quite a giveaway; people weren't like that. He also had a strange background.'

The strange background Kasrils refers to was Williamson's national service in the police rather than in the defence force. 'Now, given apartheid's securocratic nature and military obsession you might think that being in the police was the softer option, but most of the liberal types served in the army. They wouldn't go to the police because it had a greater stigma. If you were in the military you were drafted with your peers. I pushed him on it and his story was, "Well, I liked the idea of being a detective."'

Kasrils says that what caused his spy antennas to react was the stiffness about Williamson. 'He was humourless. He couldn't relax, everything was scripted.' Williamson also namedropped about the people he was involved with and, when Kasrils questioned him about his ideology, he claimed he wasn't much of a theoretician, which was his way of avoiding tripping up over Marxist theory and thought.

After meeting and appraising Williamson, Kasrils says his next step was to report to an operational unit of SACP members

in London which was led by Dr Yusuf Dadoo. '[Dr Yusuf] Dadoo was the chairman, [Joe] Slovo was secretary, and Stephanie Kemp and Aziz Pahad were there too. I reported to them and gave Williamson the code name Newman.' Williamson, it seems, added Paul to Newman. He had two things in common with the actor Paul Newman – they both liked driving fast (the good-looking Newman was a professional racing car driver) and both made a living by pretending they were people they weren't. But, according to Kasrils, Williamson wasn't Paul Newman – he was just the 'new man'.

The Dadoo unit operated at a time when the ANC's structures in South Africa had been crushed following the Rivonia Trial, and it was meant to contribute to the organisation's internal reconstruction in a programme of rebuilding inside South Africa. In addition, the unit produced material about the struggle against apartheid, which it distributed inside South Africa, and it also recruited individuals from the UK – initially South Africans – to start underground cells in the country while living apparently 'normal' lives.

Stephanie Kemp, who was part of the Dadoo unit, can't remember Kasrils's report but recalls that the unit discussed whether Williamson could provide assistance to their work. He was asked for a CV, which the members of the unit checked for inconsistencies. What raised Kemp's doubts was that Williamson had gone to the police after school, which was unusual. 'I was the only one on the Dadoo unit who had a problem with this – possibly because I was culturally closer to this interface,' she says.² Kasrils says he told the Dadoo unit that Williamson had a network of people in the white left who weren't known and he was using them to get people out the country. 'He had got quite a lot of black people who were highly wanted after the Soweto Uprising out of South Africa. He appeared OK. The pipeline

was a big carrot for us. I conveyed my doubts. This is the kind of thing you get frequently in any resistance movement – you think you're being penetrated, you assess and you're not sure.'

Kasrils decided to test Williamson with an old item of propaganda – a comic titled *Simon and Jane*. Simon was a worker and Jane was a domestic servant who fall in love and come up against apartheid. Simon joins the underground, learns to fire guns, and make petrol bombs. Kasrils had been studiously distributing it for four years and getting people to smuggle it into the country without success. 'I gave him the comics. A couple of months later he sent me a cutting from the Johannesburg *Sunday Express*, of a story about how the *Simon and Jane* comics were circulating in the townships.'

When Kasrils saw the *Sunday Express* article, he was not impressed. 'I showed this cutting to Slovo and the others. Williamson was showing us that he had achieved the mission by distributing the comics and was sending us proof, but the proof made us not trust him. The *Sunday Express* was notoriously used by Special Branch, and Gordon Winter, who we knew was an agent for BOSS, worked at the paper.' Despite this, Kasrils says they still couldn't be sure that Williamson was an agent. So Kasrils decided to set another test for Williamson, and arranged to meet him again. 'Williamson brought with him one of his underground people in London, who he said was going to go back to South Africa. The guy was a type of Craig, clean-shaven, receding hair and neat. He was on guard – like Craig. Lefties who met us weren't guarded; they were fascinated with us.'

Kasrils decided he was going to push them hard. 'I told them that I wanted them to set off leaflets bombs and I was going to train them here. They were quite into that. I had a false bottom suitcase and the guy was going back to South Africa that night, so I told him he should take the leaflets and the leaflet bomb

devices back with him. The guy went pale. He got so anxious, probably thinking we were going to kill him in the plane. He said he would just take the leaflets. I could have pushed it, but I wasn't that kind of bastard.'

The leaflet bombs went off as planned, but, according to Kasrils, it didn't prove conclusively that Williamson was actually a police agent – which makes one wonder what the point of these tests were.

Kasrils remembers Horst Kleinschmidt, a former NUSAS vice-president who was then working for the International Defence and Aid Fund in London, warned him about Williamson. He also recalls encountering Paula Ensor at an anti-apartheid march and asked her what she thought of Williamson. 'She said he's a guy you must be wary of. They couldn't actually say with 100 per cent certainty that he was an agent, but the suspicion was there.'

Kemp recalls meeting Williamson when Dadoo instructed her to courier cash directly to Williamson at the IUEF in Geneva. 'I met him and handed over the cash – which I carried on me. He asked when I was flying back to London and insisted we meet at the airport. I refused – this was not within the rules of clandestine activity. When I reached the airport after some hours, he was there. I had coffee with him and his wife, and he harassed me to reveal my identity. I was using a pseudonym, and before the plane arrived, he exclaimed that he had worked out who I was.'³ Kasrils says that after Kemp met Williamson, he asked her if he had given her anything. 'Yes,' she answered, 'he gave me the spooks.'



Mac Maharaj doesn't remember Kasrils being so wary of Williamson. After becoming secretary of the Internal Political and Reconstruction Department of the ANC in December 1977, Maharaj travelled to London, where Kasrils and Aziz Pahad told him about an amazing unit that had set off leaflet bombs in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town in two days. The propaganda leaflets, they told him, were in celebration of Dr Yusuf Dadoo's birthday and had been showered from the balcony of Johannesburg's City Hall.⁴

'I said to myself, "Hey, who can be that mobile?" In the real conditions of South Africa, this cannot be a black unit – this must be a white unit, which has resources to fly to Joburg to carry out an operation, fly to Durban to carry out an operation and then fly to Cape Town to carry out an operation. None of this can be carried out spontaneously. It must be based on reconnaissance. To be sure, at this stage, I didn't tell all the comrades in London my suspicions. All I said was, "Chaps, this unit you're talking about is phenomenal. Are you sure you know who you're dealing with?" And they told me: "No, no, no, it's a fantastic unit."'

Maharaj says that Dadoo, who was in the meeting with them, did not tell him who the members of the unit were but agreed to send him correspondence from them. 'He sent me reports signed by a person with the code name Newman. I investigated and discovered that Newman was Craig's code name. I established that these extensive reports – all under code names – were coming from Karl Edwards through Craig to London.' Maharaj was concerned because the reports were so detailed and because Edwards seemed to be travelling freely around South Africa while forging extensive links with underground activists.

According to Maharaj, 'London' (that is, Kasrils and Pahad) told him that they had tested the unit. They gave them tasks, which they carried out, and there were press reports to prove it.

'They said the leaflets were showered in the City Hall. I said this is not a leaflet bomb. This means that someone was physically in the gallery and threw the leaflets in a council meeting and got away. How do you do this? But London says there's proof because there is a report in the newspaper. And I remember saying to the London comrades: "Is this the kind of test you carry out if you suspect a person is an enemy agent? How does this test establish their credibility?" I'd been looking at this in a very cold way and I said to them, "I would send him to assassinate a top enemy target. Because if he carries it out and he is an enemy then he's destroying himself, and if he isn't an enemy, then he's a fantastic cadre. But you can't tell me that a shower of leaflets and a report in the paper is enough.'"

Maharaj says he is not trying to point fingers at anyone. 'I'm just saying that it's time the comrades begin to speak a little more clearly, so we can understand how the regime was able to find spaces for enemy agents like Craig to work. If we don't, he is able to create the legend that he was a super-spy when he was not.'

Maharaj says that wherever he turned he bumped into Williamson. 'He was Lars-Gunnar Eriksson's right-hand man, and had the keys to the IUEF safe. I was picking up traces of Williamson all over the place – in Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho – and back in South Africa. The way the story is told, it seems Williamson had infiltrated only the ANC, but because he was controlling the IUEF's funding streams, he was the primary conduit into South Africa's [anti-apartheid] who's who. His men in the country, Karl Edwards and Paul Asmussen, travelled under the cover of NUSAS ... In Swaziland he is courting the ANC's [chief representative] Stanley Mabizela, offering him money. He goes to Botswana and stays over at Marius and Jenny [Schoon] and offers Marius money. Marius writes to me to tell me about it and I write back and tell him not to touch that money.

In later life in South Africa Marius complained to me, “Why didn’t you tell me you suspected him?” But that’s not how you deal with someone you suspect of being an enemy agent, because if you tell your whole structure that you suspect someone, then before you know it the agent knows he’s a suspect.’

Dadoo invited Maharaj to meet with the Newman unit to assuage his concerns. Williamson wanted the meeting to take place in Spain, Malawi or the Seychelles, but Maharaj was concerned that he would be vulnerable there to being picked up by South African agents and suggested London instead. When they met, ‘I walked into the hotel room and said [to Karl Edwards], “Karl, have you stopped fucking around?” He went pale. I had done my homework and knew he had a reputation as a womaniser, so I greeted him that way so I could control the situation. There was Williamson and a third man lurking, who turned out to be Paul Asmussen, and who I later established was the leaflet bomber.’

Maharaj says he praised this unit for their fine work but knew their freedom of movement was just too good to be true and he was more suspicious than ever that they were South African agents – especially when Asmussen asked to work directly with him. ‘He said, “I want to establish a contact with you so we can meet face to face.” I said that was OK and asked where we should meet. He tells me he often goes on safari in Botswana, so suggests we meet in the desert. I say, “Sure,” but I’m thinking, I’m a dead man. I’m being called to meet at some secluded spot in the Kalahari where I’ll be kidnapped.’

It’s clear from a report that Edwards filed on Maharaj’s ‘personality appearance and political outlook’ to his Special Branch masters that Maharaj’s concern that his life was in danger was well founded: ‘From personal discussions with MAC MAHARAJ it was evident that he is a supreme egotist, but at the same time an extremely dangerous and ruthless

opponent ... From old photographs of MAHARAJ it is evident that he has changed his appearance entirely. His hair style is short and pushed arrogantly to the side, and he wears a 'pirate's eyepatch' over his blind eye. His dress is casual and his whole appearance is designed to give one the impression of a dashing revolutionary. This appearance, linked with an arrogant and egotistical personality, completes the picture. There is no doubt that his new look is effective. He is a tireless worker and obviously has a large following who idolize him wherever he puts in an appearance. He conjures up amongst his following the true image of the indestructible and all-powerful revolutionary. (Should the ANC/SACP ever lose MAHARAJ, it would be an extremely harsh practical and psychological blow to them.)⁵

Maharaj says he left the London meeting with the Newman unit knowing two things for certain. 'One, that these are wankers and, two, I can't win the battle with Aziz and Ronnie – because they have cultivated them, it's like they are their property. They are their star performers. They can't produce anyone else who is performing at home. They have this phenomenal unit that gives them information from the ground and is able to give them reports from Natal to Cape Town, and they have access to great resources. And Williamson is senior in the IUEF, which is now giving more money to ANC officials – so all of those things are loading the dice against me. But I am now convinced.'

In August 1977 at the World Conference for Action Against Apartheid in Lagos, ANC president Oliver Tambo gave Maharaj a letter from Nelson Mandela, who was then imprisoned on Robben Island. Maharaj read it and handed it back to Tambo, telling him it sounded authentic and asked him how he had got it. 'OR tells me he got it from Craig Williamson at this conference, and says Williamson would like to publish it in the next IUEF report. I said to Chief [Tambo], "No, this is not being

published. I want to get to the bottom of it.” Maharaj says his investigation revealed that the letter had come from Mandela via an International Red Cross member visiting Robben Island, to a man in London, to Williamson.

A few months later Maharaj and Tambo flew to Geneva where Maharaj says he planned ‘to bludgeon the information out of Williamson’. ‘I was determined to force him to tell me the truth. I meet Craig and I say, “I know who you got this letter from – the man in London – and I know who the man in London got it from. I know these names – now you must give me these names.” He says he doesn’t know. I said this is property of the ANC and you can’t tell me that you can’t divulge it. The ANC needs to know, and if you don’t tell me I’m going to cause a crisis. Craig collapses and tells me the man in London’s name but doesn’t know, as far as I’m concerned, who had given it to the man in London.’

There were two consequences. Firstly, Maharaj found the Red Cross representative and asked him to cut out the middlemen and rather give messages from Mandela directly to Tambo. Secondly, Maharaj was furious with Williamson for treating Mandela’s property as his own. ‘He is supposed to be an ANC comrade. I’m secretary of the Internal [Political and Reconstruction Department] and he is working as an internal operative, but I have to force the information out of him.’

Soon after his confrontation with Williamson, the ANC treasurer Thomas Nkobi showed Maharaj a letter Williamson had written to him, complaining that, despite being totally committed to the ANC, he was being undermined by ‘ANC comrades’. He wrote that even his work in the IUEF was in support of the ANC. He asked the ANC to write an open letter dismissing suspicions that he was working for the other side.

‘I took the letter to Thabo Mbeki, who was the ANC’s chief rep in Nigeria. I said, here is a letter from Craig Williamson,

the effect of this letter is to ask you for an endorsement – don't give it to him. Thabo asks me why. I say, I'm sure he's an enemy agent. It was feared that not writing a letter might jeopardise funding to the ANC, so a diplomatic letter was written back.'

The letter eventually written by Mbeki, who was by then the political secretary of the ANC in Tambo's office based in Lusaka, was set out on an ANC letterhead and dated '5 October Year of the Spear' [1979]. It's a skilfully written document that at first glance appears to vouch for Williamson. However, on closer inspection it simply says that the fact that Williamson was once in the South African Police had never served as grounds for the ANC to conclude that he was an enemy agent. 'At no stage has any of your personal history led the ANC to the conclusion that you are a "spy",' Mbeki wrote.

According to Maharaj, despite the letter, the doors to the ANC started to close for Williamson. 'Marius spurns his money and later, with the help of Patrick Fitzgerald and Heinz Klug [ANC members in Botswana running SANA, the news agency set up by Eric Abraham], SANA is wrested away from him. The Swazi comrades are not co-operating with him – and I have become Craig's nemesis,' he says.

Despite Maharaj's assertions, Cedric de Beer, who had compiled a report on behalf of NUSAS warning the ANC that Williamson was 'almost certainly a police agent', is still not convinced that Maharaj always suspected Williamson. 'Mac heard about my suspicions and said – and I heard this from two sources – that there are two types of people in the white left: those like Williamson and Edwards who have ideas about what to do for the struggle and get things done, and those like De Beer who just talk.'

Maharaj denies this. 'It's time to speak openly,' he says. 'An inquiry [by the NUSAS leadership] unearthed that he was a

policeman when he was in NUSAS. He made some explanations and the leadership of NUSAS accepted his explanation. To cover it up to say we sent a report to the ANC is not good enough – because it's palming the problem. We need to look eyeball to eyeball here. They suspected him and instituted an inquiry. The inquiry happened and they prepared a report. The reality is that the student body was concerned and he admitted that he had been in the police force, but the question arises: if the inquiry was instituted, then those who suspected him had a duty to pursue the investigation rather than to palm it off to the ANC. What is the ANC going to do about it? I don't want to get caught up with whose hands are stained. Nobody must walk away with clean hands here.'



The third ANC leader in London who has a story to tell is Aziz Pahad, who first met Williamson when he came to Geneva as the IUEF representative. 'Hey, this guy,' Pahad says, shaking his head when I ask him about Williamson. 'Everybody hinted that there were problems about him but they never gave us concrete information.'⁶

According to Pahad, because of these questions about Williamson the ANC never thought he was suitable for internal operations, but kept him close because he was connected to the IUEF. 'I met with him not wearing my internal hat. I was part of the ANC's group to build international solidarity and Williamson was the link to all the Black Consciousness guys.'

Pahad says that all the funding from the IUEF to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) came via Williamson, and he passed correspondence between the IUEF and the BCM to the ANC. 'Of course, we know now that it was selective information

and, in hindsight, it wasn't that useful. When we met informally with him there was always a question mark, but we decided to keep the interaction and see what happened. He was our only source within the IUEF, and he would give us their reports and their analysis of the political situation in South Africa, specifically with the white left.'

Pahad remembers that Williamson came regularly to London to meet with the International Defence and Aid Fund, which supported the families of political prisoners and trialists back in South Africa, and would then visit Pahad. 'Whenever he was in London we'd say, "Hey, this guy" because he used to come to London and we'd go to pubs and everybody used to say afterwards: "This guy doesn't drink, this guy doesn't talk and there's just something slimy about this guy."'

According to Pahad, although he knew Williamson had distributed ANC propaganda leaflets illegally in South Africa, he disputes that he was part of an organised ANC or SACP unit. 'I can't remember that. I'm fascinated. Is my memory so faded? If Mac [Maharaj] was so suspicious, why didn't he tell us not to touch this guy? People kept talking about this guy – saying there was something wrong, and that something about this guy doesn't add up, but nobody told us what.'

Pahad says people worked with Williamson even though they were suspicious of him because they had become a bit blasé. 'We had just come from a period where comrades had been labelled counter-revolutionary or accused of being traitors and had been killed or totally isolated, so we were very careful of identifying people as agents without proof.'

Pahad remembers meeting with Williamson at an anti-apartheid conference in Geneva. 'Williamson put bottles of South African wine on the table and Mike Terry, who was the leader of the Anti-Apartheid Movement [in the UK], exploded.

“Are you trying to compromise us?” he shouted at him. Here are anti-apartheid activists and ANC leaders at an anti-apartheid conference campaigning for the boycott against South Africa and Craig was giving them South African wine. He was always bringing us South African wine and dried fruit, and people used to – sometimes jokingly – say, “We can’t drink it in public but we do miss it, so we’ll drink it in private.” But everyone used to say, “What’s this guy’s agenda?””

Chapter 14

Suspicious

There was a long list of activists who were suspicious of Williamson when they came into contact with him during his nine years as a ‘comrade’ in the anti-apartheid struggle. Cedric de Beer, for one, was convinced that Williamson wasn’t who he said he was. When Julian Sturgeon flew out of Geneva to set up the South African News Agency (SANA) in Botswana, he sat next to De Beer, who turned to him and said: ‘Don’t ever trust Williamson.’ It was a comment Sturgeon never forgot.¹

De Beer had encountered Williamson as a fellow pupil at St John’s, where he was certain that Williamson was a racist bully. When De Beer bumped into Williamson on campus a few years later, he thought that a racist bully doesn’t just stop being a racist bully. Williamson also didn’t fit the profile of a committed left-wing activist – he wasn’t overtly political or ideological, which is why many activists didn’t trust him and, as much as possible, kept their distance from him. However, besides keeping their distance there wasn’t much they could do. NUSAS wasn’t an underground organisation, and their activities were not confidential. ‘Despite our attempts to be radical, we were really liberals,’ says Geoff Budlender.² ‘We used to say, “How can you judge someone before they have been found guilty?” which, in retrospect, may not be a very good basis to run a political organisation. So there were

suspicions about him but nobody did anything about it.' Besides, Williamson was efficient and hardworking, and people like that were a scarce commodity in NUSAS.

Duncan Innes, a former NUSAS president, left South Africa in 1972 and, with an IUEF grant, registered at Sussex University for a master's degree and then a PhD. Innes became involved in a research project with Dan O'Meara to provide information and assistance to the black trade unions that were being formed in South Africa as well as doing research for the ANC in exile. The IUEF agreed to fund the project, and Innes and O'Meara met with the fund's director, Lars-Gunnar Eriksson, when he came to London. The three would talk about what was happening in South Africa and the world of the ANC and the Black Consciousness Movement. At one of these meetings Eriksson asked Innes what he knew about someone called Craig Williamson. 'I told him that I knew he had been on the Wits SRC but I didn't know very much about him,' says Innes. 'A couple of months later, Lars was coming to London and wanted to have lunch with Dan and me and, he said, he was bringing Williamson.'³ This took place during Williamson's NUSAS trip to Europe in 1975 with the NUSAS president Mike Stent.

'We met at Russell Square in London, and Craig arrived and apologised for being late, saying he got held up at the ANC's offices. I raised my eyebrows. I had been in London since 1972, and although I had contact with the ANC I had never been to their office – nor would I go to their office because the South Africans were watching every person who went into their office and would have specially taken note of a guy travelling on a South African passport who is the vice-president of NUSAS. The other thing that bothered me is that Williamson just blurted out to Dan and me – strangers – that he had met the ANC.'

Innes decided to find out whether Williamson could be trusted.

He made contact with NUSAS leaders like Glenn Moss, who told him to keep away because Williamson was not to be trusted. 'When I told Lars he got quite pissed off. He said, "Well, what's the evidence against him?" I told him we didn't know what the evidence was, but the people on the ground in South Africa were suspicious of him and told us not to get involved with him. He said he found this very strange because Craig has been phenomenally supportive of the IUEF, and had helped them channel money into the country. Lars said he had gone to Gaborone and Craig had crossed the border at night to meet with him. I told Lars that this did not make me feel that Craig was a brave guy who could be trusted. I said as NUSAS president I would never have tried to cross the border at night into Gaborone and would never have met with anyone in the anti-apartheid movement in a place I knew was crawling with apartheid agents. To me, that was just further evidence he can't be trusted.'

Eriksson told Innes that he would set a trap for Williamson, and he would speak to the ANC and see what they knew about Williamson. 'We met Lars again some time later and he told us that he has the go-ahead from the ANC to say that this guy is trustworthy – and he would make a very valuable contribution to the struggle and Lars should go on supporting him. I asked him who in the ANC he had spoken to. He said, Thabo Mbeki. He said Thabo had given the go-ahead. I asked him what had happened to the trap he said he would set for Williamson, and he said he didn't set the trap because Thabo was so enthusiastic about Williamson that it wasn't necessary. I said, OK, but the reports we had contradict that, and we won't have anything to do with Craig.'

However, Thabo Mbeki says he cannot recall such a conversation. 'That's not to say that it did not take place. If and when it did, it's difficult for me to speculate on what it is that

I might have said.’ Mbeki says that towards the end of 1977 he and his wife Zanele, who had worked with Williamson at the IUEF, were in Nigeria where he was serving as the ANC’s chief representative. ‘I would imagine that Lars-Gunnar would have sought an ANC opinion about Williamson from the ANC HQ in Lusaka or possibly the ANC office in London, rather than some ANC representative in Lagos.’⁴

When Innes heard that Williamson had left South Africa illegally with Eric Abraham, he thought that this could only be a setup. ‘There was a lot of publicity about these heroes, but I remember thinking there’s no way that they would have been able to get away with that.’

When Williamson left the country, De Beer raised his suspicions about Williamson with Horst Kleinschmidt, an ANC member who had fled South Africa in 1976 and was then working in London for the International Defence and Aid Fund. Aurret van Heerden also passed on his suspicions to Kleinschmidt when he travelled to London and Geneva, soon after being elected NUSAS president in 1978, to meet with Williamson and the IUEF. ‘NUSAS’s relationship with the IUEF was an important, although illegal, one, and a lot of funding for student activities depended on the relationship. My closest comrades and I were pretty sure Williamson and [Karl] Edwards were spies, based on a pattern of events over a number of years,’ says Van Heerden.⁵

Van Heerden’s suspicions were based on the fact that Edwards was reckless – he handed out money to Black Consciousness groups, channelled money through the IUEF and was involved in a courier system – and this was obvious to the NUSAS members. ‘We felt if it’s obvious to us, he must either be a dangerous idiot or he must be an agent, because there’s no way this activity can carry on unchecked. It was too blatant. At one point, we thought, Well,

his luck as an amateur would have run out by now and he should be in deep trouble, but he isn't, so he must be a spy – and if his network hasn't been blown up, it must be because the authorities are letting him run it. And Williamson was on the other end of that network, so it must be a double act.' Van Heerden says they were hesitant to jump to conclusions because of the consequences of such an accusation, but they decided they would inform the ANC of their suspicions. 'Williamson's behaviour in Geneva confirmed my doubts. He tried to recruit me into the ANC, which was a blatant attempt to incriminate me. I passed these suspicions to Horst [Kleinschmidt].'

Kleinschmidt says he passed on De Beer's report up the ANC chain and, he claims, it was eventually handed to Mac Maharaj.⁶ According to Kleinschmidt, Maharaj leapt to Williamson's defence – an accusation Maharaj denies. Kleinschmidt was invited to a party at Aziz Pahad's home in Belsize Park in London. When he arrived he saw Williamson at the top of the stairs, holding the banister on both sides, and glaring at him. 'He didn't greet me. Within ten minutes of my arrival, Aziz asked if I would mind leaving because Williamson said I was spreading rumours about him.' Kleinschmidt left.

Almost forty years later, Pahad says he would never have asked Kleinschmidt to leave his party. 'Horst was my best friend. How can he say that I would ask him to leave a party? That would be crazy. We were comrades.'⁷

But Kleinschmidt is adamant that Pahad told him to leave. He also says that after the party he was summoned by the ANC's head of research in London, Frene Ginwala, who demanded to know what evidence he had that Williamson was a spy. 'I told her about the De Beer report. She told me that the allegations were just allegations; there was no proof, and Williamson's story was just as good as my story.'

All Ginwala would say is that this took place decades ago and ‘memory fades’. ‘I trusted Horst ... I cannot remember having that conversation with him,’ she says.⁸

Another person who had his suspicions was Harry Nengwekhulu, the Black Consciousness activist, who had encountered Williamson in Botswana in 1975 when Eriksson asked him to help his protégé jump back into South Africa. Nengwekhulu met up with Williamson again in Geneva later. The two men talked about the Black Consciousness Movement, and Nengwekhulu was surprised by how much information Williamson had. ‘He knew all about the internal politics of the movement, especially in the Western Cape. He had a lot of details about factions and even gossip – about who had stolen whose girlfriend and wife. That’s when I became really suspicious. How can a white person know so much about an organisation that doesn’t have white people? The only people who have this information are cops. I phoned [the BC leader] Barney Pityana and said to him I thought Williamson was either a policeman or worked for the CIA. Barney said to me, “No, man, don’t be racist.”’⁹

Another thing that made Nengwekhulu suspicious was Williamson’s appearance. ‘He had a crew cut, wore a safari suit and brown boots, and I thought to myself, This guy is a policeman. I know it’s not very scientific, but that is what I believed. He also had a copy of the South African Defence Force magazine *Paratus* and I asked him about it. He said, “Well, if you want to know your enemy, you’ve got to study what they do,” which was plausible enough, I suppose. Williamson also told me that if I wanted money exchanged from any currency into rands, I should speak to him. Again, the only people who I knew could do that were cops.’

One Friday afternoon at a tea in the IUEF office, Nengwekhulu

looked at Williamson and blurted out his suspicion. 'I hadn't planned to ask him, the question just popped out. I said: "Are you sure you're not a cop?" He didn't say anything, but Eriksson's wife Alison was there and she said, "He *was* a cop but he resigned." I thought, Once a cop, always a cop. He never showed any feeling of being offended, but he then followed me and asked why I had asked him that. I said that it wasn't only me who thinks you're a spy ... black South Africans know the oppressor.'



Williamson was a shrewd and sophisticated operator, managing to manoeuvre his way close to power where he could quietly influence key people in important organisations. However, every now and again, he would drop his guard and a different Williamson would emerge.

When they were students at Wits University, Williamson would take Reg Rumney for a drive in his car, gunning down dirt roads at ridiculous speeds and doing handbrake turns and 360-degree spins. During one of these drives, Rumney recalls Williamson giving him some advice. 'If you're ever in a fight with a black guy, don't punch him on the head because blacks have thick skulls. Rather hit him in the throat,' Rumney recalls Williamson telling him.¹⁰ Though this was long-discredited racial 'science', Rumney remembers Williamson expressing this view with conviction. 'I was surprised. I suppose I should have been more surprised in retrospect ... it's always in retrospect. I thought he was good-hearted but just stupid. Probably we weren't as paranoid of spies as we should have been. But we weren't doing anything wrong – in fact, we were quite proud of expressing our views. We would have been proud to be picked up by the police.'

Laura Schultz, who administered NUSAS scholarship trusts of which Williamson was a trustee, remembers him making sexist and racist jokes. ‘There’s one joke I remember specifically. He said policemen pulled a man who was bound in chains out of the sea. The one policeman turns to the other policeman and says, “Typical kaffir, trying to steal more chain than he can carry.” Yes, he used the k-word. It was brutal arrogance and utterly disrespectful. He was saying things we should have challenged, but we were frightened of him and, instead of challenging him, we withdrew.’¹¹

Julian Sturgeon and Fink Haysom were in Williamson’s flat in Geneva when the secret agent played them a tape recording of a Soweto choir. ‘It was beautiful,’ says Sturgeon. ‘Craig turned around to us and said, “*Jong, daai kaffermeide kan sing* [Yoh, those kaffir girls can sing].” I was shocked. You didn’t say shit like that. What the hell? It didn’t add up. It was in opposition to the façade he had created. Christ, that’s weird, I thought. Fink and I talked about it afterwards but dismissed it; Fink was under pressure, he was heading back to South Africa, where he was being sought by the security police. He was immediately detained and spent nearly 200 days in detention – and, of course, that was Williamson who caused that. In retrospect, I suppose, Williamson was taking a chance – he was a good operator and a very persuasive person, but he was arrogant and sometimes enjoyed the fact that he was able to pull the wool over so many people’s eyes – and that was a piece of bravado.’¹²

Williamson’s outbursts and racist utterances over the years made people raise their eyebrows because it wasn’t the sort of behaviour typical of anti-apartheid activists, but it still wasn’t proof that he was a police agent. Questions about Williamson’s bona fides had been raised directly with Eriksson, his boss in the IUEF, but it seemed the IUEF director had a blind spot

when it came to his understudy. Just as Horst Kleinschmidt was receiving concerns about Williamson and passing them on to the ANC, so Duncan Innes kept getting warnings from South Africa about Williamson and he passed these on to Eriksson. 'Lars wouldn't entertain any criticism on those lines about Craig. He said it was just rumour-mongering. There was speculation that Craig had something on Lars that he could hold against him,' says Innes.

Barry Gilder, who worked in the IUEF's Geneva office from February to May 1976 and lived with Eriksson for a while, says that he and Eriksson became quite close. In 1977, Eriksson told Gilder he was considering appointing Williamson as his number two but wanted to clear up some concerns that had been raised about him. When Gilder told Eriksson he didn't trust Williamson, Eriksson was dismissive. 'He effectively told me to stop arousing suspicions about this poor fellow,' says Gilder.¹³

On 30 June 1978 Eriksson released a press statement announcing that 29-year-old Williamson had been appointed as his deputy: 'The [IUEF's] International Board feels that due to Mr Williamson's long-standing experience with the IUEF and his knowledge of and involvement in southern African affairs, his appointment as Deputy Director of the IUEF will contribute towards the long-term development of the activities of the organisation. A large number of applications were received for this post, but after careful consideration, the Board felt that Mr Williamson's intimate knowledge of the IUEF, together with his special qualifications, make him, at this point in time, the best choice for the IUEF.'¹⁴

According to several accounts, Williamson's promotion was accompanied by a marked change in his personality. From being well-liked, outgoing and easy to get on with, he became authoritarian and abrasive.¹⁵ Nengwekhulu remembers

Williamson, whom he described as ‘mostly likeable’, exploding at IUEF staff when they were too slow to do something or made mistakes. Yet despite all the suspicions swirling around Williamson, Eriksson told the IUEF annual conference in December 1979 that ‘he retained the fullest confidence’ in his number two. A month after Eriksson’s reassurances, Williamson’s cover was blown.

Chapter 15

Williamson Unmasked

On 2 January 1980, nine years after he walked onto Wits campus trying to impersonate a hippie, an article was published in the London *Observer* that pulled a strand loose from Craig Williamson's web of lies. The spy's double life began to unravel.

Williamson was in the bath when a radio news bulletin quoted the *Observer* report that a South African spy had defected to Britain.¹

His wife Ingrid said to him: 'You know this spy?'

'Ag, it's always spy bullshit. It's probably that bloody fool Gordon Winter,' Williamson told her. Ingrid went out to buy the newspaper. When she came back, Williamson thought she'd been attacked and raped. He'd never seen her look like that in her life – not even when he had told her that he was a spy. Ingrid held up *The Observer* and there was Arthur McGiven's photograph. That's a great way to find out, thought Williamson sarcastically.

The story published in *The Observer* was about the defection of McGiven, a BOSS agent. BOSS had discovered that McGiven, who had served on the 1973/4 Wits SRC with Derek Brune, Paul Sarbutt and Williamson, was living with a man, which in the apartheid South African catalogue of sins was almost as bad as being a communist. Members of the Security Branch abused him, shouted at him, and called him a disgusting *moffie*.² McGiven

was declared a security threat. That night he went to his office at BOSS, packed a suitcase of secret documents, including material relating to Williamson's operations, and left for London.

However, Williamson's masters didn't bother to tell him about these developments, which made Williamson angry and anxious. McGiven knew who he was and Williamson wondered what would have happened to him if McGiven had talked, say, while he was in Moscow or Luanda. Williamson phoned the Special Branch in South Africa. 'What the fuck are you doing?' he asked. 'Until I know what McGiven is doing and who he has told and what, my life is in danger. This isn't a joke.'³

A few days later, on Saturday, 5 January, Piers Campbell, the IUEF's project manager, saw Williamson in the organisation's office. Williamson was carrying a suitcase and said he was returning certain documents. The next day, a second McGiven article was published in *The Observer*, and although it didn't name Williamson it made a passing reference to the IUEF. On the Monday, Campbell found a note from Williamson in his office, which stated that his wife Ingrid was sick. That night Williamson called Campbell and said Ingrid had had a nervous breakdown and had returned to South Africa so that her mother could look after her. He also said that because he had assisted three ANC activists, Tim Jenkin, Alex Moumbaris and Stephen Lee, escape from Pretoria Central Prison, he was being pursued by BOSS agents. Williamson sounded confused and Campbell was worried about Williamson's strange behaviour.⁴

Julian Sturgeon, who was then in exile in the UK and who did odd jobs for Williamson, was also troubled by his erratic behaviour. 'Craig was in touch with me just about every day, he wanted me to do this and to do that, go there ... he was impossible. I didn't know what he was doing from one minute to the next. Eventually I had enough and started to block him.

I thought this guy was going off his head. He was so weird and we had these strange conversations. I couldn't cope with him. I wrote to him and said, "I quit." "Thank God."⁵ Then Williamson himself dropped out of sight for eleven days.

Meanwhile, the IUEF director, Lars-Gunnar Eriksson, was taking strain. There were staff problems at the IUEF and he was receiving threatening, anonymous phone calls at home. The IUEF's financials were in a mess and Eriksson was in a poor psychological state. This was exacerbated by the fact that a month earlier Williamson had told him that Piers Campbell was plotting to oust him as the organisation's director. In addition, Eriksson was having to defend his deputy from accusations that he was working for the South Africans or was a communist, and now Williamson had gone missing.⁶

Both Campbell and Eriksson were worried that something was seriously wrong. On 15 January, they discovered that Williamson's desk at the IUEF office had been cleared out. They discussed the possibility that he was being blackmailed by BOSS.

Eriksson wasn't the only person worried about Williamson. Back in South Africa, Colonel Johann Coetzee was anxious that his agent was in danger. Using a code they had arranged, he and Williamson hatched a plan. They were not overly optimistic about it but decided it was the only way – Coetzee himself had to confront Eriksson.⁷ By 'confront', Coetzee actually meant blackmail into silence. The South Africans had dirt on Eriksson and Coetzee knew that the IUEF director was afraid of being exposed for womanising, drinking, and misusing funds. Coetzee flew to Switzerland to rescue his agent and confront Eriksson.

The plan could well have blown up in his face. Though a neutral country, Switzerland has strict espionage laws. The South Africans hadn't been spying on Switzerland but were spying in their country. If Coetzee or Williamson had been arrested, it

could have created an international incident with embarrassing political and diplomatic fallout. But Coetzee's man was in danger and the security of the state was at stake, so Coetzee boarded a plane to bring back his mole.⁸ 'My man could have been in a very dangerous position,' Coetzee told a journalist afterwards. 'I had to be there myself to evaluate the position and decide whether to pull him out. Someone had to be there to take that decision. It's not something you can do from a distance.'⁹

On 17 January, Williamson phoned Eriksson and asked to meet him at the Hotel Zurich the next day – and to come alone. Campbell and Eriksson flew to Zurich. The meeting between Eriksson and Williamson was set for 1 p.m. If Campbell hadn't heard from Eriksson by 2 p.m., he was to contact the Swiss police.

When the two men met at 1 p.m., Williamson confessed that he was a member of the South African security police. His cover was finally broken; he had unmasked himself. Williamson was quick to explain that he was not from BOSS. 'They are lunatics and prejudiced people. We are different. We are not as bad as you think,' Williamson told Eriksson. 'We police do a lot for the blacks, and people like you should understand.'¹⁰

Williamson told Eriksson that they had a common enemy: the South African Communist Party, which he claimed he had infiltrated. When this line of persuasion didn't get very far, a man in a duffle coat walked over to them: Johann Coetzee. Coetzee started talking to Eriksson as 'one gentleman to another'. Coetzee told him that Williamson's target all along had been the communists, and the IUEF was only his vehicle for getting at them. Coetzee warned Eriksson not to do anything stupid.¹¹ Coetzee and Williamson also attempted to persuade Eriksson not to blow Williamson's cover. They told him that it would be in the interest of the IUEF and of his own safety and that of his family to accept a 'deal'.¹² 'As an officer and a gentleman I don't

like discussing things like this, but I would not like something unpleasant to happen to you or your family,' Coetzee warned.¹³

Twelve years later the journalist Denis Herbstein asked Coetzee about the meeting. Coetzee said: 'Eriksson first went white, he went absolutely white ... he said I had him in a pickle.'¹⁴ Eriksson's silence about Williamson would allow both men to keep their jobs, and to keep the dirt about Eriksson's murky financial dealings – 'his creative bookkeeping to mislead Danish and Swedish auditors' – secret.¹⁵ They proposed that Williamson be allowed to stay in the IUEF for six more months in order to complete his mission of penetrating the ANC and the SACP. After this, Williamson would return to South Africa with as few complications as possible for Eriksson and the IUEF.¹⁶

Eriksson told them he needed time to consider the deal and returned to Geneva. At about midnight on Friday Campbell visited Eriksson, who told him everything that had happened. They discussed three options: playing for time, doing the deal, and blowing the story. They decided to blow the story. Eriksson believed his family was in danger, and that night Campbell took Eriksson's wife and their son into hiding in France. Campbell and Eriksson decided not to go directly to the Swiss police – a move an internal IUEF commission of inquiry later found to be a serious error of judgement, because it allowed Williamson to leave Switzerland without being arrested.¹⁷

Instead, on Saturday, 19 January, Eriksson contacted Hugh Lewin, a friend and former South African political prisoner who then worked on *The Guardian* in London, about writing a story for the newspaper. The following day Eriksson met Lewin and *The Guardian*'s correspondent Walter Schwarz at the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, where the two journalists interviewed Eriksson for three hours.

On 21 January Eriksson contacted his friends in the Swedish

Social Democratic Party, who called the Swedish Foreign Office. Officials there rang the Swedish mission in Berne, which got hold of the Swiss security police, seeking protection for Eriksson and his family. Two days later, *The Guardian* splashed the incredible story, titled 'How the Spy Was Blown', across its front page. The exposé caused political tremors across Europe and an earthquake in South Africa.

This, then, is the sequence of events that led to Williamson's cover being blown. But was Arthur McGiven really the trigger that set off the events that led to Williamson's unmasking? The panic around the BOSS agent is just one of a number of theories as to why Williamson blew his cover. Indeed, the articles about McGiven in *The Observer* made only a passing reference to the IUEF and had not mentioned Williamson at all.

Another of the theories that did the rounds at the time was that Williamson's underground activities were taking him to countries behind the Iron Curtain where, if he had been found out, he risked being shot.¹⁸ This theory is unlikely because, contrary to Williamson's claims that he had penetrated the ANC and the SACP, he wasn't really so close to the heart of the liberation movement.

Yet another theory that was floated was that Ingrid Williamson may not have known that her husband was a spy and, when she discovered his involvement with the Security Branch, she became emotionally unhinged and threatened to talk. In fact, soon after the Williamson story broke, the IUEF issued a statement saying they were 'seriously concerned' about Ingrid's wellbeing.¹⁹ This was false. Ingrid had known from the beginning what her husband was up to.

Heinz Klug, a professor of law at the University of Wisconsin and a former member of the ANC underground, has another theory, which starts at the Pig & Whistle in Cape Town in 1979.²⁰

Klug, a student activist who had just been called up to serve in the South African Defence Force, had gone to the pub to meet a friend. He had a difficult choice to make – refuse to serve and go to jail, or leave the country. When he walked into the bar, he saw Karl Edwards, who beckoned him to come over. Edwards said to him, ‘I hear you’re planning to leave the country.’

‘I was shocked because I hadn’t let anybody know,’ says Klug. ‘Edwards said there was a job for me to run SANA in Botswana. He told me that the IUEF was supporting SANA and I knew that Williamson was involved in the IUEF. I’d heard rumours that Edwards and Williamson weren’t necessarily to be trusted. I asked some NUSAS leaders what I should do and what they thought about these two characters. I received contradictory advice. I was told by some that they didn’t trust Edwards, but they weren’t sure about Williamson. Some thought he may be a South African spook and some thought he could be working for some foreign intelligence agency like the CIA. I’d had contact with the ANC, and the advice I received was to take the position with SANA in Botswana. So I accepted.’

Klug left South Africa on 26 June 1979 and went directly to the SANA house in Bontleng, outside Gaborone. Patrick Fitzgerald, who had left the country a couple of weeks before, was there and the two made their way to Molepolole, where ANC stalwarts Marius and Jenny Schoon were teaching. Klug says he was then formally recruited into the ANC. ‘I wrote out a biography in which I mentioned the possible problems with both Edwards and Williamson.’

Klug told Marius he was concerned that Edwards was a policeman. ‘Our unit – me, Marius, Patrick and Jenny – sat down and worked out a strategy to blow up the whole thing.’ After setting a trap for Edwards, Klug phoned Williamson and told him he was worried that Edwards was working for the other side.

Williamson's response was that everything was fine; it must just be some misunderstanding. 'I decide, OK, that's confirmation – you're bad news. As far as we're concerned, we've exposed Edwards and now Williamson is behaving strangely.'

Klug smuggled himself back into South Africa to warn fellow activists that if Edwards approached them to write reports for SANA, they should tell him they were not interested. In the meantime, Williamson cut SANA's funding and tried to close the agency down, which only made Klug even more convinced that Williamson was a police agent. 'From that point we were quite clear what we were dealing with,' says Klug. In December 1979 he informed the ANC that Williamson was a spy, thereby shaking loose another strand in Williamson's web of lies.

Perhaps it was a combination of realising that the Botswana ANC unit was on to him as well as the knowledge that McGiven could drop a bombshell at any moment that prompted Williamson to unmask himself. What is clear, though, is that Eriksson was the first casualty of Williamson's unmasking.

'To his credit,' says Mac Maharaj, 'Eriksson refused to be blackmailed, forcing Williamson to break his cover. Eriksson may have bought into the anti-ANC, pro-Black Consciousness agenda but he never turned against the South African struggle. When he found out that Craig was a South African agent, there was no way he was going to cover up.'²¹ Barry Gilder agrees and says that credit is due to Eriksson for taking the hit himself. 'Eriksson's career was more or less screwed after that,' says Gilder, who had warned Eriksson of his suspicions about Williamson. 'I didn't want to see him again; I really didn't want an I-told-you-so meeting.'²²

Neville Rubin, whose friendship with Eriksson dated back to the 1960s, says his friend was a *bon viveur* and an enthusiastic drinker. 'He would always order a double gin. He held his liquor

well, but he became gross – like Williamson – and would come to London to one of these spas to sweat it out.’ Rubin lived near the spa and Eriksson would stay with him. He was generous, always bringing presents for Rubin, his wife and their two boys. ‘He was probably careless about funds – I don’t think he ever took money that wasn’t his, but he became an increasingly heavier and heavier drinker and drank so much that he was not in control. In the end, I think that was his downfall.’²³

After the story broke about Williamson, Eriksson became very depressed. He wasn’t allowed into the IUEF offices and would phone Rubin from a bar, begging for help. Rubin arranged a lawyer for him. Soon afterwards Eriksson’s wife divorced him and married another IUEF staff member. A report in *The Citizen* revealed that Eriksson suffered a nervous breakdown and was sent to Sweden for urgent medical attention. As a result he could not attend the IUEF’s crucial board meeting to try to salvage the shattered organisation.²⁴ At that meeting Eriksson was forced out of the IUEF. Ultimately, the organisation itself could not survive the scandal and closed down a year later. Eriksson moved on to an unremarkable job at the Swedish Immigration Board, and completely withdrew from public life.²⁵ The Williamson debacle had completely ruined him.

Harry Nengwekhulu, the Black Consciousness activist who often dealt with Eriksson after going into exile in the early 1970s, says Eriksson’s problem was that he didn’t understand African politics as black South Africans did. ‘He was too trusting, but that’s because he didn’t grow up in the same political environment as black South Africans and had never been confronted by a vicious political system, so he didn’t know that he shouldn’t trust people like Williamson. We didn’t trust whites. I had this anxiety from the very beginning about Williamson and whether he was a cop.’²⁶ Nengwekhulu

later met up with Eriksson in Norway in 1984. 'Eriksson had lost his confidence. Alison [his wife] had left and he couldn't see his child. He never recovered from it.'

In 1990, Nengwekhulu received a telegram to say that Eriksson had suffered a heart attack and died. 'He had worked very hard in the struggle and was committed to South Africa. Unfortunately, people remember him for his one major mistake, but not for the good work that he did in supporting liberation movements in southern Africa. He played a major role.'

Eriksson died a disgraced and broken man. Williamson, on the other hand, returned to South Africa like a conquering hero to an enthusiastic welcome. He was hailed by his bosses and the media as the country's super-spy, who had infiltrated the ANC, SACP and Moscow and dealt them a deadly blow.

Chapter 16

The Pain of Betrayal

Craig Williamson led a double life, infiltrating NUSAS, the white left, the anti-apartheid community in exile and, to some degree, the ANC. His infiltration strategy involved befriending, gaining trust and betraying.

South Africa's struggle for liberation was plagued with acts of betrayal. Jacob Dlamini's book *Askari* documents how captured MK soldiers were beaten and tortured by the police to get them to turn against their comrades. In *Stones against the Mirror*, Hugh Lewin writes about how his best friend, Adrian Leftwich, betrayed him by turning state witness to save his own skin when both were arrested on charges of sabotage. Williamson's betrayal was different; he wasn't a friend and comrade who started out on the same side and was 'turned' by force. Without any compulsion, he chose to become a spy.

To be a good spy you need to become a trusted member of the inner circle of the group you're targeting. You have to get close to the people you are spying on. Your false identity has to be real. Successful spies form genuine friendships and allegiances – and that's just what Williamson did when he arrived on Wits campus in 1972. He contrived friendships, manipulated trust and manufactured an image for himself as a leftist fighting against apartheid.

Spies betray on at least two levels. The first is their assumed loyalty to the cause of the group they have infiltrated; in Williamson's case, the South African liberation struggle. The other is a personal betrayal, because a spy lies and deceives people who believe him to be their friend and on their side.

The pain of betrayal is magnified by a sense of vulnerability, because the deceitful conduct shatters the worldview of the person who has been betrayed. When activists are able to maintain the illusion that the enemy is on the other side, they create a psychological safe space, but when it turns out that the enemy is actually inside their circle, they feel exposed and angry. This is why some of Williamson's former NUSAS comrades were reluctant to speak to me. 'I thought we'd buried that ghost a long time ago,' said one. 'Williamson takes enormous pleasure in prominence and publicity; his best punishment is to play him down,' said another.

Nearly a quarter of a century after the country's first democratic election in 1994, former enemies have reconciled and many people who committed terrible atrocities have been forgiven by their victims and their victims' families. However, a lot of bitterness is still directed at former spies. A storm of outrage broke out in 2015 when Olivia Forsyth, who had been recruited as a spy by Williamson in 1980 and infiltrated the Rhodes University chapter of NUSAS, promoted her memoir, *Agent 407: A South African Spy Breaks Her Silence*. People she had betrayed called on readers to boycott the book and disrupt any launches. One former Rhodes student even suggested shaving her head and parading her down the streets of Grahamstown, a punishment meted out to French women who collaborated with the Nazis.

The scars of betrayal do not heal easily. When Williamson was unmasked, some of the people he had deceived felt vindicated, a few were surprised, but most were furious.

Glenn Moss, who worked with Williamson on the Wits SRC and in NUSAS:

I didn't have a sense of personal betrayal and I wasn't morally offended that Williamson betrayed me. We were involved in a political struggle and there were people on different sides. He was sent in to infiltrate us and he did his job, which was to inform on us. Our job was to limit the damage the spies did by informing.

Cedric de Beer, fellow St John's College pupil and NUSAS activist convinced to the point of obsession that Williamson was a spy:

When I heard he was exposed, I felt a sense of relief.

Charles Nupen, former NUSAS president who worked with Williamson:

I might have described him as a friend, maybe not as a close friend, but a friend. Particularly when I was on trial in Johannesburg, my wife was in Cape Town on her own. He was in Cape Town and reached out to her, phoning her to ask her how she was doing, and he and Ingrid took her out for dinner every so often. It was part of the façade of deceit, the constant need to ingratiate yourself in a way with those who you were spying on – and who could potentially be a source of information. I don't want to psychoanalyse this man: he is obviously a fraught and complicated individual, but I see him as a person who, at all times, used people instrumentally. To be able to do what he did – live a life that he did – I'd imagine that there would be pretty strong psychopathic tendencies.

Gerry Maré, former NUSAS activist:

One night, after a party in Hout Bay, I was riding my motorbike home when I noticed Williamson and Ingrid, who had left the party at the same time as me, driving behind me. He drove so

close behind me. We went over Constantia Nek, a narrow, twisty pass with no shoulders. When you are on a motorbike and a car behind you gets too close, you move over or overtake the car in front of you, but you get away from the car. However, there was nowhere for me to go. I knew that if I came off the motorbike, that would be the end of me. I crapped myself on that trip home, but had to stay calm. It was only when I heard that Williamson was a spy and he was working for the other side that I thought that maybe he was actually trying to kill me.

Julian Sturgeon, former student activist, who became Williamson's 'assistant' in exile:

Even though there were signs that he wasn't what he made himself out to be, it still came as a shock when he was exposed. I had to go through my dealings with him to see just how badly I'd been duped. It was a betrayal, but I also felt like a complete moron that I had allowed myself to be duped. I realised so many things that I missed, which made sense ... in retrospect. I remember Craig shedding crocodile tears when he told me that [Black Consciousness activist] Mapetla Mohapi was murdered by the security police in detention in August 1976. I remember him saying what a terrible blow it was because Mapetla was such a potent guy. Of course, it was all bullshit. Because I had worked closely with Williamson, I was fingered as an agent and the ANC shunned me. White South African lefties would cross the street rather than talk to me.

Tad Matsui, World University Service representative in Switzerland and 'friend' of Williamson:

I was back in Canada, working for the Canadian Council of Churches, when Craig was exposed. I was devastated. There are two things that devastated me about my work with South Africa.

One is the death of Steve Biko and the other was the exposure of Williamson. Richard Taylor, general secretary of WUS in Geneva, phoned to ask me for all the names of the people I introduced to Craig. The Canadian government didn't like me after that – they had supported IUEF and they didn't distinguish between WUS and IUEF. I kept trying to explain that we were different; we were a student-run organisation, we're democratic. The worst part of my dealing with Craig is that after he was exposed I became suspicious of all white South Africans.

Barry Gilder, former NUSAS activist:

I was in the ANC camps when I learnt that Williamson had been exposed. Upset, yes; surprised, not so much. I was upset that the ANC fell for him. Just like his efficiency saw his rise in NUSAS politics, the ANC saw what he was able to give them. His role in the IUEF endeared him to the ANC. This is the problem with spies – you can't prove it.

Horst Kleinschmidt, former NUSAS vice-president who worked with the International Defence and Aid Fund in exile and delivered warnings about Williamson to the ANC:

I felt vindicated. There was an instantaneous knee-jerk reaction by the ANC to go mum on the subject. No acknowledgement, pretend it didn't happen. It was potentially very damaging for the external ANC because too many internal contacts were managed with Williamson in the loop or through Williamson. I was taken for a spy after the Williamson thing blew up. A member of the PAC wrote a booklet published in Switzerland called 'A Curve in the South African Spy Ring' and said that if Williamson had made it to the top of IUEF, the fact that Kleinschmidt made it to the top of IDAF suggests he's a spy. It was sold in bookshops until I had legal action taken against it.

Ronnie Kasrils, ANC leader in exile who worked with Williamson:

None of us was surprised, but then again everyone turned around and said: ‘Told you so, told you so.’

Mac Maharaj, ANC leader in exile, who encountered Williamson’s ANC cell:

I was in Lusaka when I got a frantic message from the chief representative in London, Solly Smith, who was later blackmailed into becoming an informer to the apartheid regime. The message, which was marked urgent, read: ‘Comrade Mac, don’t come to London.’ I was surprised because I had no plans to go to London. Ten days later the story breaks that Craig is back in South Africa and Johann Coetzee had rescued him. Craig had gone to London in desperation to get me to come over to London. What his plans were for me, I don’t know. But when I met Solly and asked him what his message was about, he said, ‘Comrade Mac, the man came into my office like a demented person and said he needed to see you immediately. I got a sense that this man is mad and I thought you were in danger. I had to warn you not to come.’ I don’t know what his game plan was and I’ve wondered if he and Coetzee were trying to set a trap for me or implicate me.

Aziz Pahad, ANC leader in exile, who worked with Williamson:

One day he came to see me unexpectedly in London. He said he had to leave urgently and I will read something about it in the newspaper the next day. ‘What is this guy talking about?’ I thought, and wondered if it was perhaps something to do with the Black Consciousness Movement. But the next day I saw he had been exposed. I said, ‘Jesus, all these suspicions have turned

out to be true.’ But I wasn’t surprised. Afterwards we felt that if the IUEF had been infiltrated, what of our internal structures? In the early years, we never realised how deep the infiltration was.

Duncan Innes, anti-apartheid activist in London:

I was disappointed when I heard that he was actually a spy, but I felt vindicated. But I was also worried because I knew that if a document I had compiled had got into his hands, I could be in trouble and I would have problems if I wanted to return to South Africa. Shortly after he was exposed, he sent me a letter. It was a one-liner that read: ‘You must be very fortunate to be able to travel to South Africa ...’ That was all. I took it as a threat. What he was actually saying was, ‘If you go back to South Africa, we’re going to pick you up.’ And, of course, that’s exactly what happened.

Neville Rubin, International Labour Organization researcher and friend of IUEF director Lars-Gunnar Eriksson:

When the Williamson thing blew, someone phoned to say I was on the front page of *The Observer*. ‘What for?’ I asked. ‘You’d better go read it yourself,’ the person told me. I bought the paper, and read it with some nervousness. I was horrified. I was named in the story. The story reported that ‘a minor researcher’ at the ILO was apparently in contact with Williamson at the IUEF. It wasn’t heard of for an ILO staff member to have an association with organisations like the IUEF. I felt betrayed. But I didn’t have time to think – I had to protect myself. Within half an hour of me reading the story, I was summoned by the ILO’s personnel department and questioned about my role with Williamson. It was touch and go whether I’d get the sack. In the end I got a written reprimand.

Paula Ensor, anti-apartheid activist in exile and friend of Jenny Curtis:

David Beresford, a journalist with *The Guardian*, told me that Williamson had been exposed. I was shocked but not surprised. It all fell into place. When I was at university a spy came out and said, 'I'm a spy and you are accusing people of things they didn't do.' He wasn't forgiven, but in a way he redeemed himself. Williamson is beyond that.

Harry Nengwekhulu, Black Consciousness activist in exile:

I wasn't surprised. He was a likeable guy and wasn't offensive, but he would have explosions at staff at the IUEF if they were slow or made mistakes. That reminded me of how the Special Branch operated – they started off 'nice' and then they exploded.

Geoff Budlender, advocate who stayed with Williamson in Geneva:

I had gone to Geneva to discuss with the IUEF the possibility of establishing a public interest law centre in South Africa. I stayed with the Williamsons. A friend in exile had asked me to take some money out of South Africa and deposit it into a bank in Geneva, which was illegal. I asked Williamson for help and he took me to a bank where I deposited the money. When I returned to South Africa there was a story in one of the Afrikaans newspapers that a prominent lawyer was in deep trouble for flouting exchange control laws. From the description of the events it was clearly me. I hit a panic. In the end nothing came of it. They wouldn't have been able to prove anything without exposing Williamson and it would have been a high price to pay for a low benefit. It was only when Williamson was unmasked that I realised he was the person who had betrayed me.

Chapter 17

‘Super-spy’ Comes in from the Cold

On 23 January 1980, Craig Williamson returned to South Africa. This was in fact the second time he had come back after escaping into Botswana with Eric Abraham on 2 January 1977. In 1979 the Special Branch had smuggled him back into the country when his father died. Though he did not attend the funeral – one of the ‘sacrifices’ he made for his country – he was able to see his mother and his sister.¹

In January 1980 Williamson returned, this time in the full glare of media attention. When his plane landed at Jan Smuts Airport, reporters and photographers waited for the super-spy to emerge. Williamson had become an international story. Among those disembarking was an old man with his hat pulled down over his face and the collar of his coat turned up, who leant on the railings of the stairs and negotiated the steps slowly, being supported by an air hostess. As he approached the customs exit, he suddenly stood upright. The ‘old man’ was, in fact, 30-year-old Williamson. For nine years Williamson had played the role of a left-wing activist and now the exposed spy was trying to slip past the press by playing the role of an old man. Photographers and reporters rushed up to him, but Williamson, who pulled his

hat over his face, refused to answer questions. He was whisked away to the airport garage where a car was waiting to take him to police headquarters in Pretoria.² Williamson had flown back with his wife Ingrid and his spymaster, Johann Coetzee.

The next day the Minister of Law and Order, Louis le Grange, released a statement praising Williamson for outstanding services to the country. Le Grange claimed Williamson had infiltrated the South African Communist Party, the ANC, the PAC, and the Black Consciousness Movement, and thanked him for providing invaluable information that had helped uncover 'anti-South African' activities. 'Due to the delicate nature of the work of the Republic's intelligence services, no further details can be released at this stage,' Le Grange said.

For the South African press, Williamson was the hero of the moment. According to Olivia Forsyth, the apartheid spy who was recruited by Williamson, there was a lot of fanfare when Williamson returned to South Africa. 'When a spy comes in from the cold – in his case, literally, from Switzerland – you must be bigged up; and they did as you would expect them to.'³ *Beeld*, a pro-government Afrikaans newspaper, claimed that Williamson had even negotiated in Moscow with the Soviet authorities on behalf of South African leftists and communist organisations. 'His enemies fear him and admire him,' the paper reported.

The English newspapers were just as obsequious. Four days after he returned to South Africa, a thick black headline screamed across the front page of the *Sunday Times*: 'Our Man in Moscow', with the following dramatic bullet points:

- HE spied on the KGB
- HE sent back vital data
- HE visited terror bases
- HE was real James Bond

The paper gushed: 'In an exclusive interview one of South Africa's most successful undercover agents told of his fantastic coups among South Africa's enemies – including Russia,' and quoted Williamson as saying: 'I don't know how many communist organisations and terrorist movements I infiltrated ... we are still drawing up a list. I have been living under quite a lot of stress for the past few years and have been under severe stress for the past week. I don't think that I was ever scared ... if anything I found my work exciting. I don't regret anything.'

Williamson made a point of boasting about his travels to Moscow, where he said he had monitored the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He crowed about how he'd infiltrated other anti-South Africa organisations there, such as the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee; and he bragged that he had made useful contacts with members of the KGB, including the Soviet secret service's number two agent in Geneva. The *Sunday Times* also quoted one of his Pretoria spymasters as saying that Captain Williamson's activities made James Bond stories seem like child's play. Accompanying the story was a photograph of Williamson in Moscow's Red Square, standing in the snow wearing a heavy coat and a fur hat outside the Kremlin. There's a grin on his bearded face. The caption stated that he was engaged in spying on the Russians. 'It's a relief to be back, to be in from the cold,' he said.⁴

The Williamson story was not only news in South Africa. The London *Sunday Times* commissioned the renowned South African photographer David Goldblatt to take a portrait of Williamson and Coetzee for a feature article it published about the saga. After the paper got permission from the Security Branch, Goldblatt photographed Coetzee at his home in Brixton. Goldblatt had a rough-and-ready test for photographing prominent people: he asked them to look at him, not the camera, but Goldblatt says that Coetzee couldn't

look him in the eye. It was the first and only time that someone had refused to do so. Goldblatt then arranged to photograph Williamson on the steps of the Great Hall at Wits University. It was raining and Williamson popped open an umbrella and told Goldblatt, 'I've come in from the cold.' Inevitably, this became the headline which the London *Sunday Times* used.⁵ In fact, most of the headlines of the newspaper stories published in the aftermath of Williamson's unmasking played on the title of John le Carré's 1963 Cold War spy novel.

Williamson himself wrote up an account of his spying achievements in a three-part feature series for the South African Police magazine *Servamus* – Latin for 'we serve' – in which he spoke about the Special Branch giving 'the enemy many severe blows'. The series provides insight into Williamson's obsession with the Cold War, which he used to justify his actions. The first part, published in September 1981, was a sustained piece of boasting, documenting how effective he had been as a spy. Part two, titled 'Why Spy?', published the following month, was an attempt to defend and rationalise spying. In part three, 'A Look at the Enemy', Williamson gave godfearing Christian readers a glimpse of how the children of the revolution were being trained on Cuba's Isle of Youth to 'persue [*sic*] Lenin's dream of world revolution'.

The three-part series was written in the language of Cold War rhetoric and counterinsurgency jargon, drawn from National Party government propaganda of the time, and laced with phrases like 'total onslaught', 'the barbaric forces of international communism', and 'chaos and anarchy'. It spoke of the dangers of '*rooi gevaar*' (the Red Peril) in fevered terms. 'The subversive political side of the total assault concentrates on sowing hatred, despair and distrust. Law enforcement officers, such as members of the SAP and other organs of the security

forces, understand that the RSA is faced with a revolutionary onslaught which, if it is ever allowed to succeed, will plunge the southern tip of Africa into chaos. In this context, we must also remember that the revolutionary enemy is not only the South African Communist Party, the ANC or even the PAC – it is also those foreign states which use South African revolutionary organisations as puppets in order to wage an undeclared and secret war against our very existence.’⁶

According to Williamson, the South African Police was engaged in a secret war ‘fought in the twilight world of revolutionaries and secret agents. It is a war against treason.’ He outlined his achievements, claiming that ‘we controlled the SA Communist Party and the ANC’s propaganda network for three years’, and that the intelligence gathered had been – and was being – used in the security police’s strategic planning against ‘our enemies’ onslaught’.

Accompanying the feature was a colour photograph of a clean-shaved, fresh-faced Williamson with a short-back-and-sides haircut, wearing a pinstripe suit, at his desk at police headquarters in Pretoria. He was shown making notes on a pile of legal-looking papers – possibly the very documents he would go on to use in the coming years to convict the revolutionaries in court. Behind him was a map of the world, perhaps intended to provide a subtle message that South Africa’s super-spy’s reach covered the entire world. There is one aspect of the photograph that is intriguing: Williamson’s tie is black, green and gold – the colours of the ANC.

In the ‘Why Spy?’ part of the series, Williamson wrote: ‘If it were not for South Africa’s agents and “spies” who have been fighting a secret war for many years, the barbaric forces of international communism would probably have been far stronger in the RSA than they are today. Bear in mind the Johannesburg

station bomb outrage [of 1960 when John Harris of the African Resistance Movement exploded a bomb in the concourse], the Rivonia episode [of 1963 when police captured the senior command of MK] and more recent terrorist onslaughts such as Silverton and Sasol [where the ANC had exploded bombs in 1981 and 1980 respectively]. How much more would there have been if the RSA had to do without its “spies”.⁷ Williamson argued that South Africa was not the revolutionaries’ only target. They sought to conquer the entire Western world. ‘The battle for South Africa is but one battle against the West declared by Lenin and the Soviet Union in 1919. Dare we not have spies?’ he concluded.

The ‘Why Spy?’ double-page spread contained three images. Two were there to show just how far Williamson had penetrated the left. The first – with the caption ‘Our spy’ – was a photograph of Williamson at the World Conference for Action Against Apartheid in Lagos in 1977. The second image was a letter he had received from ‘left-wing revolutionaries when he infiltrated their clandestine organisations’. The third was a gory image of a man who has been hacked to death, with the caption: ‘This is the way communists treat their own people. Capt. Williamson says that any means to fight them, including spying, should be used.’

In his series Williamson wrote that perhaps the most valuable result of his work was the opportunity for him to get to know the enemy personally. ‘It is also good that they have been forced to look us in the eye. When all is said and done, we know we won and they know they lost. That is important.’

Among his colleagues and within the security establishment, Williamson was regarded with great acclaim and respect. Special Branch members called Williamson ‘*die Groot Man*’ (the Big Man) and, according to Olivia Forsyth, they all looked up to him. ‘He had done all these derring-do things –

infiltrating NUSAS and the IUEF – and then was rescued by General Coco – Coetzee. Coco went to get his man back; it was rather wonderful.⁸ However, Forsyth also says that after a while some of the gloss began to wear off and, perhaps envious of the attention he received or the inflated reputation he had acquired and even created himself, some Security Branch agents made snide remarks about him or even questioned the extent of his accomplishments. They sneered that he had a car with a 007 registration plate and one of the first car phones with a big aerial that stuck out of the boot. Then, it was cutting-edge technology. 'In that way he was kind of a James Bond figure. Now and then someone would say he didn't do everything he said he did.'

Unsurprisingly, Williamson's enemies also were quick to belittle his claims. Mac Maharaj pooh-poohs Williamson's 'super-spy' status, insisting that he wasn't really an effective spy. 'He gave the South African government reports from the United Nations Anti-Apartheid Committee – stacks and stacks of reports. These were public documents; you just walked into the UN and collected them. He went to the Soviet Union – yes ... but as a visitor.'⁹ Williamson had actually gone to Russia as a tourist and was only there for a week. The Red Square photograph was taken by Ingrid. 'How do you spy on the KGB from the back of a bus?' one of his former colleagues in the IUEF wanted to know.

Maharaj also says that Williamson may have been a member of the ANC ('Aziz and Ronnie trained him and deployed him – he was actively in the ANC as the head of a unit'), but asks if anyone can point to underground structures or organisations in South Africa that were not just put in jeopardy but were destroyed because of Williamson. 'Did he cause problems? Yes. Did he wreak havoc? Yes. He created an atmosphere where comrade was not sure of comrade. But was he effective? No.'

Super-spy or not, Williamson became the focus of the media's attention, with newspapers looking for various angles. The *Sunday Express*, for example, tried to work out how much money the Williamsons had accumulated while, as a Security Branch agent, he worked for the IUEF in Geneva. It came up with the sum of R72,000. The paper established that he was paid an annual salary of R26,000, which amounted to R78,000 for the three years he worked there. Added to this was Ingrid's R18,000 income she earned from the World Health Organization, making a combined total of R96,000. The Williamsons were presumed to have been able to save a third of their earnings and so would have brought back to South Africa R32,000 to add to the R40,000 nest egg in monthly salaries from the South African Police that would have been banked for Williamson, giving a total of R72,000.¹⁰ An inflation adjustment calculator reveals that R72,000 in January 1981 would be worth R1.7 million and some change in April 2016.¹¹ Of course, the newspaper didn't take into account the IUEF money that Williamson might have squirrelled away into his own accounts over the years.

The IUEF tried to get its money back from Williamson and in 1980 launched a civil case against him in a Swiss court for breach of contract, arguing that he had signed a contract of employment under false pretences. The IUEF wanted three years of salary back.¹² There was also talk of launching a criminal action against Brigadier Johann Coetzee and international action against South Africa. But it was all too little, too late.

In another twist it emerged that Ingrid had also been a spy in Geneva. She confessed that she had been spying on the ANC's health department while she worked for 18 months for the World Health Organization (WHO). After this she studied at Geneva University's medical school. She claimed she didn't want to get involved at first, but correspondence she received from the ANC

and talks with them made her change her mind. 'They made clear to me that one of their aims was to cut South Africa's medical ties with the world and this, as a medical student, horrified me. I found out the ANC were trying to use the WHO in their campaigns against South Africa. They wanted to prevent the distribution of drugs to South Africa from Europe and also prevent the distribution of drugs in South Africa.' She said the ANC, who referred to her as Comrade Ingrid, hoped to get her to work as a doctor in their military camps in Africa once she completed her studies. She said she was asked by the ANC to specialise in war and disaster medicine because they desperately needed medical people. 'My real aim was to get as much information as possible on their activities in the medical world.'¹³

Although the media and the police in South Africa lauded Williamson's achievements, not everyone gave him a hero's welcome. Activist Glenn Moss addressed a meeting at Wits to call on the university's authorities to cancel the degrees and credits of all spies who had been exposed. Williamson had never completed his degree.¹⁴ Also, in a symbolic gesture, in 1980 NUSAS withdrew its honorary life membership that it had conferred on Williamson at its 1976 national congress.¹⁵ Further student hostility towards Williamson featured in the *Wits Student* newspaper, which produced a poster and front cover with a picture of a naked Williamson crouching under an umbrella with the headline 'Craig Williamson Reveals All' and the payoff line 'The spy who blew his cover'. On 5 March 1980, just six weeks after he returned to South Africa, Williamson sent Sheldon Cohen, the *Wits Student* editor, a letter of congratulations on a police letterhead: 'Ten out of ten for your "The Spy who blew his cover" cover.'

Not long after Williamson returned to South Africa, he went about tracking down some of his former comrades. He sent

Duncan Innes a one-line letter threatening him with arrest if he returned to South Africa and, a week or two after he was back in the country, he phoned Laura Schultz, who was involved in administering scholarship and education trusts on behalf of NUSAS, and told her: 'I know all about what you're doing.' Schultz believes he phoned her to show off his power and create fear.¹⁶

Williamson's next stop was Glenn Moss. Moss was in his office in Braamfontein when the death squad leader Dirk Coetzee and some security policemen barged in and dragged him out. Moss yelled for one of his comrades to call his lawyer, Kathy Satchwell, to tell her what was happening. The Security Branch men drove him off to a spot near the Wanderers cricket ground and motioned for him to get into a nearby parked car. Williamson was in the car. He said to Moss: 'Are you free for lunch?' Moss told Williamson that he regarded this as abduction and warned him that his lawyer had already been notified. Williamson drove him back to Braamfontein. Moss believes Williamson had picked him up to see if he would act as an informer.¹⁷

In its commission of inquiry held after Williamson was unmasked, the IUEF conducted an assessment of the damage Williamson might have caused or could still cause. It feared, for example, that Williamson could probably identify major Black Consciousness Movement contacts inside the country and might have details on ANC and other students in African countries who had fled from South Africa and who received scholarships through IUEF-funded organisations. The IUEF also warned that their former deputy director might be able to forge evidence to implicate people in much more serious activities than they had actually been involved in.¹⁸ In particular, there was the danger that the state would use Williamson's intimate knowledge of white activist networks to mount a conspiracy trial

against them. As it turned out, this was exactly what happened. For the next couple of years Williamson was used as the Special Branch's interrogator-in-chief and was trotted out at various political show trials involving white activists as the state's expert on all things ANC.

Chapter 18

Trials and Interrogations

After his return to South Africa, Craig Williamson entered a new phase in his life as a security agent of the apartheid regime. Placed in Special Branch's G6 Unit, also known as Section A, which was responsible for intelligence gathering, he set about collecting notches in his victim belt with a vengeance. The first victim was the IUEF director, Lars-Gunnar Eriksson, who lost his job, his wife, his dignity and his place as a hero in the South African struggle. The second victim was the IUEF itself, which did not survive the Williamson scandal and closed down.

His next victim was Renfrew Christie, who had been arrested before Williamson was unmasked. Born like Williamson in 1949, Christie was conscripted into the South African Defence Force and joined the infantry. While in the army, he saw 'something' that made him believe that South Africa was developing nuclear weapons. From then on, he says, he was determined to find out whether South Africa had an atom bomb. 'I became a spy,' says Christie.¹

After completing his national service Christie went to Wits to study and joined NUSAS. After obtaining his master's, he won a scholarship to Oxford, where he researched the history of electrification in South Africa for a DPhil. According to Christie, he designed his doctoral thesis in order to get into Eskom,

South Africa's electricity utility. His underlying goal was to find out how much uranium was being enriched in South Africa and to what degree. At the time there was much speculation about whether South Africa possessed the capacity to develop its own nuclear weapons. 'My motive was clear: I didn't trust [Prime Minister] B.J. Vorster with the bomb. I didn't think the National Party should have the bomb – this is pretty fundamental.'

While Christie went about his research, he kept his distance from the ANC and the South African Communist Party for fear of being identified as a member or sympathiser of both banned organisations, and thus attracting unwanted Special Branch attention. In 1979 he decided to return to South Africa to gain access to Eskom's archives on the pretext that he was doing academic research on coal mining, but really to research their plans on uranium enrichment and plutonium production. According to Christie, Frene Ginwala, the ANC's head of research in London, said she would find money to fund his return to South Africa. 'I told her not to take money from the IUEF because of Williamson. She said she didn't believe Williamson was a spy, but she said she would humour me and not take money from the IUEF. As I understand – and I have not discussed it with her – she then took money from the IUEF for me.' Christie says the moment Ginwala asked Williamson for money for him, Williamson knew he was linked to the ANC.

Ginwala can't recall Christie approaching her for funding. 'This took place decades ago and memory fades,' she says. 'If Renfrew asked me for money – and it's possible – I can't remember who I asked for the funding.'²

Christie returned to South Africa in August 1979. While he actively pursued his underground project, he was all the time monitored by the security police. On 23 October 1979 Christie moved into a flat in Cape Town, where he planned to live while

conducting his research. He was loading boxes of crockery and cutlery when he was surrounded by a group of security policemen led by the notorious Spyker van Wyk, who apparently earned his nickname after hammering a nail through the foreskin of someone he was interrogating. ('Spyker' means 'nail' in Afrikaans.) The policemen laughed and said Christie was never going to use the crockery and cutlery. He was detained and made to stand all night. He spent seven months in solitary confinement.

Although he was in custody, Christie came up with a way to get information to the ANC. He made a confession, in which he gave very precise instructions about how, why and when to bomb the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station (where it was believed uranium enrichment might take place), the Calueque hydroelectric dam on the Kunene River (completed in 1976), and the Sasol oil-from-coal plant, which, in a twist of irony, Christie had helped guard as a conscript in 1967.

'I deliberately put all the details into my confession so it would be part of the court's public record and the information would get to the ANC.' Because of some concern that the confession wouldn't be made public, before the trial Christie's lawyers in Johannesburg decided to fax the document to lawyers in London. 'Just before they faxed it, there was a sudden Special Branch raid on the lawyers' offices. One of the lawyers puts the confession in his shirt and goes and hides on the fire escape. That lawyer is Penuell Maduna, who became the country's Minister of Justice [in 1999] after South Africa's democracy.' The confession was made public. When Christie went on trial in May 1980, the headline that went around the world was 'White Scientist Faces the Gallows'.

It appeared that the ANC took note of Christie's confession. Sasol I and Sasol II were bombed on 31 May 1980, Republic Day, during Christie's trial. 'My lawyer Raymond Tucker came

into court, and handed me the newspaper which had stories and photos of the bombing. He told me I was going to get at least 30 years.'

Williamson gave evidence at the trial, testifying that Christie had received funds from the IUEF, and that he had seen Christie at an ANC conference in London, talking to Ginwala. He also had evidence that Christie had found a secret Atomic Energy Board document that was in the Eskom archives, and had given it to the ANC.³ Christie doesn't have an accurate memory of how he felt when Williamson took the stand. 'There was nothing particularly personal. We hadn't been close friends, so there was no sense of betrayal. It was war and he was the enemy.'

As Christie was on trial for terrorism, the defence's concern was whether Williamson could say something that might see their client hanged. The answer turned out to be no. Christie was convicted of leaking information to the ANC about South Africa's nuclear weapons programme and of exposing vital installations to the danger of sabotage. On 6 June 1980 he was sentenced to 10 years in jail.

For Christie, it was a personal sacrifice, but he considered it a victory against the bomb. Two years after he was jailed, Rodney and Heather Wilkinson, who had been hired to work at the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station, smuggled bombs in backpacks, and detonated an explosion there on 19 December 1982. Christie says they more or less followed the instructions he had outlined in his confession, which was to put bombs in the pipe racks and on the reactor heads.

Christie was held on death row in Pretoria Central because it was considered to be a more secure facility after ANC activists Tim Jenkin, Alex Moumbaris and Stephen Lee escaped from the local prison in December 1979. There he remained for two and a half years and listened to about 300 people being hanged.

When he was eventually released from prison in 1990, the crockery and cutlery confiscated on his arrest was returned to him – and he did get to use it.



During Christie's trial, Duncan Innes, a former NUSAS president and then an independent labour researcher, was interrogated by Williamson. Williamson used Christie's conviction to scare Innes. 'You know,' he told Innes, 'we have enough information on you to put you away – just like Renfrew. You will sit for ten years. But if you talk to us and co-operate, that may not be necessary.'

Innes's predicament stemmed from a secret meeting that had taken place in Geneva two years earlier to discuss setting up an underground organisation in South Africa. Innes and a fellow researcher, Dan O'Meara, were invited by IUEF's Lars-Gunnar Eriksson and Neville Rubin, the former NUSAS activist then working at the International Labour Organization, to fly from London to Geneva to discuss the project. Innes explains that at the meeting Rubin outlined the plan, which was to create underground cells inside South Africa. 'People in Cell A wouldn't know who was in Cell B – it was a classic run-around network,' says Innes.⁴ 'They wanted this organisation to compile research on infrastructure – electric pylons, train timetables – in South Africa. Dan and I thought this was ARM [the African Resistance Movement's sabotage campaign of the early 1960s] all over again. Dan told me he couldn't get involved, but I said I thought that was rude and we should do something. He said, "Good luck," and went off. I sat down at a typewriter and typed up the discussion and put it in the form of a proposal.'

Innes gave the document to Eriksson and Rubin, and said he

would do the ‘research’; but he had one condition, which was that Williamson, whom he did not trust, could not be involved. ‘Don’t show this document to Craig Williamson and keep it somewhere that he can’t have access to it. Promise me that you will do that,’ Innes asked. According to Innes, the two men promised, and Rubin said he would keep the document in his office at the ILO. To his relief, Innes heard nothing more about it. In early 1980, not long after Williamson had been unmasked, Innes’s mother had a heart attack and died in South Africa. He needed to go back to South Africa to organise her burial and memorial service. About two days after he arrived home, he was driving and noticed he was being followed. ‘They followed me for about three days – it must have been boring for them because I was organising my mother’s burial. I was staying with my father and one night at 10 p.m. there’s a *bang bang bang* at the door. It’s Brigadier [Kalfie] Broodryk and two *handlangers* – some of the biggest thugs I’d ever seen.’

Innes was taken to Caledon Square police station in Cape Town and put in a cell. He didn’t know what the security police wanted from him. He thought they might want to know about his links with the trade unions or perhaps it was something he had written. He was the editor of the radical journal *Review of African Political Economy* and had authored several articles on South Africa. The next morning, he was taken off for interrogation. ‘I sit down and there is Broodryk at the end of the desk. He reminded me of Hitler. He had a pencil-thin moustache and a face that was cold. He looked like he’d slit your throat for two rand.’

In front of Broodryk was the document Innes had typed in London after his meeting with Eriksson and Rubin. ‘I don’t think it went to Neville Rubin’s file – I think it went into Lars-Gunnar’s personal file, Craig found it, copied it and sent it to

the security police. Broodryk pushed the document across the desk and asked me if I had ever seen it before. I was thinking, Oh shit ... what do I say here? While I was looking at the document, the phone rang and it was General [Hendrik] van den Bergh, who was head of BOSS at the time. They talked in Afrikaans because they thought I couldn't understand it. From their conversation I understood that Van den Bergh wanted to know if I had admitted to writing the document. Broodryk said he had only just shown it to me. I thought that if this has come from Craig, my only chance is to admit to having seen the document but say I had nothing to do with writing it, and I didn't know who had, which is what I said. They kept on going over it and asking me about it. They asked if this was an attempt to set up an underground organisation, and I said it could be, but it could also be above board. And we carried on sparring, which went on for about five days. During this time they kept the lights on in my cell, which made it difficult for me to sleep. At one point I was taken up the stairs at Caledon Square and told to be careful "because lots of people fall down these stairs accidentally".

While Innes was in custody, his father contacted Lionel Murray, a lawyer and United Party MP for Green Point, who negotiated with the security police to allow him to attend his mother's funeral. Before he got into the police car one security policeman opened the boot and showed him an Uzi sub-machine gun and said, 'Don't try to get away when you're there.'

After the funeral Innes was brought back to Caledon Square and left for a few days. Then one morning he was taken into an interrogation room. 'The door opens and I look up and I see this stomach coming through the door. I thought, What the fuck is that? As it came through it was followed by three double chins. I thought, Who the hell is this? It was only when he got into the room did I realise it was Craig – but he was enormous. When I

last saw him in 1976 he was huge but he wasn't that fat. His first words to me were "It's been a long time". I nodded. Then he wanted to know why I had tried to warn Lars-Gunnar against him. I said there had been anonymous messages from South Africa saying he was a spy and I should pass the message on to Lars-Gunnar – so I did. I said, "I didn't know whether you were or not, but I know now." He smiled.'

In contrast with the Broodryk interrogation, Williamson was knowledgeable about the activists in exile, the anti-apartheid movement and Innes's labour research, and as a result Innes had to be extra careful about what he said. 'He asked me whether I had ever been to Joe Slovo's house in Kentish Town. I had. I realised he asked me the question because he knew I had been to Joe's house and wanted to see if I would lie about it – so I said yes. He wanted to know what I was doing there. I explained that I was visiting Ruth First, Joe's wife, because Ruth and I were editors of the *Review of African Political Economy* and I went to talk to her about the articles. He nodded and asked if Joe was there. I said he was and that he, Ruth and I had lunch together. He asked if I was there in the afternoon with Joe. I said, yes. He asked what we talked about and I replied that we weren't talking; we were watching rugby on TV – being a white South African male, Joe liked rugby. Craig, said to me, "Ja, you arrived at the house at this time on this day, and you left at 5.30 p.m." I said, "Well, if you say so." I gave an account of what I had done. Obviously, they had spies there. I felt there was a limit to what I could lie about.'

Williamson told Innes there were two kinds of people in the left in exile: Trotskyists and Leninists determined to overthrow the South African government and those opposed to apartheid but who were working within the law. Williamson said he hoped Innes was in the latter category. 'I said, yes, I was,' recalls Innes.

Williamson interrogated Innes for five days and never threatened him physically. He had copies of everything Innes had written, but there was nothing there that Innes was worried about. During one of the interrogation sessions Williamson got a call and Innes heard him say, 'Hy wil weet van die handskrif [He wants to know about the handwriting].' Innes went pale. He remembered that when he was reading through the document he had typed in Geneva, he fixed some of the mistakes on the document in pen. He wondered if the police were going to bring in a handwriting expert to analyse his handwriting and compare it with that on the document. He quickly thought of an answer: that when he read the document, his inner editor kicked in and he decided to fix the literals and typos. Fortunately, the handwriting analysis never took place.

During the interrogation Williamson shared information with him, and told him that his handler in the ANC was Essop Pahad. 'I think he was trying to co-opt me. During one of the sessions, he sent out for a hamburger and chips and asked me if I would like a hamburger and chips. The food in prison was goddam awful. I thanked him but said that as long as there were bars on the windows, I couldn't accept. I thought that he was making overtures, which were designed to draw me into his network. But I made it clear that I wasn't going to work for him.'

After being in custody for more than a month, Innes was told he was being released. 'I tried not to get overjoyed because I knew that sometimes you walk out onto the pavement and the next thing you know, you are rearrested. But they let me go. That was that.' Innes returned to London, and Williamson moved on to his next victim.

Chapter 19

‘And in Walked Craig Williamson’

Twelve days after Renfrew Christie was sentenced, NUSAS president Andrew Boraine was speaking at a meeting in Durban to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the 1976 Soweto Uprising when Security Branch members arrested him in terms of Section 6 of the Terrorism Act and rushed him at breakneck speed to Cape Town. Boraine was held in the Parow Police Station. After a couple of days in the cells, he was brought into Caledon Square in the centre of the city and deposited in an interrogation room. ‘And in walked Craig Williamson.’¹

It was the first time Boraine had clapped eyes on Williamson, but he recognised him straight away. Soon after Boraine was elected NUSAS president at a Durban congress in December 1979, some of his predecessors, specifically Cedric de Beer, pulled him aside and said, ‘We can’t prove it but there’s this guy in Geneva – Craig Williamson – and we think he’s a spy, and if he is a spy, then Karl Edwards is probably also a spy. So watch out.’

He didn’t think much of it until a month later when the Williamson scandal broke, and that’s when Boraine realised he could be in serious trouble. In June 1979, he had gone to Lesotho with Edwin Angless, a colleague in the student movement,

where they met with members of the ANC, including Phyllis Naidoo, and read the Freedom Charter. 'Later on Edwin had gone overseas and had stayed with Williamson in Geneva – and had mentioned this trip to Williamson,' recalls Boraine. Boraine didn't know it at the time, but Angless had also been detained, on 6 June 1980.

'Boom! The interrogation started. Williamson said, "What were you doing between this date and this date last year?" Williamson went straight in there – to Lesotho. He said: "Here's a pencil, here's a pad of paper. Write down everything you did when you were in Lesotho." I thought, God, he will know some of it, so what do I tell him?'

Boraine realised Angless had also been detained when, about a week later, Williamson put a pad of paper down and Boraine recognised his friend's handwriting. 'I knew he was comparing our notes – classic technique. I would write five pages, keeping it as bland and as superficial as possible. Williamson would come in and say this is a lot of crap, and shout and scream a bit and then tell me to write it again. So I would write ten pages. And so it would go on. And they would keep all the versions and compare them. Obviously he was getting Edwin to do the same thing. A fairly standard technique, but you feel under pressure. With Williamson it never got physical because he prided himself on being above that; a man of the world. Of course, if you've been sitting in Geneva for a few years, you get into more rarefied ways of dealing with information rather than the brute force of the security police. I don't think he would have hesitated to get physical, but we weren't having that type of conversation.'

A member of the Security Branch sat in on the interrogation sessions. 'He sat on my left, often cleaning his service pistol, taking bullets out, putting them back in. It was very menacing,' says Boraine. 'The guy would suddenly come in with a question

– literally from left field – and if I turned to face him, he would push my face to Williamson, who would watch my eyes. They were watching your eyes to see if they go left or right and whether you're telling the truth, which is obviously something they had seen on TV. Williamson always had a briefcase with his notes – and he'd fish his notes out, look at them and then close the briefcase and carry on. This went on for a few weeks. They weren't the only ones to interrogate me. Spyker van Wyk, from the local security police, came and the Military Intelligence came to ask me about another NUSAS project I had been involved in, the Military Commission (MilCom), which was the start of the war resister movement.'

Boraine, who was 21, was scared. The intimidation was orchestrated from the moment he was arrested and transported at 180 kph from Durban to Cape Town. 'The three security policemen from Durban – all smoking – took me to Colesberg, where the Cape Town security policemen were waiting to transport me to Cape Town. They were softening me up, saying things like, "Oh, you're in such trouble now." I'm myopic and my glasses were taken away, so I felt completely helpless. They took my belt, so I had to walk around holding my pants up. They took my boot laces away, so I was stumbling. They took my watch, so I didn't know the time. They haven't laid a hand on you but you are at their mercy; you're dehumanised quickly and easily. And they haven't even started shouting at you yet. I didn't have a toothbrush or toothpaste. After a month, how do you cut your fingernails? I had to bite them. My beard grew because I didn't have a razor. I got very itchy. I didn't shower for those two and a half months. It was the middle of winter and there was only a cold tap.'

Boraine arrived in Cape Town on 17 June 1980. There had been protests on 16 June, the fourth anniversary of the Soweto

Uprising. ‘These huge riot policemen came into the police station, bustling past me, boasting about how many kids they had shot on the Cape Flats. I was in my cell and I heard them bringing in these *laaities* [youngsters] who had been throwing stones at cars and Casspirs [police armoured vehicles], and burning tyres – the normal stuff at the time. The cops proceeded to sjambok the life out of them in the courtyard outside my cell. I heard them whipping these teenagers – they fucked them up. That was the context of my interrogation.’

Boraine believes that what saved him was Williamson’s own arrogance. ‘He was so full of himself – after two or three hours I’d think, Flip, I’m getting tired, I’m starting to make mistakes, I can’t remember what I just said. Did I meet this person or not? I’d start getting a bit delusional ... and that’s when Williamson would suddenly break off the conversation and start telling me about his life in Geneva and how he had fooled Mossad [the Israeli intelligence agency] and the CIA, and how he was the ultimate spy. I would ask him questions about that. I would think, Keep on talking, Craig, keep on talking. It would give me a break from the pressure. I would butter him up. I said, “Gee, how did you do that?” Which would send him off on another ten minutes of boasting. I realised his ego was large and he felt the need to prove himself and boast, when he should have been keeping up the pressure of interrogation like a more professional thug.’

Boraine recalls Williamson bringing in a green book, which the Security Branch referred to as ‘the Terrorist Album’, which featured mugshots of anti-apartheid activists. This was common practice in security police interrogations across the country. ‘Every page had nine photographs on it. The photos didn’t have the person’s name, but were numbered. They were keeping tabs on everyone who had gone overseas. Williamson would open the book and say, “Who do you know on that page?” And then sit

back and watch my eyes to see if they would flicker.

'I'd look at a page and there was a photo of Oliver Tambo. Even though he is in a banned movement, you should know who he is if you're the NUSAS president – so you can't deny you recognise Oliver Tambo. So he leads you in like this. If you say you don't know him, he'll say, "You're talking complete crap, of course you know him." Who should you know? You turn the page and there's Joe Slovo. Should you know Joe Slovo? Probably yes. He's quite a public figure, but then, flip, you start seeing people from Lesotho, people you denied meeting in Lesotho, people like Phyllis Naidoo – should I know her or not? That was part of the interrogation technique.'

On one occasion Williamson opened a page and asked Boraine if there was anyone he recognised. 'There were a lot of white people on the page and I genuinely didn't recognise anyone. I said, "No." "You are lying," he shouted. "Who do you recognise?" He started performing and shouting. I didn't know what he was on about because I didn't recognise anyone. I looked again, but nothing. He pointed to a photo and shouted, "Look there. Who is that?" I shrugged. "That's me. That's me," he screamed. He went off again about what a good spy he was and how he had even fooled his own colleagues in the other intelligence branches. He boasted how they thought he was a genuine ANC guy, opposing the apartheid government. I thought, Gosh, you are so full of yourself, I can outlast you. It gave me some courage to know I'm dealing with a bumptious idiot. I mean, very cunning, very smart, and very good at his "job".'

One thing that had been drilled into Boraine by his predecessors in the student movement was that he shouldn't sign any statement in front of a magistrate because it could be used against him in court. There was some wriggle room if a statement was signed only in front of the security police

because then he could argue he had signed under duress. After Boraine had written some twenty pages about his involvement in NUSAS and his trip to Lesotho, Williamson told him to sign the document, which he did. 'The next day I was taken from Caledon Square to a magistrate's office. The two security guys who had escorted me left me in the office and waited outside – ostensibly a division of powers between the executive and judiciary in some notional way. The magistrate – a typical bloody apartheid magistrate – said: "I believe you've got a statement to sign." I thought, Aha, here's my chance. This is the first time in about two months that I'm seeing anyone other than the security police. "Right," he says, "what's your statement?" I say: "My statement is that I do not wish to make a statement." He says, "That's not a statement." "Yes it is," I tell him, "and I want you to sign as witness." "I can't do that," he says. The two guys outside came flying in, pulled me out of there, screaming and shouting. So I never got to say anything in front of a magistrate – thank God. I was very proud of myself.'

The final time Boraine saw Williamson was when his interrogator came into the room and told him he had completed his investigation and submitted his report, and it was now up to the prosecutor's office to decide whether Boraine would be put on trial. 'He was trying to be like your headmaster from your old school. He said, "I want to give you a word of friendly advice," and proceeded to give me a long lecture, telling me that if I'm ever in front of him again, I am going to be in much more serious trouble. He was saying, "Look what a nice chap I am – I'm quite benevolent, I'm giving you a friendly warning."'

During his interrogation Boraine had managed to deflect and spin enough to not implicate himself. Although he admitted that he had met certain people, he denied knowing they were in the ANC. Mere contact was not enough to prove that he had

been furthering the aims of a banned organisation. Boraine had played Williamson at his own game – and won. He was released a couple of weeks later without being charged.

Boraine carried on as NUSAS president and was arrested a year later, in May 1981, at an anti-Republic Day campaign where the South African flag had been burnt. He was taken from Cape Town to Pretoria Central Prison, to B Section, which he recognised from having read *Cold Stone Jug*, by Herman Charles Bosman. 'It hadn't changed. You still had prisoners going up and down polishing the floor and then the warders would walk across it and then the prisoners would polish it again. It was this futile action.'

A few weeks after his second detention, Boraine's father, Alex, then a member of parliament for the Progressive Federal Party and later the deputy chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, went to the security police headquarters to ask about his son. 'I'm afraid I can't tell you that,' was all he was told. Boraine Senior's trip to the security police featured in the *New York Times*. 'The father believes that his status as a Member of Parliament offers some protection to his son. But images of Andrew in an interrogation room stay with him, even when he is exchanging casual greetings with members of the governing National Party in the corridors of Parliament. "You try to carry on, to do your work, to live normally," he said. "But there's another kind of clock operating for you. Each time the phone rings, each time there's a knock at the door ..." He could not complete the thought.'²

Andrew Boraine was kept in isolation for six weeks and was then released and banned for five years. He had to give up his position as NUSAS president. That marked the end of his part in the student movement.

Boraine never saw Williamson again – at least not in his

waking hours. ‘For quite a few years after that I would dream about killing him and his family. I had this fantasy about what was the most brutal way I could kill him. I would kill his family first in front of him and then kill him. I would literally have dreams of killing, hurting or maiming Craig Williamson in some way. In 1986 I suddenly got very physical symptoms. I was stressed out. This was all part of post-traumatic stress disorder. I hadn’t processed being in detention and being banned. I would talk to people about the terror of being in detention, the fear, the loneliness of being in isolation – and start to deal with it.’



While Boraine was having nightmares about Williamson, the spy-turned-interrogator moved on to Guy Berger, then a 24-year-old junior lecturer in journalism at Grahamstown’s Rhodes University and an anti-apartheid activist. Berger was woken up by loud banging on his door in the early hours of an August morning in 1980.³ Six security police officers burst into Berger’s home and dragged him off to jail. ‘The first three or four days ... were the worst in terms of direct pressure. There was a combination of sleep deprivation and slapping me around. Unlike some others, I wasn’t given electric shocks or made to stand on drawing pins, but the inhumane treatment was still effective.’⁴

After being interrogated by Alfred Oosthuizen, a member of the Eastern Cape Special Branch who would go on to be the handler for the apartheid spy Olivia Forsyth, Berger was transferred to East London. ‘I was interrogated by a guy who said to me: “You are really going to shit off tomorrow. You’ve really had it easy with me compared to who you are going to meet next.” I thought it was going to be Williamson.’⁵ He was

right. The next morning Berger was brought into an office, and there was Williamson, looking out of the window, with his hands clasped behind his back. 'Like he was Napoleon,' says Berger. 'I greeted him. I said, "Good morning, Captain Williamson." He was so intent on acting a role and making a grand entry that he didn't hear me say good morning. "Do you know who I am?" he asked. I said, "Yes, I do." He was very disorientated. This was the most interesting thing. I was supposedly being interrogated by him.' Berger says the East London police officers, who had been so excited that their 'man in Moscow' had come to town to interrogate Berger, couldn't believe it. 'Their jaws dropped when they saw how useless Williamson was when it came to interrogation. They were puzzled. They couldn't figure out why he wasn't asking any questions.'

Williamson spent a whole day talking at Berger. 'It was the strangest thing. I thought this is fantastic; he's not squeezing me for more information. I think he was new to this role – coming back and coming face to face with the consequences of what he was doing. Not that I was a serious consequence. He said very strange things like "Lenin had a phrase for people like you, Guy Berger, you're useful idiots – you're being used by evil people and I'll tell you how evil they are. I was at a rally in London and Joe Slovo said it's not enough to die for the struggle; you must be prepared to kill for the struggle. That shows you how violent and evil these people are." It was kind of ironic for him of all people to say that.' It was especially ironic considering that almost twenty years later Williamson told a journalist that he respected a person who was willing to die for his country, but admired a person who was prepared to kill for his country.⁶

Williamson also touched on questions of faith and religion. He told Berger that he was still working out the question of God's existence. 'Sometimes I think there is a God, but I'm not

100 per cent sure. But I'm not an atheist,' he told Berger. 'This guy was pouring out his life's questions to me; it was like he was reconciling himself to what he was doing in support of that whole system. It was the most bizarre scenario.'

When Berger eventually went on trial on 17 February 1981, Williamson gave evidence. 'He was doing his best to say what a big conspiracy this all was and the magistrate was eating it all up,' Berger recalls. Berger's advocate, Denis Kuny, recalls that at the trial Williamson was in command of the whole operation. 'I remember very specifically that he was standing in the witness box – the court was packed with Special Branch and spectators, and one of the Special Branch juniors came into court and Williamson nodded at him as if to say, You need to see who is in court and take names. It was clear that he was in control. He was the kingpin of Special Branch.'⁷

After Williamson, the next witness to give evidence in Berger's trial was referred to only as 'Mr A'. The magistrate ruled that Mr A's identity would remain a secret and his evidence would be heard behind closed doors. Mr A was none other than Karl Edwards, the BOSS agent who had followed Williamson's footsteps in NUSAS, the IUEF and ANC.

Berger says he knew Williamson and Edwards had worked together, but when Williamson was exposed, he didn't put two and two together and realise there was a network involving Edwards and Williamson. Berger had in fact been in contact with Edwards, who had come to Grahamstown to deliver messages relating to his research work. Edwards had once given Berger money and told him to use it for a good political cause and then send a report to a particular mailbox. Berger started doing voluntary research for the ANC in 1978–9. He believes that the delivery chain for the flow of messages was from Peter Richer, a former student at Rhodes who was Berger's contact in

Botswana, to Mac Maharaj to Marius Schoon to Williamson to Edwards and then to Berger.

'I was a bit uncomfortable about getting these messages because it made it sound very conspiratorial about what I was doing when, in fact, it was hardly professional revolutionary stuff. It was just research on trade unions for [the trade union federation] SACTU, which was an overall sympathiser with the ANC.' Berger was told that there would be a secret code in case he needed to get out of the country. If he needed to go underground, he was to find a place to go and get an emergency message to the ANC, who would send someone to his house. The code would be: 'Are you William's brother?' And he was supposed to reply, 'No, I'm Charles's brother.'

At Berger's trial, Edwards testified that after matriculating he went to the police college for six months in 1969 and then became a prospector in South West Africa. He returned to South Africa and began working part-time for BOSS. He was sent to Rhodes University, where he studied social sciences, and was ordered to infiltrate the left-wing student movement, to build his credibility, with the ultimate purpose of joining the ANC. He became a 'vigorous member of the leftist community' and in 1973 was elected NUSAS director for the Eastern Cape. The following year he was on the NUSAS national executive and based in Cape Town as a full-time member. It was at this time that he stopped being a part-time BOSS agent and was formally sworn in as a full-time member of the agency, with all the benefits associated with his rank.⁸ Edwards also revealed that in 1976 Williamson had already received substantial sums of money from the IUEF for distribution inside South Africa. To assist him Edwards opened bank accounts in various names, through which the money would be funnelled.

Edwards testified that in 1977 he was formally recruited into

the ANC by Aziz Pahad. At the same time, working through front organisations, he was also involved in various aspects of clandestine activity for the IUEF. He said he knew Williamson was a lieutenant in the police force and Williamson knew he was a member of BOSS. 'It was the desire of Williamson to have an internal network which he could lay at the disposal of the ANC. As Williamson was also, to my knowledge, a member of the ANC at that particular time and I had become a member of the ANC at that stage as well, upon his instructions we formed an ANC unit. We were playing both sides of the game. We were formally attached to the IUEF but informally – and unknown to the IUEF – we were also attached to the African National Congress.' In fact, he and Williamson were playing three sides. The two were informing on the IUEF to the ANC (in order to boost their credibility with the ANC) and were also informing on the IUEF and the ANC to their respective intelligence agencies.

When the court adjourned, Edwards buckled under the weight of the stress of giving evidence against Berger. He collapsed in the witness box, prompting the *Eastern Province Herald* to run a story the following day under the headline 'Government agent faints during evidence in security trial'. The prosecutor objected to the headline, arguing that while Edwards was indisposed and had sweated profusely, he did not go as far as fainting. But Berger insists he did faint.

When the court reconvened to hear the judge deliver sentence, Berger was convicted of being in possession of banned books and of being a member of the ANC, although he wasn't actually a member. He was sentenced to seven years in jail, with three years suspended. The sentence was reduced on appeal, and Berger spent two years behind bars.

'Looking back now, these people [Williamson and Edwards] were still quite young and I don't know – they're certainly not

nice people – but for them this had been a game – a game in favour of racism, but a game nonetheless,’ says Berger. ‘Of course, the more serious things came later.’

Chapter 20

Barbara Hogan's 'Close Comrades'

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the rise of the securocrats in the apartheid regime under the leadership of P.W. Botha, the hawkish former Minister of Defence and new Prime Minister. He set about reorganising and coordinating the intelligence structures of the country. At a meeting held in Simonstown, according to Craig Williamson, the heads of the security forces attending were told 'to take the gloves off in the fight against the revolutionary enemy'.¹

The police, and particularly the Security Branch, were under intense pressure to perform. Results became more important than legality. The Eleventh Commandment was well known to those in the security forces: thou shalt not be found out. Security force members, especially agents in covert units, saw themselves as operating in a secret theatre, which fed into the wider war against communism and its allies, the liberation movements like the ANC. Enemy successes – the killing of security force members, attacks on economic targets like Sasol or Koeberg, and civilian bombings – produced recriminations from the politicians. Security force successes – arrests with convictions, cross-border raids, killing the enemy – brought praise, pride and relief from pressure.²

It was within this climate to 'perform' that the security police arrested the 30-year-old anti-apartheid activist Barbara

Hogan on 22 September 1981, after a report she had sent to the ANC was intercepted. In addition to the report, police found a list of names she'd written under the heading 'Close Comrades' – a group of people who she believed were sympathetic to the struggle.³ The Security Branch detained, interrogated and tortured many of the people on the list, including Alan Fine, Cedric Mayson, Cedric de Beer, Aurret van Heerden and Neil Aggett. The state then announced that there would be a massive treason trial, arguing that all the accused were involved in a conspiracy. This, as the IUEF predicted in its commission of inquiry after Williamson had been unmasked as a spy, was meant to be the Treason Trial of the white left. 'They could never prove such a conspiracy because there wasn't one,' says Advocate Denis Kuny, one of those who defended Barbara Hogan. Yet Hogan was charged with high treason.⁴

One of her fellow accused, the former NUSAS president Aurret van Heerden, was being held in isolation at Pretoria Central Prison when Williamson arrived one day and collected him from his cell. Instead of an interrogation room, he took Van Heerden to a coffee bar downtown. Van Heerden says Williamson was smug, and presented himself as a sophisticated, civilised intelligence operative who did not really approve of the more thuggish methods of some of his colleagues. 'His message was that he wasn't involved in the sharp end of the stuff. I was guarded and we had a polite conversation. This coffee shop meeting was then misrepresented in my trial.'⁵

Williamson didn't play a role in Van Heerden's brutal interrogation, which took place from September until the middle of December. During this time he was forced to stand for about ten and a half hours with one of his wrists manacled to an ankle. A tight-fitting bag was placed over his head and he was suffocated. He was given electric shocks, strangled with a wet

towel and interrogated for a hundred hours – his body swelling up badly. These torture methods, according to the expert Dr Louis West who testified at Van Heerden's trial, had been used by the North Vietnamese.

Van Heerden was kept in detention for eight months because the state wanted to use him as a witness in some of the cases it was mounting against those on Hogan's list. 'In January 1982 Williamson pitched up again,' says Van Heerden. 'He once again played this more sophisticated intelligence operative and we had a conversation about the state of politics in South Africa and the state of the left. He acted as if he didn't have anything to do with the nasty stuff – like I could have a civilised conversation with him because he doesn't have his hands dirty.'

Four years later Van Heerden, then freed, sued ten Security Branch policemen who had interrogated him. The policemen secured a high-powered legal team. But Van Heerden also had formidable legal firepower in the persons of Jules Browde, Wim Trengove and Sydney Kentridge. 'My team slaughtered them; their whole case collapsed. However, on the Friday afternoon their advocate announced he was bringing a surprise witness to court on Monday to present dramatic evidence that would change the course of the case.' That surprise witness was Williamson, whose dramatic evidence was that Van Heerden couldn't have been tortured because his detention was a set-up. Williamson testified that Van Heerden was a spy and hadn't been in detention, but had received five-star treatment in a hotel in return for giving the Security Branch information. 'It was a brilliant move on their part – and the press picked it up. It was dangerous for me. I thought some lone MK guy might take me out.'

Sydney Kentridge told Van Heerden not to worry, and proceeded to cross-examine Williamson. 'It was a masterclass in cross-examination,' recalls Van Heerden. 'Kentridge kept

Williamson on the stand for a couple of days. He got Williamson to discredit himself. Medical evidence showed I had been in a state of incredible anxiety and the judge conceded that I was tortured. However, there was a sting in the tail because I hadn't sued the police within six months of my interrogation, as the law had prescribed.'

The same men who tortured Van Heerden tortured Neil Aggett, a medical doctor and organiser for the Food and Canning Workers' Union. Aggett was detained on 27 November 1981 and 70 days later was found hanging in his cell at John Vorster Square. He was the first white political prisoner to die in detention. The eight-month inquest into his death became an examination of the security police's interrogation methods during which activists who had been tortured and assaulted in detention testified about their experiences. Lawyers for Aggett's family showed that in the seven days before his death he had spent 110 hours in interrogation. They asked that two security policemen, Major Arthur 'Benoni' Cronwright and Lieutenant Stephen Whitehead, be charged with culpable homicide.⁶ Instead, the inquest magistrate found that if anyone should be held responsible, it was Van Heerden, because he had failed to alert the authorities to the fact that Aggett was suicidal. Van Heerden had testified that four days before his death Aggett – who was being held in the same prison – told him he had 'broken' as a result of electric shock torture, beatings and prolonged sleep deprivation: it was then that Van Heerden realised his comrade was suicidal.⁷

Barbara Hogan also saw Aggett shortly before his death. 'We were at a sort of reception area for the cells and Neil walked past me. He gave me this huge smile and lifted his arms and said, "Amandla! Amandla, Barbara." I was able to work out it was on that day that they really started beating him up. It was

always quite important for me to have had that moment with Neil, because I never saw him again.’⁸

Hogan herself was kept in solitary confinement and was also assaulted and tortured during interrogation. She eventually went on trial in August 1982, a year after she had been arrested. The state claimed she had joined the ANC in September 1977 and carried out certain acts to further its aims, including working in the labour field on behalf of the ANC, setting up dead letter boxes and codes to communicate with the ANC, and visiting the ANC member Marius Schoon in Botswana and passing on information to him. Hogan admitted she was a member of the ANC, and that she was furthering the aims of the ANC. However, she pleaded not guilty to the charges of treason and terrorism.

Thirty-two years after the trial – and after holding two cabinet positions, as Minister of Health (from September 2008 to May 2009) and as Minister of Public Enterprises (from May 2009 to November 2010) – I meet her at her apartment to talk about the man who played a significant role in her conviction: Craig Williamson, the state’s main witness against her.⁹

‘Is he still alive?’ she asks.

Hogan says that during her interrogation Major Cronwright tried to scare her with Williamson. He bragged to Hogan that Williamson was a great spy, who had penetrated the Soviet Union. ‘[Williamson] was inflated as this big expert. Cronwright showed me a photograph of him in Moscow and said, “You see, we know everything about you guys.” A photograph of Craig Williamson standing in Moscow’s Red Square meant he infiltrated the heart of the organisation? Really?’

‘Cronwright said to me, “Oh, Williamson said you were the sexiest girl on [Wits] campus.” He said it in a taunting way – there was something very personal about that kind of statement.’ For the Security Branch it *was* personal: they saw Hogan as a

traitor, and her trial was specifically mounted to inculcate fear in whites who might consider joining the ANC.

Hogan believes that Williamson was more than simply an operative. For an operative, it's a job; but being a spy is a way of life. 'He suckered a community. I have come to believe that there are people who are capable of that kind of deception, who can compartmentalise their lives. Torturing, arresting, murdering – it was what "the boys" did in those years.'

Hogan says Williamson's script was that communism was evil, the ANC was in the hands of the communists, and South Africans were fighting a war to preserve their women, their religion, their language, their everything. 'It's interesting how Williamson, an English-speaking South African who comes from a different environment, stayed true to that script. Of course, if he wasn't following a script, then he is a psychopath.'

While Williamson didn't have much evidence that directly implicated Hogan, he was the state's trump card to prove its case; its expert on all things ANC. Williamson took the stand, giving the court a lecture on the national liberation movement. This information, he testified, had been given to him by his two major instructors in the ANC, Ronnie Kasrils and Aziz Pahad. 'It was always stressed that the aim was to create or bring about revolution rather than evolution. I was also told that the so-called revolutionary struggle combines what one can term political, economic and armed struggle, and the very term "Revolutionary Armed Struggle" merely means a form of military political struggle, in which violence is an element, and that could be either political or armed violence.'

Williamson produced ANC documents and letters to prove the organisation's revolutionary intention to overthrow the government. To establish just how close Williamson had got to the '*rooi gevaar*' and how deep he had muscled his way into the

heart of the enemy, the prosecutor Advocate Swanepoel produced Exhibit 30 and asked Williamson if it meant anything to him. Exhibit 30 was a red flag with a hammer, sickle and star on it.

‘Ja,’ said Williamson, ‘I’ve seen these before.’

Judge A.P. van Dyk interrupted to say, ‘Probably the understatement of the decade.’

Williamson continued: ‘It’s the flag of the international communist movement. It’s the flag of the song “The Red Flag”.’

Swanepoel: ‘When you say that you’ve seen it before, have you seen it in South Africa?’

Williamson: ‘No, I saw it in the Kremlin, my lord.’

Williamson’s testimony was simple: if Hogan was a member of the ANC – and she was – then she supported the armed struggle and promoted violence. He argued that whatever she did, no matter how innocuous, represented high treason because she belonged to a banned organisation.

In cross-examining Williamson, Advocate George Bizos, acting for Hogan, argued that there was room in the ANC for people who did not associate with violence. He said ANC members did not have to become party to a conspiracy to overthrow the state by violence. A tussle then ensued, with Bizos trying to get Williamson to concede that idealists could join the ANC with the intention of contributing to its work in a way that was non-violent.

Williamson: ‘The ANC per se is inherently violent. So, I’m not denying that it is conceivable or inconceivable that somebody could join with those objectives. What I’m saying is such a person would be confused about the ANC.’

Bizos: ‘... would be confused about the ANC because that person would not have the same image of the ANC as you have as a police officer?’

Despite the state’s lack of evidence, on 21 October 1982

Justice Van Dyk found Hogan guilty of high treason and of being a member of the ANC, and sentenced her to ten years in prison. 'All that the state had against Barbara was a disguised letterbox under a rock where papers and reports were left,' recalls Denis Kuny. There was no violence, there was no allegation of violence, there was no suggestion of any treasonable activity, and she got ten years. We had an awful judge. Van Dyk was tough and nasty.'

Kuny believes the difference between Hogan's conviction and the acquittal of Alan Fine, another of those detained as a result of appearing on Hogan's list, was the person who held the gavel. In Hogan's case, Van Dyk was antagonistic to Hogan whereas Magistrate W. Rosch, who presided over Fine's trial, was sympathetic to him.

After being arrested in the 'Close Comrades' round-up, Fine spent six months in detention before he was charged with being part of a conspiracy involving the ANC and its trade union arm, SACTU. Williamson's task as the state's witness in the Fine trial was to give evidence showing that by passing on information to SACTU, Fine was furthering the aims of the ANC to overthrow the government and destroy the South African economy.

Fine's involvement with SACTU started when he went to Botswana to visit Marius and Jenny Schoon, after they fled the country in 1977. Fine told Jenny, who was a SACTU official, that he wished to do the kind of work she was engaged in. 'I saw a job advert for an official at the National Union of Distributive Workers, which was a whites-only trade union and had a couple of parallel unions – one was the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa. The unions ran quite closely together. I spoke to Jeanette and Marius about it and they encouraged me to apply. The purpose of getting that job was to provide intelligence on the trade union movement, through Jeanette and Marius, for SACTU,' says Fine. Jenny became Fine's handler. He passed

on information about individuals and trends in the trade union movement to her through dead letter boxes.

During the trial Denis Kuny stuck to Fine's cover story, which Fine and Jenny had worked out in advance: that if he was ever arrested, he was to admit he was working for SACTU but claim he was ignorant of the extent of its relationship with the ANC. 'Obviously I wasn't ignorant of that, but I stuck to the story under interrogation – even though they got quite nasty about it,' says Fine.

In court Craig Williamson testified that although SACTU was a separate organisation from the ANC, it was part of the same revolutionary alliance. He told the court he had been part of a unit of the ANC's armed wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), headed by Mac Maharaj and had received copies of *Dawn* – MK's internal monthly journal, from which he quoted: 'The African workers have a decisive role to play in our struggle to overthrow white supremacy and achieve the goals of the Freedom Charter. We cannot envisage the advance of the armed struggle without the involvement of the toiling masses. The organisation of the workers into fighting trade unions, the withdrawal of their labour power at crucial moments, is an absolute necessity if our struggle is to advance.' Williamson also argued that in using dead letter boxes and secret codes to hide their communication, Fine and Jenny Schoon were breaking the law. He said he would be suspicious of even the most innocent of communications with Jenny, who was then engaged in furthering the aims of revolutionary organisations, just as Israel would regard with utmost suspicion any communication with the PLO leader Yasser Arafat.¹⁰

In other words, Kuny told Williamson when he cross-examined him, in the minds of the security establishment this was guilt by association.

‘As an example,’ said Kuny, ‘Jenny is poison for people to be associated with.’

‘Well,’ answered Williamson, ‘poison ivy.’

Kuny argued that Fine and Schoon worked in secret because they were considered by the police ‘objects of interest’, and the police harassed, detained, banned, seized passports and spied on objects of interest, even if they weren’t actually doing anything illegal. Fine, he argued, passed on innocent information.

Although Fine didn’t build up any hopes that he would get off, he enjoyed watching Williamson squirm as Kuny methodically dismantled his evidence. ‘Denis was relentless in getting Williamson to contradict himself and make the kinds of concessions that he did – for example, that the fact I had acted in a covert way didn’t mean what I was doing was unlawful. He also successfully challenged Williamson’s testimony about the conspiracy between the ANC and SACTU.’

The trial hearing was the first time that Fine and Williamson had laid eyes on each other since they were comrades in NUSAS at Wits University a decade earlier. ‘Williamson didn’t make eye contact with me,’ recalls Fine. ‘He only looked at the prosecutor and the magistrate. I had had so many security police interrogators in my six months of detention that he didn’t scare me. I felt contempt for him.’

In the end, Fine was acquitted. He believes Kuny saved him from a spell in prison. He says it also helped that the magistrate took the letter of the law seriously. ‘There weren’t many of them around at the time – I was lucky.’ Kuny remembers walking down one of the court corridors sometime after the trial and Magistrate Rosch came past. ‘We greeted each other and he gave me a big smile as if to say, “We did it.”’

After his acquittal, Fine, who had been in detention throughout the trial, went home. That evening the phone rang.

It was Jenny Schoon, his friend and comrade and the person Williamson had referred to as ‘poison ivy’, calling to congratulate him. ‘We had a brief conversation – it was very nerve-racking, because I expected that my phone was tapped and, obviously, I didn’t wish to experience another spell in detention.’ It was the last time the two friends and comrades spoke.

The massive Treason Trial of the white left fizzled out, with the only successful prosecution being that of Hogan. The state hadn’t succeeded in crushing the white left or warning white activists to stay away from the struggle, but had instead exposed itself and its operatives as ruthless torturers. Until then only black detainees had been assaulted and tortured in detention. But as a result of the various trials of the ‘Close Comrades’, the newspapers gave much publicity to the brutal interrogation of Hogan, Van Heerden and others and, especially, the death of Neil Aggett, whose vicious assault and terrible torture led to his taking his own life in detention.

In a review of Beverley Naidoo’s book *Death of an Idealist: In search of Neil Aggett*, the journalist Terry Bell writes: ‘The resultant watershed saw the introduction of Vlakplaas and the death squads, since extra-judicial killings do not result in messy and embarrassing inquests and court cases.’¹¹ The Hogan and related trials would also mark a watershed in the activities of Craig Williamson. Until 1982, Williamson hadn’t been involved in the lethal aspects of apartheid’s dirty tricks. That changed as his service to the state itself altered from informing to interrogating to bombing – the bombing of both places and people.

Chapter 21

Bombing of the ANC London Office

At 9 a.m. on 14 March 1982, a 4.5 kg bomb exploded at the ANC's headquarters in London, injuring Vernet Mbatha, an ANC member who lived on the top floor, demolishing a section of the building and shattering windows in neighbouring buildings. Police cordoned off the area and led sniffer dogs through the rubble.

A crack South African hit squad had carried out the attack, which was sanctioned by the Law and Order Minister, Louis le Grange. Le Grange had instructed the Security Branch head and Williamson's former spymaster, Johann Coetzee, to plan the operation. Coetzee chose Brigadier Piet Goosen, then head of the intelligence section of the security police, to carry out the operation. As his second-in-command to lead the mission to London, Goosen appointed Security Branch captain Craig Williamson. The bomb was the South African government's way of striking back at the ANC in retaliation for the rocket attack on Voortrekkerhoogte military base near Pretoria in August 1981 – in the execution of which two British citizens had been involved – and also to punish the British government for allowing the ANC to operate from its country. It would also send a message

to the ANC that wherever they found themselves, they were not out of the reach of South Africa's security forces.¹

Williamson assembled a crack team of security force members, consisting of Vic McPherson, Eugene de Kock, John Adam, Wybrand du Toit, James Taylor and Roger Raven.² De Kock and Adam were chosen to provide protection on the scene.

'We were not fighters,' McPherson told the investigative journalist De Wet Potgieter later in an interview, 'we were not used to killing people, we needed people around us who knew how [to] act instinctively.'³

In Anemari Jansen's book *Eugene de Kock: Assassin for the State*, De Kock explains how Williamson travelled to the South African military base at Oshakati in northern Namibia, where De Kock was in charge of the notorious Koevoet – the South African Defence Force's ruthless counterinsurgency unit – to recruit him and Adam for the London mission. 'They were looking for someone who could kill with his bare hands if there was trouble, as it wouldn't be possible to get weapons through customs. I could use my hands very well. I could kill a man with the point of a pen, with a shard from my glasses, with a chain around my neck, a piece of wire, anything.'⁴ The team assembled at the security police's Daisy Farm outside Pretoria for a week of training and planning.

Goosen arranged with Coetzee that the code 'The egg can be laid' would be given once it was safe to carry out the operation. The explosives were hidden inside a radio and placed in a Military Intelligence diplomatic bag, which was sent to the South African embassy in London, where Peter Casselton, an ex-Rhodesian recruited into the security police in 1979 and trained at Daisy Farm, picked it up.

The team left in groups of two under false identities and with fake travel documents. McPherson was given the name Klaus

Dietrich, and Raven entered the United Kingdom as Jeremy Raven (and was then known forever after as Jerry). Taylor travelled as a book dealer on his way to a book fair in London. He had letterheads and business cards made to support his false identity.⁵

When De Kock, travelling under the name Alexander Knox (Alexander is his middle name), and Adam, flew into London, they were detained and interrogated for about three hours by customs officials, who suspected they were dealing in drugs or contraband because they had large amounts of cash with them.⁶ De Kock and Adam each had £12,000 in cash and more in travellers' cheques; Adam had slipped his money into De Kock's bag. They were released but kept under surveillance for a few days. De Kock had never been to London, and he and Goosen were like country bumpkins, with Goosen being pickpocketed in the street. Williamson, however, was streetwise and knew his way around the city.⁷

The team, staying at different hotels, all pre-paid, had arranged to meet at certain tourist spots – such as Madame Tussaud's – at specific times, not to talk to each other but to check that all was okay. It was at one of these venues where De Kock indicated that he and Adam were under observation. However, after the third day the United Kingdom's secret service gave up its surveillance.

The group met up at Dirty Dicks – a pub next door to the ANC's office in White Lion Road – where they set up camp to carry out surveillance. From here they drove around London to acquaint themselves with routes to and from the airport, and observed the routine of the police nearby to see at what times they changed shifts and when they patrolled. They also travelled on the Underground to familiarise themselves with escape routes of England in case something went wrong. As it happened, Raven and Casselton were driving with the bomb on

the back seat of a hired vehicle when they were stopped at a police roadblock, but were then waved through.

According to De Kock, on the night of 13 March 1982 the team enjoyed a dinner of pizza and a bottle of KWV wine that McPherson had acquired. Goosen interrupted the meal and said it was all systems go. He sent Coetzee the message 'The egg can be laid' to inform him the mission was going ahead. McPherson parked the getaway car around the corner from the ANC's office. Casselton handed the explosives, which had been placed in a large green canvas rucksack, to McPherson.

McPherson and Raven climbed over the high locked gate of the fence around the backyard of the ANC offices and hid the rucksack behind an old bench. The bomb, which had been fitted with an alarm clock device, was set to detonate 10 hours later – between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. – giving the group time to leave the UK before the explosion. Anything that could link them to the bomb – gloves and shoes – were put in a plastic bag and thrown into the Thames. The men were supposed to go to the Netherlands for a relaxing four days after the job was done, but orders came that they should head back to South Africa.

Shortly after 9 a.m. on 14 March, the ANC's Gill Marcus received a call telling her that a bomb had exploded at the ANC's headquarters. She rushed to the building, making her way to her own office where she found the printing machine had been thrown across the room and her metal desk twisted. Marcus, a workaholic, was in the office virtually every Sunday, but on this occasion she had worked until ten the previous night preparing placards and banners for a rally at Trafalgar Square in support of sanctions against South Africa. She thinks that this is what probably saved her. When she arrived at the scene of the explosion, she found a three-metre crater where she would have been sitting. There was glass everywhere from the windows that had been blown out.

The explosion caused the entire building to shift, and structural repairs had to be carried out to make the building safe again.⁸

Williamson's team flew from Heathrow to Frankfurt, from where they were to fly back to South Africa. At the airport, they coincidentally heard an announcement over the loudspeaker calling for 'Mr Joseph Slovo to please come to Information'. And there they saw Joe Slovo walk past them. 'We will never get such an opportunity again,' De Kock said, arguing that they had to kill South Africa's public enemy number one – as Slovo had been dubbed by the apartheid government – right there in the airport. De Kock had a yellow Bic pen with him and wanted to stab Slovo in the throat with it. It's not clear whether De Kock couldn't find Slovo or if his colleagues persuaded him not to carry out his mission. Either way, Slovo was spared and the members of the hit squad flew back to South Africa. Here they were taken to Daisy Farm, where some of the police's top brass were waiting for them. They had a braai and drank beer. Le Grange presented eight members of the team with the Police Star, the highest award for bravery. The only one not to get the Police Star was Casselton, who was still undercover in London, handling a network of apartheid agents.⁹

A few weeks after the bombing, Marcus went to collect her post and found a postcard with only one sentence written on it: 'Oh, you are still around. Craig.'¹⁰

Chapter 22

Ruth First: Death of an Intellectual Weapon

With parents like Julius and Tilly First, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who were founder members of the Communist Party of South Africa, revolutionary politics were always going to be central in Ruth First's life.

Ruth was born on 4 May 1925 in Johannesburg, and married Joe Slovo in 1949, shortly after both graduated from Wits University, he with a law degree and she with a BA. Both were rising stars in the Communist Party, and were among the 156 anti-apartheid activists arrested and charged with high treason in 1956. The trial – known as the Treason Trial – lasted four years and ended with all 156 accused being acquitted.

On 9 August 1963, First was arrested at Wits University's library and held in solitary confinement under the 90-day law. On her release she was rearrested outside the police station and held for another 27 days. While in custody she took an overdose of sleeping pills, but survived her suicide attempt. She was eventually released after 117 days in detention, and with her daughters Shawn, Gillian and Robyn she left South Africa on an exit permit to join Joe, who had managed to leave the country previously, in England. The family settled in North London.

While Joe was closely involved in exile in the ANC's armed wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe, as its chief of staff, Ruth became active in the British Anti-Apartheid Movement. In 1977 she was offered a post as professor and research director of the Centre for African Studies (CEA) at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique. Joe was worried about Ruth's safety in Mozambique, being so close to South Africa, but First was more concerned about her husband's wellbeing: as a leader of MK and general secretary of the Communist Party, Joe was the apartheid government's arch-rival.

On 17 August 1982, First was in her office at the university chatting to her colleague Bridget O'Laughlin, an anthropologist and political economist, and Pallo Jordan, a fellow ANC member in exile, who was joining her for lunch. While they were waiting for other guests, Ruth's boss, Aquino de Bragança, walked into her office and told her that people might think that she was the director of the centre, not he, because her mailbox was always full and he got so little mail. First responded: 'Well, you know if you want to get mail from people you have to write to them,' and then went to fetch her post.¹

She began to open her letters. She picked up an envelope that seemed to have a book inside, which had been sent from the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Swaziland. As she opened the parcel an explosion ripped through the office. Pallo Jordan recalls seeing a flash. 'You know in the movies when they show explosives like that and they make everything go into slow motion. That is how you perceive the whole situation. I mean nothing goes into slow motion, but that is how your brain perceives it. It's at the end of that when you try gathering yourself together and you realize that there was a bomb.'² The force of the blast blew out the window, sending half of the industrial air-conditioning unit thudding to the ground.³

O’Laughlin, who was then pregnant, heard what sounded like three blasts. She thought she was going to die. Then she saw Ruth lying straddled on the floor, face down and motionless. She was wearing her red blazer, white skirt and favourite Italian shoes. O’Laughlin ran outside and shouted for an ambulance, a futile gesture because there were no ambulances in Maputo.⁴ But Ruth First was dead.

In the final sentence of *117 Days*, First’s book about her experiences in detention in 1963, she wrote: ‘When they [the security police] left me in my own house at last, I was convinced that *they* would come again.’⁵ They had.

As Gillian Slovo tells the story, her father who was living in Maputo at the time, received a call telling him to come quickly because ‘something has happened’.

‘Dropping the receiver Joe ran out to his white Mazda and, without bothering to check it for bombs, he turned the key and drove straight to the university. There was a commandeered jeep outside the university block, busy ferrying Ruth’s three injured companions to hospital. Joe vaulted up the stairs, weaving through a shell-shocked crowd. A finger pointed him in the right direction. He was moving more slowly now. He saw an open door. He went closer. Her feet, clad in the t-bar, tan high-heel shoes that had been her favourites, poked out from the ruins of the room. My father was no stranger to violent death. The angle and the stillness of her legs told him everything he needed to know. He went no further.’⁶

Albie Sachs, a friend of the Slovos and likewise an ANC member living in Mozambique at the time, went to the mortuary to say farewell to First. ‘It was one of the worst moments of my life. Her whole head had been blown away; it was grotesque. It was a terrible violence,’ he says.⁷ ‘There was a sense of danger all the time, but somehow people felt Joe was the target – so it

was particularly shocking. This wasn't an accidental thing; the parcel was addressed to her and she was a relatively soft target,' says Sachs. 'The sense of loss was just immense. She was a brain. Samora Machel called her Mozambique's secret weapon in the war against apartheid. She was very influential as a thinker; very respected. She wasn't involved in the underground and in the military – she was an intellectual weapon. The bomb was meant to terrorise all of us,' says Sachs, who was himself a target of a bomb blast in Mozambique two years later.

Thousands of kilometres away, in a police bar in Pretoria, Craig Williamson told the police death squad commander, Dirk Coetzee: 'We got First.'⁸ The plan had been hatched at Daisy Farm and the unit assigned to do the job was the Security Branch's Section A under Brigadier Piet Goosen, who instructed Williamson to carry out the attack. The bomb was manufactured and placed in an envelope stolen five years previously from the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Swaziland. 'After the bomb exploded, Coetzee said he remembered it was a joyous occasion for the police. The men drank beer and brandy and Coke and patted each other on the back. All agreed they had dealt the enemy a terrific blow.'⁹

On 17 August 1992, at a ceremony to mark the tenth anniversary of First's assassination, Nelson Mandela said that when he received the news in Pollsmoor Prison, he felt shattered and terribly alone. 'My grief was all the more poignant because I knew both of the men injured in the same blast. In my mind's eye I saw Pallo Jordan as I had last seen him when, during 1948, I spent a few days in his home. Similarly, I could see Comrade Bragança talking intensely to me when we met during my stay in Morocco in 1962. But most clearly I could see Ruth: Ruth engaged in intense debate while we were at Wits University together; who uncompromisingly broke with the privilege of

her wealthy background; who readily crossed the racial barrier that so few whites were, or still are, able to cross; a woman whose passion and compassion enabled others, including those from liberal and conservative perspectives, to play their part.

‘It is a small consolation that her memory lives beyond the grave, that her freedom of spirit infuses many committed to an open society, rigorous intellectual thought, courage and principled action.

‘Ruth spent her life in the service of the people of southern Africa. She went to prison for her beliefs. She was murdered because of her acute political acumen combined with her resolute refusal to abandon her principles. Her life, and her death, remains a beacon to all who love liberty.

‘The assassination of Ruth First was not only a personal tragedy of immense proportions, it was part of a pattern of the systematic elimination of leading opponents of apartheid. Ten years later this commemoration is most appropriate, because it is only now that information is beginning to come out about the death squads and the crimes committed in defence of apartheid.

‘Our country cries out for peace. But this will be difficult to achieve until there is a recognition of the real causes of the violence, and the disbanding of those forces at the centre of what is in reality a low-intensity war against the people.’

Chapter 23

Jenny Curtis: A Ball of Good Energy

There are many sung and unsung heroes in South Africa's struggle for liberation – men and women who made enormous sacrifices for the achievement of the country's democracy. One unsung hero is Jeanette Eva Curtis Schoon, or Jenny, as most of her friends called her. Ironically, in post-apartheid South Africa more people probably know of Craig Williamson, her killer, than of Jenny Schoon, his victim.

Like Ruth First, Jenny was born into a political family. Her parents, Jack and Joyce Curtis, were founding members of the Progressive Party. Joyce joined the anti-apartheid women's group, the Black Sash, and Jack was a prolific letter-to-the-editor writer, expressing his opposition to apartheid policies. Jenny's elder brother, Neville, was to become a courageous and pathbreaking president of NUSAS for two years from 1969 and was then banned by the government in 1973.

The unpublished manuscript of Jack's autobiography, 'South African Saga: A Political Odyssey', documents Jenny's early years, growing up in the Johannesburg suburb of Kensington. Jenny, like Ruth First 20 years earlier, went to Jeppe Girls and then later attended St Andrew's in Bedfordview. She was not

impressed by authority or bullies: a friend of hers recalls Jenny being reprimanded by the headmistress for a misdemeanour she believed she did not commit. Jenny stamped her foot at the headmistress and stormed out of her office. She would treat the Security Branch with similar contempt when she crossed paths with them many years later.

Jack and Joyce bought a large, old rambling house in Johannesburg's northern suburbs, which they called Benteigh, which was within walking distance of Wits University, where both Neville and Jenny became involved in student politics. These were happy and carefree days. Benteigh became a meeting place for student friends, who would meet in the basement to drink and talk politics.¹ If the Curtis family had kept a visitors' book during their years at Benteigh, from 1968 to 1975, it would have read like a who's who of the left, many of whom suffered persecution, banning, detention, assault, imprisonment, torture and even death. When Indres Naidoo was released from Robben Island after a ten-year sentence, he spent a lot of time at the house, where Jenny taught him to swim.²

Steve Biko also visited Benteigh: he and Neville built up a close relationship, and Neville supported the founding of the Black Consciousness-aligned South African Students' Organisation after black students under Biko's leadership seceded from NUSAS. In 1973, the state banned Neville and seven other white activists, informing him that the reason for his punishment was that he had 'encouraged black-white polarisation', a rather bizarre charge in view of the apartheid policy.³

Another of the banned students was Paula Ensor, one of Jenny's closest friends.⁴ She and Jenny met at a NUSAS congress in 1969. They remained close friends, and when Ensor finished her degree in Durban and moved to Cape Town to further her studies in 1972, she moved in with Neville and Jenny, who had

both relocated to Cape Town. Jenny was the vice-president of NUSAS and was president of NUSWEL, the welfare arm of NUSAS. She had also enrolled at UCT for a higher diploma in librarianship. Both Neville and Jenny continued their involvement in student politics. In his autobiography, Jack describes a photo in a daily newspaper of police officers using teargas and batons to break up a student protest meeting in 1972 on the steps of St George's Cathedral. The photographer had captured Neville being dragged down the steps by his feet – his head banging on each step – with Jenny next to him, trying desperately to save her brother.

Neville, Jenny and Ensor lived in a house in Belvedere Road in Claremont, which like Benteigh became a meeting place for student activists. 'There was a great buzz in the home, which I found too distracting so I moved out, but kept coming over for dinner and eventually they said, "Just move back in." So I did,' says Ensor. 'I was very close to Jeanette. Very close indeed. We had a friendship and common political interests. She had a marvellous sense of humour. She was very articulate and a great reader; an addictive reader. She read anything – novels and non-fiction – and always had a book with her; it didn't matter where she was. She was a great person to live with because she was a homemaker – cooking was an investment of time, love and care.'

Jenny was not a single-minded professional activist; though she was dedicated to the struggle against apartheid, she made sure she enjoyed life. 'One of the reasons I loved being with her is that we could play together. We shared a political involvement but we listened to music, played bridge, and drank wine. I was very comfortable with her. She was good, intelligent, funny, entertaining, she was good company; very easy to be around; she was very loyal,' says Ensor.

Jenny returned to Johannesburg in 1974 and moved into a

flat in Clarewood Mansions in Webb Street, Yeoville, with the activist Janet Love. 'For a whole range of reasons Jenny was a very stimulating person to live with,' says Love.⁵ 'She bustled – whatever she did she bustled, she was a ball of very good energy.' In Johannesburg, Jenny helped set up the Industrial Aid Society, a kind of advice bureau for the emerging black trade union movement. She also worked for the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) as an archivist. 'She was a librarian by training and an archivist by instinct. Jeanette wanted to preserve things,' says Ensor.

According to Ensor, Jenny was not particularly interested in the deep theoretical issues around the nature of the South African revolution and was much more involved at a practical level. 'She was absolutely untiring in relationship to that – and deeply, deeply committed. She was a very good organiser. She had a good way of bringing people together and harnessing their energies and getting things done,' says Ensor.

John Kane-Berman, who was then working as a journalist and later became head of the SAIRR, visited Jenny in the IAS office in Bree Street. He had befriended Neville and Jenny at Wits. Jenny and Kane-Berman would go to movies, where she insisted on smoking in the cinema – even though it was not allowed.⁶

One evening Jack visited his daughter. As he left he noticed Craig Williamson making his way to the flat. 'I knew him well by appearance from meetings but had never seen him close up. He had even then a heavy lumbering gait and a perpetually forbidding look bordering on a scowl. How he sidled his way into acceptance by his fellow students as a genuine supporter of their philosophy of liberation still amazes me. It says much for the purity of their motives that at no time did they suspect there was a Judas in their midst.'⁷

Alan Fine, who was then volunteering for the IAS, going around the country canvassing support for the society, became friends with Jenny. 'A great part of her life was devoted to politics but also to building strong relationships with people. She was a highly regarded elder statesperson to my generation of student activists. She was sensible and politically mature – when there were nasty, unpleasant struggles in the Industrial Aid Society, she was the one who worked things out.' It wasn't all politics, though. They often had braais, got drunk and had a lot of fun.⁸

In the same year that Jenny moved to Johannesburg, her brother Neville decided to flee the country. Security Branch harassment was becoming too much for him. One of the terms of his banning order of 1973 was that he was not allowed to attend social gatherings. One evening the police raided Benteigh and dragged Neville off to jail for contravening his ban because he was playing bridge with members of his family. Neville stowed away on a boat and made for Australia. With Neville gone, the security police turned their attention to Jenny.

In September 1975, Jenny was one of the student leaders detained under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act in the wake of the Breyten Breytenbach saga. She was taken to the Pretoria headquarters of the Security Branch. John Kane-Berman and a number of other friends brought clothes and dried fruit for her. One day Kane-Berman received a phone call from someone who had gone to the police station to deliver goods to Jenny but was told, 'Oh, she won't be needing those.' Kane-Berman panicked, thinking Jenny might have died in detention. He then got hold of the Progressive Federal Party's MP Helen Suzman, who made enquires and who was assured that Jenny was alive.⁹

Jenny never received any of the things her friends and family sent. She was held in solitary confinement with nothing to read but the Bible. After she was in detention for six weeks, Jack and

Joyce were told that they could visit her for half an hour. ‘Jenny and a wardress sat in a cell visible through a double plateglass window ... We had been told that only subjects of a purely personal nature could be discussed, excluding anything relating to her treatment in prison. We then prayed, including for the liberation of all the oppressed in South Africa, at which a burly Security Branch officer interjected, presumably because he felt that to ask God to intervene on the side of the enemies of the government was to involve Him in seditious activities.’¹⁰

That visit was the only contact – other than Special Branch interrogators and prison warders – that Jenny had during the 65 days of her detention. When she was released, she went to live with Jack and Joyce in Bently. She often woke up in the middle of the night, shouting, ‘They are coming to get me,’ before her mother comforted her and assured her she was safe.¹¹

Jenny carried on working at the Institute of Race Relations, where she collected material on trade unions and prominent individuals in the labour movement. She also wrote short biographies of banned people, detainees and ex-political prisoners. This is how she met Marius Schoon. She went to interview him and they struck up a relationship. Marius had just been released from a 12-year prison sentence for sabotage – for trying to blow up the radio installations at the Hospital Hill Police Station in Johannesburg. He had been set up by an agent provocateur. Marius came from a ‘very South African background’. He grew up believing that it was possible to implement apartheid with justice. At university in Stellenbosch, he began his journey down the path of political activism, joined the ANC-aligned Congress of Democrats and then took up arms against apartheid. While he was in jail, his first wife committed suicide and both his parents died. He was not allowed to go to any of their funerals. He was banned after his release from prison and restricted to his home in

Johannesburg between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.¹²

In an interview in 1986 with the author Julie Frederikse, Marius explained that a comrade had told him that Jenny was the only leading figure in the white left who had worked through the question of the white left's relationship to the ANC. She had come to the realisation that the struggle could not progress without the ANC. 'Jenny was able to introduce me to very wide sections of the white left – people in the trade unions, people in the community organisations, students – and Jenny and I did a solid nine months' political work ... We saw a large number of people. We argued the case for the ANC – we argued the case for the ANC–SACP alliance. It was a very, very political nine months. Perhaps I flatter myself, but I feel that that nine months' work that Jenny and I did actually made a substantial difference to the white left.'¹³

Jenny moved out of her parents' home and into a house with a number of friends, where it wasn't easy for the Special Branch to monitor her and Marius's movements. In November 1976, Jenny was banned for five years. Despite this blow, Jenny and Marius's relationship flourished politically and romantically. Being banned meant that every time Marius and Jenny saw each other, they were breaking the law. They conducted some of their courtship in John Kane-Berman's flat. 'She used to ask me to leave and I never asked what was going on in there but I had a fair idea,' says Kane-Berman. They chose that flat specifically because it had access to a fire escape, by which they could escape in a hurry if necessary.

Although the Security Branch made it difficult for them to conduct their courtship, Jack and Joyce were not surprised when Jenny told them she and Marius wanted to get married. Of course, there was the small snag that because they were both banned, their wedding would be illegal. With the help of a friend of the Curtis family, the Rev. Theo Kotze, a plan was

made to dodge the Security Branch officers keeping a close watch over the pair and hold the wedding. According to Jack, Marius arrived in a well-pressed lounge suit, and Jenny wore a smart dress and brought her adored poodle, who, in the middle of the ceremony, managed to wrap his leash around her skirt. 'For the reception we had wine and biscuits and then went our separate ways, Jenny clutching to herself her marriage lines; Theo wondering what would happen when he sent in the information to the Registrar of Marriages that he had connived at defeating the objects of the Security Act.'

Rumours had been circulating that Marius was going to be arrested. As a result, on the night of their wedding the couple fled the country. This was 1 June 1977, not long after Craig Williamson had walked into exile with Eric Abraham. After packing her bags, Jenny drove her fire-red Beetle to Marius's house only to find that a raid by the Security Branch was in progress. She hid in the bushes. Her cover was almost blown when Marius's dog arrived to welcome her. When the Security Branch finally left, a friend drove Marius and Jenny close to South Africa's border with Botswana. They walked in darkness through hilly scrub-covered country before encountering a road on the other side of the border. They had a map, a compass, a torch and water bottles, and were guided only by the stars, stumbling in the night. Eventually, after many hours and with many cuts and bruises, they reached the main road and hitched a ride with a passing truck into Gaborone.

Here they applied for – and were given – refugee status, which entitled them to a monthly grant from the Botswana government. They secured jobs as English teachers in the town of Molepolole, outside Gaborone, and moved into a cottage, where they settled down to married life. After two years' teaching at the high school Marius and Jenny accepted jobs as

field officers with the International Voluntary Service, a British-government-funded Peace Corps-type organisation teaching skills to people in the developing world.

Jenny became pregnant and their daughter Katryn was born on 2 April 1978 in the David Livingstone Hospital. During the birth the lights failed, and Katryn was delivered by the light of a hurricane lantern.

In 1980, after being expelled from the ANC as part of the Marxist Workers' Tendency, Paula Ensor went to live in Botswana. 'That was difficult for Marius. Jeanette and I continued to see each other but it was not without its tensions with Marius,' says Ensor. 'Jeanette and I had such a close bond that my suspension from the ANC was something we managed. On a theoretical level we didn't always agree, but we always respected each other's opinions. The political tension between me and Marius was marked. Marius was a dyed-in-the-wool Communist Party and ANC supporter, but we still saw each other.'

Ensor babysat Katryn when Marius and Jenny went to meetings. 'Katryn was a gorgeous little thing. She loved bathing. Any sign of stress and I would put her in the bath and she'd be fine. She was a very sweet, beautiful child, with big beautiful golden locks. She had a very sweet temperament. When [their son] Fritz was born [on 6 February 1982] Marius came straight over to tell me that he had arrived. I remember how delighted they were when he was born. There was no electricity, and Marius had to use his cigarette lighter to help the midwife get him out. They named him Frederick and then immediately called him Fritz. I spent quite a bit of time with them when Fritz was small. Fritz was more highly strung than Katryn. I can remember him climbing out of his cot when he was tiny. I never worked out how he did it. It was hard for Marius and Jeanette in

Botswana. Exile was hard. They tried to live as normal a life as they could with a young family.'

Their Botswana house – just like the Curtis family's home Bentleigh and Jenny and Neville's Belvedere Road digs in Cape Town – was always open to comrades. No one would come into the house without being offered something to eat – not even Craig Williamson, who stayed with them when he visited Botswana on IUEF business.

Although Marius and Jenny had settled into family life, they were still active politically. From Botswana, Jenny attempted to strengthen trade unions in South Africa, doing research and writing policy documents for the ANC-aligned trade union federation SACTU. They also supported and encouraged the war resister movement and, above all, they remained committed members of the ANC, in this way showing other white activists that white comrades could work in the ANC.¹⁴

In April 1983, the Schoons were informed that the British government didn't want the couple to continue to work for the IVS. They agreed to resign and said they would finish their projects and wait for a successor to be recruited. In June, the British High Commissioner told them that there was 'good intelligence information' about a bid to assassinate them. He said the couple's involvement in the IVS programme was putting British volunteers at risk, and requested them to resign immediately. When Marius and Jenny showed scepticism, the High Commissioner took them to the head of Botswana's security police, who confirmed that he had also received intelligence that the Schoons were in danger. He told Marius and Jenny to take the threat seriously.¹⁵ The Schoons discussed the matter with the ANC. It was agreed they would leave Botswana. A few days later Marius and Jenny had a farewell supper for their friends and family. Paula Ensor was there. 'That's the last time I saw her,'

she says. Jack and Joyce also went to Botswana to say farewell and cried when they said goodbye. 'We were never again to see them all together,' wrote Jack.

The idyllic days in Botswana thus came to an end. Marius, Jenny, Katryn and Fritz now retreated deeper into Africa in an attempt to escape the reach of apartheid's agents.

Chapter 24

Bomb Blast in Lubango

After leaving Botswana, the Schoons spent six months in the ANC's offices in Lusaka, working for the ANC's departments of education and of arts and culture. When the ANC received an urgent request from the central committee of Angola's ruling MPLA for assistance with English teachers at the University of Lubango, Jenny and Marius were asked to go to Angola. They arrived in Lubango on 5 January 1984.

It was relatively easy for 2-year-old Fritz to adapt to life in Angola, but Katryn, who was 6, missed Botswana desperately. 'She missed her friends, she missed our friends, as did we, but I think Katryn missed them more than we did,' said Marius. 'The last six months of the little girl's life were not happy for her. She found Angola very, very difficult. I think she felt very lonely, very isolated, whereas she'd felt very close to various people in Botswana, and I think she missed them enormously.'¹

Marius, who taught English and linguistics at the university, and Jenny, who taught English, took turns to travel from Lubango to the Angolan capital of Luanda once a month to work with the chief representative of the ANC on development projects there. In June 1984 it was Marius's turn to fly to Luanda. On Friday afternoon of 28 June, the day before Marius was due to return home, the ANC's chief representative in Angola came to

the house in Luanda where he was staying to deliver a terrible message: there had been an explosion in the Lubango flat. Jenny and Katryn were dead.

‘I’m very bad at this – I get the shakes and I cry, so you must excuse me,’ Marius told author Julie Frederikse in 1986 as he recounted the trauma of Jenny’s and Katryn’s murder.

Marius returned to Lubango where he was reunited with Fritz, who was then two and a half. Fritz put his arms around Marius and said: ‘I thought you weren’t coming back as well.’ In the car Fritz sat on Marius’s lap and held on to his father. He whispered in his ear: ‘The enemy didn’t kill our Jenny, they just broke her into pieces.’ According to Marius, Fritz must have seen the horror in the flat – his mother decapitated with her arm wrenched off.

It emerged that Jenny had taken Katryn and Fritz to their play centre and had then gone on as usual to the university. At the end of the morning session she had collected two large envelopes, then fetched the children and returned to the flat to give them their lunch. At 1.05 p.m. the bomb went off.

Marius was taken to the building. The street was filled with glass and bits of brick from the explosion. He went upstairs to the flat, which looked as if it had been hit by an artillery shell. It was annihilated. There was a smear of blood three metres wide from floor to ceiling on one wall – that was all that was left of Katryn. Fritz had probably been just outside the flat when the bomb exploded.

The university arranged for the bodies to be taken to Luanda. Marius wanted Jenny and Katryn buried in Luanda with their ANC comrades around them. Memorial services were held in Angola, Botswana and South Africa. ‘We grieved for our loss of a child and a grandchild,’ wrote Jack Curtis, Jenny’s father. ‘We grieved even more for the loss to Marius and Fritzie of a wife and a mother. Truly our hearts bled for them.’²

Afterwards, Fritz barely talked. He would cling to Marius wherever he went. One day Marius suddenly heard Fritz screaming in terror. He rushed to him and found there was a monkey that had come in from the bush and was grabbing at Fritz's hair. The little boy was terrified.³ Monkeys became a symbol of the horror that Fritz had gone through. When Marius and Fritz travelled to England, Fritz hallucinated monkeys during a seven-hour car trip to Devon. 'The monkeys were there all the time. Every time we stopped the monkeys were getting into the car. The monkeys were on the bonnet of the car, and he was just in an absolute panic about the monkeys ... The monkeys were there – the monkeys were there every day, sometimes more so than other days, but they were there all the time.' Fritz was unable to talk about the explosion. He had suppressed the trauma completely.

The death of her best friend crushed Paula Ensor. 'I heard on the news that she and Katryn had been killed in a ... you know ... that parcel bomb. I was devastated and, in a way, not surprised. I had to write a letter to Marius to express condolences and I just found it so difficult to do. I must have written twenty drafts of that letter. I can't remember what I said.'

Ensor keeps mementos of her friend. 'I've got a Mason Pearson hairbrush that she bought for me. The bristles have fallen out but I keep it in memory of her. I also have bath salts she gave to me and which I've never used.'

Ensor brings out a folder of her correspondence. She flips through it. 'They are quite intimate – those dimensions of life that people aren't usually interviewed about. By intimate I mean girl stuff – the kinds of clothes we liked, the make-up we wore, the things we gossiped about, the kinds of comments we made about people, the guys she was attracted to, her heartaches. She felt like a sister to me. We could talk about absolutely anything.'

Ensor hands me a photograph of Katryn with a teddy bear. On the back of the photograph Jenny's written an inscription: "Isn't she beautiful?" says her besotted mother.'

'Jeanette and I thought we'd grow old together,' says Ensor. 'We never thought what happened would happen.'

When news broke back in South Africa, Craig Williamson apparently said something like 'Nice go, Jerry, it worked' to Roger Raven, the man he had instructed to make the bomb that was sent to Lubango.⁴ It was only at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's amnesty hearings that the full story of Williamson's involvement in the attack became known.

Chapter 25

Ruth First and Jenny Schoon Remembered

Not everyone whose life was sacrificed in the fight against apartheid became a well-known struggle hero. Ruth First is an icon of the struggle on a par with other anti-apartheid giants like Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela and her husband Joe Slovo. Her life has been featured in films, and books have been written about her. Residences at Rhodes University and the University of the Western Cape are named after her. There are Ruth First streets in Stilfontein near Potchefstroom and Louis Trichardt, Ruth First roads in Fisantekraal, Philippi and Mitchell's Plain in the Western Cape and in Soshanguve in Gauteng, and the Ruth First Freeway is the major artery running through the eThekweni Municipality (formerly Durban) in KwaZulu-Natal. There are fellowships, trusts and lectures named in her honour. There's a Ruth First mural in Soweto, and she was even a clue in a cryptic crossword puzzle in *The Guardian* on 27 April 1994 to mark South Africa's first democratic election: 6 Down: Bible Book, opening chapter. Compassion a priority. (4, 5).¹ There's also an environmental patrol vessel named the *Ruth First*. Albie Sachs, an anti-apartheid activist and friend of First, says she would have found that amusing. 'I can just hear her voice in

mock horror saying, “An environmental boat named after me?””²

In 2014, Ruth First was posthumously awarded the Order of Luthuli (Gold), which is conferred upon South Africans who have contributed to the struggle for democracy, human rights, nation-building, justice, peace and conflict resolution. According to Sachs, Ruth’s deep legacy is her brilliant mind and her non-racism. ‘In an awful way Ruth’s death helped to cement her contribution in life and affected a whole generation in a very powerful way in terms of the imagination of the people that the enemy was a system, a brutal system.’

Bridget O’Laughlin, who was in the room with First when the parcel bomb exploded, was taken to hospital, where she had to lie flat on her back and could not go to the funeral. From her hospital bed she penned ‘No cheap death’,³ a poem written for Joe Slovo in First’s memory as a message of anger and defiance. A week after the blast, the jazz musician Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand) performed in a concert in Maputo that became a tribute to First. In a voice quivering with anger, Ibrahim recited O’Laughlin’s poem at the start of the concert:

Hey baas. Hey, baas.
It’s time for you to learn a lesson
We thought it was plain.
In our war of liberation there’s no cheap death for you to gain
So wait. Just wait. You’ll pay. You’ll pay. You’ll pay
Until you’ve paid all. You will pay until your capital is gone.
Until your capital is gone
You sent us a bomb. We opened it. And we died
You heard us cry and swelled what little cocks with pride
But wait. Just wait. You will pay. You’ll pay. You will certainly
pay
Until you’ve paid all

You'll pay until your capital is gone
We are very hard to know, baas, because we are no race, or
colour – just a single face
So look over your shoulder, baas
Watch your flank, baas. In case.
Just wait
You'll pay. You'll pay. You will certainly pay
Until you've paid all
You'll pay until your capital is gone ...
Until your capital is gone
Until your capital is gone.

By contrast with Ruth, Jenny Schoon is not a household name, though she is not entirely forgotten. The University of Cape Town has named one of its computer laboratories after her, and she's remembered in a shrine to her in the foyer of Community House, a building in Cape Town's Salt River that houses progressive organisations. Jenny was also awarded the Order of Luthuli (Silver) in 2014.

The artist Sue Williamson included a portrait of Jenny in her series 'A Few South Africans', produced in the 1980s to showcase women 'whose contributions to African history deserve recognition [and] ... highlight the contributions to the struggle against apartheid of an often-overlooked group of people. The pieces in the series consist of photo-silkscreen portraits of each woman in front of a significant landscape and surrounded by specific references to the subject's life.'

Most of the women featured in the series – like Helen Joseph – look serious, but Jenny is smiling. She's a fresh-faced, beautiful young woman, full of energy. In the artwork she is surrounded by a collage of photos of her parents Jack and Joyce, her husband Marius, her brother Neville, her son Fritz and

workers at a meeting, because trade unionism was so integral to her life and was part of the reason she attracted Security Branch attention. Her daughter Katryn is on the side of the image, as if she's been blown out of it. The image is framed by a parcel bomb that has been unwrapped. According to Sue, Helen Joseph, who was Jenny's role model, contacted her after Jenny was murdered and suggested she include Jenny in the series.

Jenny also appears in the artist Michael Matthews's 'Blackenedout', a series of portraits of people eliminated in the 1980s in South Africa. Matthews wrote that 'unlike the faceless creature who posted the bomb, and those who sustain him, Jenny will be remembered as a fine human being, one who gave her life for the liberation struggle in her country'.

The poet Chris Mann, who knew Jenny at Wits University, wrote a poem entitled 'In memory of a friend killed in the struggle against apartheid'.⁴

In memory of Jeanette Schoon
killed in exile by a parcel-bomb
Your nervy laugh and small, neat hands, Jeanette,
the high, compassionate ideals which you,
like a swallow, tossed about in storm-clouds,
still flew towards, these lines commemorate –
a bunch of winter marigolds, bitter
but still affirmative, gathered to mark
the grave-side reverie of a student friend.

But language, its close-knit fabric of words,
which speaks with ease of precious, humdrum things,
your kitchen's bright kettle, those hands cradling
that last blue mug of tea, language is ripped,
the threads dangling, by such a smashing

blast, can only gesture, patchily, at a
room in shambles, the rafters smoking, freak-
mangled chairs, the hair-tufts, flesh
-bits, your infant's ...

Not grief, Jeanette, some sort of remembrance
is all you'd ask, a woman of privilege
who spoke her mind, who never would accept,
in gaol or out, how much we humans loathe
to be confronted with our cruelties.

This truth we both misjudged, when, as students,
our placards raised, we marched the Joburg streets,
your language then a tapestry of dreams
with numb horror, at human violence, torn through,
as mine, in memory of your high ideals,
your gentle hands and voice is now, Jeanette.

Chapter 26

Dashed Expectations and Revolutionary Warnings

Under the leadership of P.W. Botha, *die Groot Krokodil* [Big Crocodile], the National Party government embarked on a policy of cautious reform and severe repression in the early 1980s. As part of its attempt to reform apartheid, Botha introduced a new constitution, which allowed for the representation of coloureds and Indians but not black Africans in Parliament by way of separate houses – the so-called tricameral parliament. Rather than placating his opponents, the new constitution provoked the formation of the United Democratic Front, an alliance of civic organisations, and led to the outbreak of violent protest in the townships. By the mid-1980s the government was faced with a low-intensity civil war and in addition industrial unrest, forcing it to declare a partial state of emergency in July 1985.

At about the same time there were great expectations that President Botha was going to break the political deadlock at an NP congress a month later and announce a major shift away from apartheid, including the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela. But instead of crossing the Rubicon, Botha responded with *kragdadigheid* [forcefulness], rejecting bold reforms, and projecting himself as the ‘uncompromising

leader of a white minority determined to fight to the end for its survival'.¹ Consequently, the local and international business and financial community began to withdraw their support from the government. International banks refused to roll over the country's loans, the United States passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, and the country was faced with a mounting array of economic, military, trade and cultural boycotts. The regime was under siege from all sides, and it responded with force and subterfuge.

Craig Williamson, who worked in the foreign section of the security police from 1976 to 1985, played his part too. As head of intelligence, including foreign operations, he was in charge of running an extensive African and international spy network. Among his recruits were agents in Brussels and London, South African students studying abroad, a Dutch police officer, and several European journalists. The head of the Spanish anti-apartheid movement was also an apartheid agent, and the organisation was set up at Williamson's suggestion and funded by his section.²

Williamson also served on a subcommittee of the State Security Council, which came to play a prominent role in formulating and executing security policy in the 1980s, both internally and outside the country's borders. In 1985, for instance, Williamson attended a meeting at Special Forces headquarters with sections of the Security Branch, National and Military Intelligence, and Special Forces to plan Operation Plecksy, a cross-border raid into Botswana against ANC targets, which had been approved by P.W. Botha and Pik Botha, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. At 1.30 a.m. on 14 June 1985, the raid was launched from Nietverdiend, about an hour's drive from Gaborone. It was led by senior officers in the South African Defence Force's 5 Recce Regiment. Williamson was at

the Nietverdiend administrative command centre during the raid. The soldiers rolled into Gaborone, shooting up houses and offices. Of the 12 people they killed, eight were South Africans and only five were ANC members.

Operation Plecksy was the fifth South African attack on a neighbouring country since 1981 and was not a success in military or public relations terms. In fact, the public's reaction to the raid was so negative that Williamson, considered something of a propaganda expert, mounted an elaborate propaganda exercise to justify the operation.³

Williamson was used to manipulating the press. After Ruth First's death, he had planted the story that 'KGB colonel' Joe Slovo had killed his wife because she was 'ultra left', a story *The Star* newspaper published, prompting Slovo to sue the newspaper in London for defamation. Slovo's suit was successful and he was awarded damages, but the Johannesburg-based newspaper was not bound by UK law and suggested facetiously that Slovo return to South Africa to sue it.

After the Botswana raid, Williamson asked Eugene de Kock for weapons to show journalists what the SADF had captured in the raid. He planted stories about the raid's success in government-friendly newspapers like *The Citizen* and *Sunday Times*, which published an account under the triumphalist headline 'The Guns of Gaborone', a play on the 1962 Second World War movie, *The Guns of Navarone*.

Alan Fine, who after his acquittal on charges of treason went to work for the *Financial Mail*, decided to write about Operation Plecksy and set up an interview with Williamson at the security police's headquarters in Pretoria.⁴ On the day of the interview he made his way into the bowels of Compol, bumping into security policemen he'd had the misfortune of encountering while in detention. When he got to Williamson, he braced himself and

approached the interview as a professional journalist rather than a former accused in a trial in which the subject of the present interview had tried to have him locked away. 'The vibe was there, the dynamic was heavy, but I didn't refer to it and neither did he. I tried to ask tricky questions but he knew the line and in those days the white public thought there was nothing wrong with attacking installations and institutions of the ANC, particularly ones from which they may have been launching attacks. Williamson didn't have any trouble justifying the raid.'

In December 1985, six months after Operation Plecksy, Williamson left the security police, and ostensibly went into business. In January 1986, a month after his resignation, the glossy business magazine *Leadership* carried a piece penned by Williamson in which he set out his views on the state of South Africa. Accompanying the article was a portrait of Williamson taken by the renowned photographer David Goldblatt. Williamson, squat, stout, hunched, bearded and besuited, sits awkwardly on a chair in the garden with a white cat on his lap. In a case of life imitating art, the scene could come straight out of *From Russia with Love*.

Goldblatt, who had photographed Williamson and his handler Johann Coetzee shortly after Williamson was exposed, was commissioned by *Leadership* magazine to photograph Williamson's portrait once again. 'I was at his house and we had gone into the garden. As I was chatting to him, his cat strolled over and jumped on his lap,' recalls Goldblatt.⁵ Williamson stroked the cat as Goldblatt clicked away. 'He's an interesting guy, if a terrible man. There was nothing particularly notable about him – but you really sensed his evil – he was as slippery as the cat. One senses the emanations and your job is to hold them. He was shrewd. The cat on his lap just worked very well.'

In the *Leadership* article that accompanied the photo,

Williamson wrote that 'we live in a time of serious misconceptions'. He warned that 1986 was going to see increased political, economic and social conflict. It was the job of the security forces to protect the reformers in government from the onslaught of revolutionary violence so that they could pursue their plans to carry out acceptable changes in South Africa.

In the article Williamson talked about his friend, a white man in Camps Bay, who believed he was safe from 'the blacks' because he thought three strategically placed roadblocks could seal off his area from any unwanted elements. He said that what people (and, by 'people', he meant white people) did not realise was that it was difficult to draw back into a laager because 'the blacks are not outside – they're with us. We are all South Africans.' However, just before readers were moved to place an arm around a fellow South African and sing *Kumbaya*, Williamson continued about a second friend of his: a 'middle-class black living in a reasonably nice house in one of the better areas of a black township', who was angry with the whites because he was expected to get involved in official black community councils (set up as part of the government's reform process) without any protection, his car got searched at roadblocks during the state of emergency and he'd been called a 'kaffir' by some young soldier carrying a rifle; while his children hadn't been allowed to attend school for a year because of boycotts in the townships.⁶ Williamson argued that it was vital that 'we' give this kind of 'black' – moderate, middle-class, non-revolutionary – 'real power'.

The other blacks were the ones who were actually causing the violence – 'the disparate bunch with a vague sort of support for the ANC or organisations such as the UDF or [the Black Consciousness-aligned] AZAPO'. The only way to avoid a cataclysmic revolutionary situation, suggested Williamson, was for the security forces to destroy what needed to be destroyed

(revolutionary blacks) and protect what needed to be protected (whites and moderate, non-revolutionary blacks). 'We should not be alienating some of the very people we could entice into the laager,' he concluded. 'We want everyone in our laager, except the lunatics.' The lunatics were, of course, the ANC and its allies.

Chapter 27

Leaving the World of Espionage

In his *Leadership* article, Williamson preached that South Africa had found itself in a ‘time of serious misconceptions’. But in 1986, when he wrote these words, he himself remained the master of misconception. In the article he claimed that he had resigned from the security police and was operating privately as a security analyst. This was only half true. He had resigned from the police and had become a security analyst but he was not private. In fact he had joined the South African Defence Force, been given the rank lieutenant-colonel, and become involved in Military Intelligence’s anti-ANC operations.

Williamson formed a security consultancy company called Long Reach that specialised in intelligence gathering. It was a front company funded by Military Intelligence and security police slush funds.¹ Williamson realised that using false flags (a front like Long Reach) to convince people to give information was more useful and efficacious than coercing people into giving up information by threatening them. With Long Reach, informants thought they were supplying intelligence to an independent company, not to the apartheid government.

For his company Williamson recruited Mike Irwin, a former British Marine, and James Anthony White, a former member of the Selous Scouts, a special forces regiment of the Rhodesian

army. Irwin couldn't recall performing a single useful task during his two years with the company. 'But we had some laughs ... some good lunches ... quite a few trips to London ... one to Florida to talk to Cuban exiles. But we never got any useful intelligence. We entertained right-wing Americans, hung around bars with Rhodesians who all said they had been Selous Scouts, and we had to deal with acres of useless telex reports from the International Freedom Foundation.'² The International Freedom Foundation (IFF) was another security force front that was subcontracted to Long Reach. Its aim was to influence big business overseas in favour of the South African government and spread misinformation about the anti-apartheid movement. The IFF was supposedly a conservative think tank, but was actually part of an elaborate Military Intelligence operation, codenamed Operation Babushka, to campaign against sanctions.³

Through Giovanni Mario Ricci, an Italian millionaire and suspected organised crime boss operating from the Seychelles, Williamson secured the Seychelles government as a Long Reach client.⁴ Together Ricci and Williamson established GMR (named for Ricci's initials), with Williamson becoming the MD of GMR South Africa in 1987. According to an affidavit in support of a Protection of Access to Information Act application by the South African History Archive Trust, GMR's purpose was to bust international sanctions against South Africa by bringing capital from foreign businesses into South Africa and facilitating the movement of boycotted goods through the Seychelles.⁵

In his book *Selling Apartheid*, an account of the National Party government's propaganda war, Ron Nixon writes that through a GMR office in Switzerland, Williamson paid for the making of propaganda videos showing alleged atrocities committed by ANC members. The tapes were distributed through conservative

religious organisations in the United States. One of the videos was called *ANC: A Time for Candor*. In the video, supposedly ANC supporters are seen burning black people in the townships and a black policeman is shown being beaten to death, which the narrator attributes to ANC members. Williamson, who is not identified as a government agent, appears in the video discussing the ANC's violence.⁶

When the ANC president Oliver Tambo embarked on a world tour in 1987 to drum up support for the liberation movement, Williamson was part of an anti-ANC campaign that made sure that wherever Tambo spoke, a video would be released to the media with footage of 'necklacings', the gruesome method of burning to death of suspected collaborators by placing a tyre doused with petrol round the victim's neck. The footage was accompanied by Winnie Mandela's infamous quote that 'With our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country'.⁷

In the 1980s black informers and collaborators, black policemen and community councillors, had become the targets of necklacings and petrol bombs from militant activists and underground guerrillas. Williamson was also a target. In 1987, while Williamson was making anti-ANC propaganda, Gavin Evans, a member of MK, was approached by a Wits University lecturer who knew Evans had links to the ANC. She told Evans she was going to give him some information and didn't want to know what he would do with it. The information concerned details where Williamson lived. Evans passed it on to the ANC and then went to Zimbabwe to discuss the next step with his commander.⁸ His commander told Evans to get his MK unit together to reconnoitre Williamson's house. Evans hired a bakkie, changed the number plates, and took photographs of the house from every angle and mapped it. There were high aerals, which he thought were radio masts to send and receive

secret messages. The intelligence gathered was couriered to the ANC in Harare, and Evans was told he had provided valuable information. MK was going to have Williamson assassinated.

Evans had no compunction in being involved in plans to kill Williamson. 'He was a legitimate hard target, who had been involved in killing people, had betrayed so many people and was a thoroughly nasty piece of work,' says Evans. Evans waited for MK to carry out the hit. Three months went by, six months passed, then nine months. Nothing happened. Sometime after that, Evans read a story in *The Citizen* newspaper about a Mr Craig Williamson whose house and garden wall had been spraypainted with anti-spy messages. The article contained a plea from Mr Williamson: 'I'm Craig Williamson the businessman, not Craig Williamson the spy.' Evans looked at the photo of the graffitied wall and saw it was the house he had been told was Williamson's.

'I think the lecturer had despaired of me and had decided I was useless and had gotten one of her students to spray-paint the walls of the house with graffiti. It is very fortunate that MK was so absolutely incompetent. I could have lived with the death of the real Craig Williamson but wouldn't have liked to have the death of an innocent Craig Williamson on my conscience.'



In 1987, 21 years after he reported to do his national service in the police, Williamson left the murky world of espionage and embarked on a political career. Finally his childhood ambition was about to be realised. He stood as a National Party MP for Bryanston, a liberal stronghold in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, in the May 1987 general election.

The election, which was held during a state of emergency, saw the first serious challenge to the ruling National Party by the

right-wing Conservative Party, which was opposed to the NP's 'reform process'. Led by Dr Andries Treurnicht, it promised white South Africans to steady the ship of state by clamping down on black resistance and reaffirming white supremacy.

During the election campaign Williamson wrote a letter to Bryanston voters explaining that the election was important to the reform process and, more specifically, 'to determine the role of blacks in this process'. The question, though, was: which blacks? He said that because of his professional background in intelligence work and his knowledge of the ANC-SACP, many voters had asked him about his views on negotiating with the ANC. At the time, a great deal of media attention had been given to high-profile visits by delegations of white business leaders, students and academics, including Afrikaners, to the ANC in Lusaka, much to the displeasure of the P.W. Botha government, which – ironically – was itself engaged in secret negotiations at the time with Nelson Mandela in jail.⁹ Williamson spelt out his answer in an accompanying eight-page pamphlet.

He argued that the ANC lost its right to play a meaningful role in the political process on the day it resorted to violence. Besides, he added, negotiations included a process of give and take, and the ANC was only interesting in taking. 'The ANC is committed to a policy of violence because its members are revolutionaries, trained in the skills of Marxism–Leninism. Their Leninist doctrine demands violent revolution to destroy all vestiges of a capitalist democracy ... *Revolutionaries do not negotiate, they take power through force.*'¹⁰

In the Bryanston election, Williamson stood against the PFP stalwart Rupert Lorimer. Lorimer's son James, who is now the DA's shadow minister of mineral resources, worked on his father's campaign, which he describes as the dirtiest election he's ever contested. The Lorimers were bombarded

with anonymous phone calls at all hours of the night – with heavy breathing and people hurling abuse – their posters were damaged and, the day before the election, an officer came to arrest Rupert Lorimer for a late credit card payment. *The Citizen* ran the story, and on the morning of the election newspaper posters stating ‘Lorimer arrested for debt’ were plastered all over the suburb. James Lorimer says that the former MP for Bryanston Horace van Rensburg hadn’t been nominated by the PFP to stand but contested the election as an independent candidate. James suspects this may have been orchestrated by the National Party to draw votes away from the PFP to secure a Williamson win.¹¹ ‘The Nats were going on about the *rooi gevaar*, but I remember we put out a pamphlet that said communist parties were collapsing all over the world and thrived only in oppressive countries, which meant that if it weren’t for the Nats, South Africa wouldn’t have a communist party.’

The upshot of the election countrywide was that the NP won with 52 per cent of the vote and the Conservative Party unseated the PFP as the official opposition. However, the dirty tricks didn’t work in Bryanston and Rupert Lorimer was elected by about 800 votes. ‘It was a *kragdadige* [forceful] election,’ says James Lorimer, ‘but Bryanston was a solid PFP constituency and we fought a good campaign.’

Though Williamson was not returned to parliament as an elected member, he was appointed in 1987 as a member of the President’s Council, an advisory body set up as part of the tricameral parliamentary system. But his political ambitions were not over yet. In the 1989 election Williamson stood again for the National Party, this time in the right-wing heartland of Nigel, where B.J. Vorster had once been the sitting MP, and lost again. In two short years he was rejected by both white liberals and white conservatives. Overall, the National Party won that election,

which was the country's last racially based general election.

In January 1989, P.W. Botha suffered a mild stroke, thus clearing the path for F.W. de Klerk to be appointed as the head of the National Party and then the country's State President in September. On 2 February 1990, less than five months after taking office, De Klerk rose in parliament and, where P.W. Botha had failed five years before, took South Africa across the Rubicon, announcing the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and PAC, and the freeing of political prisoners, including the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela. John Matisonn, then a *Rand Daily Mail* journalist, was one of those in parliament who listened to De Klerk change the direction of South African politics. After the groundbreaking session Matisonn bumped into Williamson, who had also come to parliament. When Matisonn was a junior reporter at the *RDM* in the early 1970s, his beat was student politics and he was always on the hunt to unmask spies. 'Williamson knew I suspected that he was a spy and he kept his distance from me,' says Matisonn.¹² 'But after the De Klerk speech he agreed to talk to me. We went to my hotel room and I interviewed him. He told me that the hard men from both sides must accept that it's over. And then he said: "I don't want to have to worry that when I drive up to my gate there will be a man with an AK47 behind a tree waiting for me."'

Matisonn says that during the interview Williamson also claimed to have saved the life of ANC stalwart Barry Gilder. 'Barry was my news editor when I was editor of *Wits Student*. Williamson told me that when the SADF raided Botswana in 1985 he knew where Barry's house was in Botswana and told the SADF to avoid it. He said he had done it because of old times. I knew he was trying to ingratiate himself with me – and when you're dealing with spies you have to be intelligent about intelligence. It was classic disinformation – there's some truth

to the story but he was feeding in bits that suited him.’

The ‘some truth’ of the story was that Gilder, who was the ANC’s head of intelligence in Botswana at the time of the SADF attack, wasn’t killed in the raid. Gilder says he had moved a few weeks before the raid because he received intelligence that something was going to happen. ‘So we were on high alert.’¹³

In addition to his ANC work in Botswana, Gilder was working at the Solidarity News Service (SNS), which had emerged from the ashes of SANA. During the raid the SADF soldiers attacked the SNS office, shooting up the photocopy machine and confiscating the telex machine. ‘The reports we got the next day was that we had been sleeping in the office during the raid and we were all dead. It is quite possible that there were other reasons they decided not to hit me, but all the evidence put together – including the fact that they claimed I was dead – makes me think that having not killed me, Williamson is now claiming my continued existence to his credit.’

Despite taking some of Williamson’s more boastful claims with a pinch of salt, Matisonn says that after the interview he concluded that De Klerk’s speech on 2 February 1990 wasn’t a half-baked political exercise. ‘I knew this was the real thing because the tenor of Williamson’s conversation was, “It’s over, we know we cannot carry on.” He was a member of the President’s Council and was part of De Klerk’s inner circle and, as far as I understood, had De Klerk’s ear.’ Williamson remained a President’s Council member until he left politics altogether in 1992.

Chapter 28

Interrogating the Interrogator

One morning someone who heard I was working on ‘the Williamson project’ handed me a flash disk. ‘You didn’t get it from me,’ she said. I cranked up my computer, opened the file and discovered an audio recording of Williamson being interrogated by the ANC in 1995. I’ve heard accounts from people whom Williamson had interrogated; now he is on the other side of the interrogation – the interrogator being interrogated. I listened to his South African English boytjie drawl and imagine Williamson sitting at a table with his head in his hands while a skilful interrogator shoots questions at him.

The voice of the interrogator is familiar, and after a few minutes I recognise it as that of Robert McBride. In 1986 McBride was the MK bogeyman who represented everything white South Africa feared about the ANC. McBride was one of the ‘lunatics’ that Williamson wanted to keep out of ‘our laager’. Nine years later, though, the enemies Williamson and McBride face off, but this time the power dynamic has shifted. The boss is McBride; the man wriggling in the interrogation chair is Williamson. The wheel has turned; so has the worm.

In a recent interview McBride says that soon after the 1994 election he attended a Thebe Investment Corporation business gathering in Rosebank.¹

Thebe is an ANC-aligned black empowerment investment company. ‘Williamson was there,’ says McBride, ‘with some Angolans – doing deals. He was there every day and no one raised any objections – someone in the ANC decided it was OK to work with him. It was business as usual for him. At some point someone approached me to say Williamson had asked for an audience with me. I said, OK. Craig came over and tells me “they” are worried about how things are developing in South Africa and asks if I could set up a meeting with ANC people to discuss their concerns. They were nervous,’ says McBride. McBride asked Ronnie Kasrils for advice, and Kasrils told him to arrange a meeting with Williamson to see what the former agent had to say.

The meeting was held at McBride’s home in Parkhurst, Johannesburg, with Williamson and Kasrils to discuss the terms of engagement. ‘I got my family to go out. Then Ronnie came, he made sure he wasn’t tailed. Then Craig arrived – I wasn’t worried about him coming into my house. We had just come out of a war with the IFP [Inkatha Freedom Party], and I still had an AK47 under my bed.’

During the talks with Williamson, Kasrils wore a wry smile on his face. ‘The irony of the situation didn’t escape Ronnie. The two of them were feeling each other out. For me, you’re either going to talk to us or not. If not, go away. But if you’re going to talk, then talk. I had done my jail time, I didn’t need anything from Craig. I knew he was talking to us because he wanted to save his arse.’ The men finally agreed on four sessions, which took place at McBride’s office at the Gauteng legislature, where McBride was a member of the provincial parliament.

McBride wanted Williamson to reveal just how deeply the ANC had been infiltrated by South African government agents. ‘I thought it was important to get information from him about the extent of the penetration. Ronnie and I were scared we were

going to get played and that Craig would continue to cause division by bullshitting. That was a fear. Ronnie said to Craig, “We’re tired of bullshit being fed to us – so just tell us what you know.” What was unsaid was that if Craig co-operates and tells us what we need to know, there would be some sort of deal.’

Kasrils says that after 1990 Williamson had tried to touch the ANC ‘here and there’. ‘The people in ANC intelligence wouldn’t just say fuck off. The ANC at the time would have wondered what use he could be to us. We would have taken him into the intelligence service if he was a competent intelligence officer ... but he wasn’t. He was just a pompous guy. That’s all.’²²

According to McBride, as negotiations began for a political settlement in South Africa a rift opened up between the National Party politicians and the government’s former operatives, the people who had carried out apartheid’s dirty work. ‘The politicians and operatives seemed to be working against each other,’ he says. ‘The issues Craig raised with us were issues he was concerned could be a problem for him at some stage – remember, people were starting to talk; people like [the former death squad commander] Dirk Coetzee – and, like the Nazis, they kept files so the stories were all going to come out – and Craig was worried.’

As the recording of the session continues, it feels that McBride was not giving Williamson a difficult time. Williamson appeared to be spinning rings around McBride. After all, Williamson is the master manipulator, the trained liar, and, to my ear at least, he was in total control.

McBride’s contribution was to punctuate Williamson’s narrative with an ‘OK’ every now and again and a couple of *ja-ja*’s as Williamson recounted his story, from his entry into the police force to his resignation.

Williamson: 'My involvement with the SAPS began in 1968.'

McBride: 'OK.'

Williamson: 'I was called up to do my national service – instead of going into the SADF I went to the SAP. It was a nine-month call-up but you had to do camps for 10 or 15 years.'

McBride: 'Ja-ja.'

Williamson: 'However, if you went into the police you had a longer period of service but you didn't have any future involvement.'

McBride: 'OK.'

Williamson: 'My idea was to join the police, spend a couple of years at the police, go to university and do law – and with the background of the police it was a good thing. What happened was I just joined as a normal member.'

McBride: 'Ja-ja.'

It was as if McBride hadn't watched a single episode of *Law and Order*. After 41 minutes McBride made his longest sentence and asked his first question: 'Can I smoke?'

'No, please,' said Williamson in that uniquely South African way of answering 'yes' in the negative.

The information contained in the briefing has been used in various chapters throughout this book. What is interesting about the recording is how Williamson placed himself in the story. Sometimes he talked about 'we' when he was talking about NUSAS and the ANC, sometimes he talked about 'they' when he was referring to the Security Branch. For example, explaining how he saw NUSAS becoming increasingly radical and espousing openly Marxist rhetoric, Williamson told McBride that if NUSAS took a Marxist line, then the struggle was about class and white students had some relevance. 'If it was a race issue, then *we* were on the enemy's side,' he says.

When he talks about NUSAS as 'we', I can't help think that

this is not merely a slip of the tongue but a sign of his internal conflict in being a spy. As an infiltrator, most of his time was spent with the people he was spying on – he marched with them, socialised with them, planned with them and even got invited to their weddings – and that must have created conflicted elements in his identity, belief and loyalty.

By associating himself with the NUSAS ‘we’, Williamson was also distancing himself from ‘them’ – the apartheid machine, in which he was a central cog. This comes out clearly when McBride questioned him about Eugene de Kock, who headed the Special Branch’s C1 Unit, at a time when Williamson was in Section A.

McBride: ‘OK. I’ve heard that Eugene de Kock was in Namibia ...’

Williamson: ‘Koevoet ...’

McBride: ‘... and had bad experiences. He had something like 56 firefights ...’

Williamson: ‘More, I think over 100 ...’

McBride: ‘... and lost eight comrades ... Would you say that contributed ...’

Williamson: ‘Totally ...’

McBride: ‘Towards ...’

Williamson: ‘No, totally. De Kock was sent to Namibia, South West Africa, in ’68 as a constable and told, “*Daar’s moelikheid met hierdie boys, hierdie SWAPO maak kak* [There’s trouble with these boys, this SWAPO is causing shit].” And he’s got no training, nothing. And he arrives with a rifle and now he is in the Security Branch and must start investigating SWAPO. He only survived because he’s such a tough guy. They formed Koevoet. Insurgents have support mechanisms in the area they are operating. You’ve got to identify those support mechanisms and eliminate them whether it’s legal or not –

and that is what Koevoet was formed to do. And they would identify the SWAPO guys and put landmines in their driveway and when they left their house they got blown up. If you lasted six months in Vietnam you were regarded as something of a freak. If you lasted a year, or two or three tours, then you were something unbelievable. Most guys who just did one tour [of Vietnam] went back to the States suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, and this, that and the next thing, but *they* put someone like Eugene de Kock for 12 or 15 years fighting, not doing anything else – and then *they* expect him not to become a complete ... animal. He's just got a survival instinct. Survival to him means kill the other guy before he kills you – that's it. If you tell that guy that this chap or that organisation is threatening you, he has only got one way of handling it. And *they* knew that.'

McBride: 'Why don't the people own up and say this is what happened to the guy and they made a mistake by putting him too long on the tour?'

Williamson: 'Robert, no man. I've asked myself ... In 1985 I said that's it. I'm sick and tired of this business.'

Williamson told McBride that in 1985 he wrote an article for the *South African Journal of Criminology*, which was translated into Afrikaans because 'I wanted *them* to read it'. He says he explained in it the theory of revolutionary warfare and warned that 'if you continue the way you're doing, then the police – undermanned, underpaid, underequipped – will collapse and then they would have to bring the army in – and that was it. And I even said there that the rulers of the state must realise that once they use the armed forces of the state against the citizens, it implies the end of democratic government.'

He said his views caused the Minister of Law and Order, Louis le Grange – the man who in 1980, as Minister of Police, had hailed the returning super-spy, Williamson, as a national

hero – to have a heart attack. This claim Williamson repeated twice to McBride, though I guess he was speaking in hyperbole because no records confirm this.

Nevertheless, ‘they’ weren’t pleased with Williamson. ‘They nearly fired me,’ he told McBride. ‘Luckily, I had a letter of permission to publish it. I know that when they gave me permission, they didn’t read the article because it was too long and too complicated. They said, “*Ag, dis akademies* [Ag, that’s academic].” The basic idea was to beat the hell out of any internal dissent, and if they were outside [South Africa], you just beat them there as well. It became a problem ... The more you killed members of the ANC, the less easy it was going to be to have a political solution. I just felt that I wanted to get out. After *them* trying to kill Marius Schoon, and killing Katryn and Jenny instead. Ruth First – at least the thing wasn’t addressed to her; it was addressed to Joe Slovo. But Jenny and Katryn ... ahhh.’

One of the last things on the recording is Williamson saying, ‘Robert, I must ask: is it OK to park in the street after 4 p.m.?’ Williamson, a confessed killer, doesn’t want to get a parking ticket.

After one hour, 27 minutes and 41 seconds, the interrogation that spans 17 years of Williamson’s life – from 1968 to 1985 – ends.

As the recording stops, I’m struck by some similarities in Williamson’s and McBride’s very different lives. Both men have killed, with bombs. Williamson sent parcel bombs that killed Ruth First in 1982 and Jenny and Katryn Schoon in 1984. On 14 June 1986, McBride parked a blue Cortina packed with explosives outside the Why Not? and Magoo’s bars in Durban and set a timer. When the bomb exploded, three women died. The bars were considered a legitimate target because it was where military officers were said to hang out. Only, they weren’t there – at least not on the night of 14 June 1986.

Both men had the blood on their hands scrubbed clean by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They both received amnesty from the TRC. They have now been officially forgiven – maybe not by their victims’ families, but in the eyes of the law. In stranger parallels, both men were arrested after 1994 in other African countries and in bizarre circumstances. Williamson was arrested and held briefly in Angola in 1996 in connection with diamond deals and in 1998 McBride, then a high-ranking official in the Department of Foreign Affairs, was arrested and held in Mozambique, after apparently going undercover to investigate a gun-smuggling ring.

Since 1995 McBride has lurched from scandal to scandal. In addition to the Mozambique arrest, there was a drink driving conviction, which was overturned on appeal, an assault charge (which didn’t go anywhere), and a lengthy legal war with *The Citizen* newspaper, which ended up in the Constitutional Court after McBride sued for defamation when the newspaper claimed that McBride was unsuitable to be the Ekurhuleni Metro police chief because he was a ‘criminal’ and a ‘murderer’. The Constitutional Court found in favour of *The Citizen*, ruling it was protected comment, but it also found that the newspaper had defamed McBride by asserting he was not remorseful for the Magoo bombing. He was awarded R50,000 in damages. In March 2015 he was appointed head of the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID). A year later, the Police Minister, Nathi Nhleko, suspended him from his position – and so began another protracted legal battle. McBride won the latest round and in September 2016, after 18 months, the Constitutional Court ruled that his suspension had been unlawful, and he was reinstalled as IPID head.

Reflecting on the interrogation two decades ago, McBride disputes that he was soft on Williamson. ‘I was tough on him,’

he says, adding that the recording I have is of him softening Williamson up. 'It started off quite civil – general conversation in a roundabout way, easy and smooth. He had clearly thought of everything I was going to ask – until I asked him about specifics. In some of the interviews I was a bit harsh on him. They never expected to be in captivity, so they didn't train for it. The firmer I was, the harder I pushed, the more he co-operated. I was aware of the fact that the tables had turned and I was the one doing the interrogation, but I was focused on what I was doing. We were not as structured as we should have been and, in retrospect, I think I should have taken more interest in what he was saying. Once you start questions, it starts to get too complicated and then it becomes unmanageable. But I did my job.'

McBride says an important outcome of the sessions with Williamson was the emergence of details about Ruth First's murder. 'I established that he was involved directly in the killing of Ruth First, which was something the ANC had not known. He gave descriptions of how Ruth was killed. I passed on the recording of the interview to Ruth's daughter Gillian – and that is how she learned about it.' Williamson also told McBride about the bombing of the ANC office in London. 'One of the people involved in the bombing was Jimmy [James] Taylor, who interrogated me when I was captured.'

McBride says Williamson gave him two or three boxes of files that contained details of ANC members who had, in one way or another, passed on information to the Security Branch. 'There were no names, just descriptions of the people – a particular place, ethnic origin, the task the person performed and information given – but there were enough details to work out who the people were. I realised that this was a Pandora's box. The leadership didn't have an appetite for this. I worked out who some of these people were and they still haven't been exposed. Ronnie told me

to give the boxes of files to the Department of Intelligence.’

McBride says that after he handed over the boxes, he heard nothing more. ‘The leaders in the ANC had a lack of appetite to deal with this thing. I told myself that some people will forever get away with what they did – and maybe it’s not in the interests in the bigger scheme of South Africa’s project of nation-building that it comes out. Unfortunately, some of them are still doing shit. But I had done my part and withdrew,’ he says.

One day in the late 1990s McBride was walking through Killarney Mall in Johannesburg when he bumped into Williamson, who complained that McBride had put a knife in his back because the recording containing details about Ruth First’s murder had found its way to the TRC. ‘He tried to use emotional blackmail, saying he had co-operated and now the stuff was before the TRC. He was playing the victim. I said to him, “Well, what goes around comes around.” I wasn’t in a good space at the time. Fuck him.’

Chapter 29

‘It’s a Soldier’s Job to Kill’

After the ANC and SACP were unbanned and it became clear that F.W. de Klerk was serious about negotiating with liberation movements to end apartheid, political exiles began to return home. On 27 April 1990, less than three months after De Klerk’s speech, Joe Slovo arrived back in South Africa. ‘As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted 27 years ago,’ he told reporters gathered at Johannesburg’s Jan Smuts Airport. He returned with four other ANC heavyweights: treasurer-general Alfred Nzo, MK commander Joe Modise, international affairs chief Thabo Mbeki, and National Executive Committee member Ruth Mompati.

A year later, Marius Schoon also decided it was time to return to the country he had fled 15 years earlier with Jenny, his new bride. Marius, who was living in Ireland with Sherry McLean, his third wife, and 10-year-old Fritz, was offered a job as a development officer at the Development Bank of Southern Africa. He returned in June 1991, and McLean and Fritz joined him in December. For Fritz it was yet another disruption in his trauma-filled life.

After the bomb blast Marius and Fritz had settled in Ireland, living with Kader and Louise Asmal. They were refugees and the Irish gave them passports. Marius and Fritz were in terrible

shape when McLean met them at an anti-apartheid fundraiser. McLean says that one doesn't need to be a psychologist to realise the trauma of a child witnessing the killing of his mother and sister. 'I tried to heal some of those hurts – as a support. You can't take it away; just make the path as easy as possible.'¹ Marius became a very heavy drinker, smoked like a chimney and could be quite difficult, but he was conscious of and vigilant about Fritz's psychological welfare and didn't want Fritz to fall apart.

At night Marius would stay with Fritz until the boy fell asleep. 'If it took two hours he'd be beside him, talking to him about Jenny and Katryn and how much he loved him, and telling him stories. A child psychologist came over and told him that he was doing everything he could do. Marius showed Fritz photos of Jenny and Katryn and talked about them; he was dealing with his own anger and being mindful of Fritz's wellbeing. He was a remarkable man.'

When the Schoons returned, it was an eventful time in South African politics. The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) was launched in December 1991 as a forum for political groups to negotiate the transfer of power from the white minority to the black majority and draw up a new constitution. By the middle of 1993, after another round of formal negotiations, the parties agreed on an interim constitution and the date for an election. One of the sticking points of the negotiations was the issue of amnesty for people who had committed abuses on both sides of the apartheid divide. From 1990 the ANC's negotiators needed indemnity to return home and, in return, some form of amnesty was promised to members of the government's security forces, who would have been unlikely to co-operate with the negotiations if they believed they were going to be tried when an ANC-led government came to power. However, the ANC was unwilling to grant a blanket

amnesty. Though the ANC had insufficient power to ensure that perpetrators would be prosecuted, it had enough power to demand truth in exchange for amnesty.²

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was thus born out of a political compromise. Both the ANC and the National Party government agreed to an 'amnesty deal', which would avoid Nuremberg-type trials on the one hand and a blanket amnesty on the other. According to the deal, perpetrators of human rights violations would not be prosecuted if they disclosed the full extent of their crimes.

The first democratic election was set for 27 April 1994. Before the election, 3,500 security force members and National Party cabinet members applied to the government for blanket amnesty for 'all actions' rather than specifying the individual member's offence. Craig Williamson was approached by a police brigadier to join but rejected it, saying he thought it would do more harm than good.³ When the ANC learnt about this surreptitious amnesty bid, it made it clear that any amnesty granted by the NP government would not be honoured by a new government.⁴

As the negotiations proceeded, Williamson, like many other security force members, became increasingly bitter with the NP politicians, who he felt were abandoning apartheid's foot soldiers, especially when De Klerk insisted that the horrendous crimes committed by operatives had been done without the knowledge or sanction of the government. According to Williamson, both sides had committed crimes but, whereas the ANC stood by its members, the National Party did not.⁵

In a strongly worded letter to *The Star* in January 1995, Williamson warned his former apartheid bosses 'not to think we have forgotten who gave us the orders'. 'I hope that those politicians who are in such an incompetent, self-servicing, pension-protecting and cowardly way betraying the members

and political heads of the security forces which kept the NP in power for so long, do not think that we have forgotten who gave us the orders to do what was done during the conflicts of the past. Those who sat on the State Security Council, those who chaired the National Security Management System structures, those who signed the orders, those who often begged us to restore order in their ideological apartheid creations must now know that we remember them, though they seem too frightened to remember us. I suppose they also believe that it was the NP's political brilliance which kept them in power for 46 years and not security force action.

'In the absence of a general amnesty, the Truth Commission is the only alternative we have. We must trust the interim constitution, the president and the ANC when they say that amnesty will follow full disclosure and that reconciliation is their objective. I believe them. They have proven themselves to be honourable, which is more than I can say for the National Party, about which hangs a stench of betrayal, decay and fear.'⁶

In less than a decade the ANC had been transformed in Williamson's view from violent lunatic revolutionaries into honourable democrats. Perhaps he was trying to secure a job with the new security establishment or else to protect himself from prosecution. Whatever his motive, he caught the attention of his old bosses. Pik Botha, former Foreign Affairs Minister in the apartheid government and then Minerals and Energy Affairs Minister in Mandela's first cabinet, responded to Williamson's angry utterances by calling him a 'clown you have to be careful of'.

It seems that the clash with Pik Botha prompted Williamson to disclose some of the security force's dirty tricks to a journalist. Marius Schoon opened a newspaper one day in 1995 to read that Williamson had admitted his involvement in the bombing of the ANC's London offices and revealed that his Security Branch

section had been responsible for the parcel bombs that killed his wife and daughter in Angola and Ruth First in Mozambique. Finally, after more than ten years, Marius had the name of the killer responsible for blowing up his wife and daughter. It was someone whom he and Jenny had once welcomed into their home. Sherry McLean remembers Marius putting down the paper and saying Williamson would pay for what he had done. 'We were quite aware that Williamson knew where we lived and our safety wasn't guaranteed. Would he resurface? We had to fight the fear,' she says.⁷ Marius made an appointment to see Karien Norval, a lawyer at Cheadle Thompson & Haysom, to discuss his legal options.

Norval and Schoon went on to institute civil proceedings against Williamson for damages amounting to just over R2 million, primarily on behalf of Fritz as a result of loss of support, shock and therapy costs. 'We issued civil summons on 18 August 1995. We felt we should keep the threat going,' says Norval.⁸ From then on Marius was driven to see Williamson held accountable. 'It became a way of life for my father,' notes Fritz.

In the meantime, with the democratic election finalised and a new ANC-led government of national unity in place, South Africa had to confront its past. The responsibility fell on the new administration to pass legislation for amnesty. Parliament passed the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995. Then in December 1995, the TRC was set up with the aim of giving space for victims to tell their stories and receive reparation, and to allow perpetrators to apply for amnesty. Those granted amnesty would be protected from all criminal and civil prosecutions.

In December 1995, shortly before the Schoons' civil action against Williamson was set to be heard, Williamson asked the court to halt the legal process because he intended to apply for

amnesty. The proceedings were then placed on hold. However, on 11 May 1996 the AP news wire service issued a dispatch that among the people who had missed the 10 May 1996 amnesty deadline were ‘former president P.W. Botha; former defence minister Magnus Malan; National Party leader F.W. de Klerk; convicted kidnapper Winnie Mandela; and super-spy Craig Williamson’. The deadline to submit amnesty applications was then extended to 30 September 1996. When Williamson failed to meet the new deadline, his application to have the civil case that Marius Schoon had brought against him stayed was dismissed. However, the amnesty deadline was extended once again, with 10 May 1997 being declared the absolutely final cut-off date.

On 16 January 1997, Williamson eventually submitted his amnesty application for the murders of First and the Schoons, and for the bombing of the ANC’s headquarters in London. He went back to court to ask for a postponement in the civil case brought by Marius. Williamson arrived in court with bodyguards. While the court dealt with the application, Marius and Williamson sat at opposite ends of the public gallery – Marius next to his lawyer in the front, and Williamson pressed between two bodyguards at the back.⁹ The civil case against Williamson was once again placed on hold. But even though Marius had received a setback, his institution of civil proceedings against Williamson did have a positive effect, for without it Williamson might not have applied for amnesty.¹⁰

In an interview with the SABC after submitting his application, Williamson – described as the intellectual giant of the security police in the 1970s and 1980s – said he was going to the TRC because he was vulnerable to prosecution, and this was a way to deal with his legal problems. He insisted that he wasn’t going there to confess but to set the record straight.¹¹ This interview served as a dress rehearsal for what he would say

when he eventually took the chair at the commission. The gist was that he was an officer in the security forces, and his job was to carry out counter-revolutionary actions against the ANC and other organisations. 'I did my job. It's a soldier's job to kill. If the enemy is trying to kill you and the people you are protecting, your job is to kill him.' Williamson was adamant that the National Party politicians had known what was going on behind the scenes and needed to shoulder responsibility. 'When you carry out operations and are congratulated, decorated, honoured and given accolades of a successful officer in the struggle against communism, insurgency and counter-revolution, you believe the people honouring you know what you did to be honoured for. Part of healing will be for us to admit what we did to each other – that's not only what we did to the ANC but what the ANC did to other people.'

Marius Schoon, who was also interviewed in the same SABC segment, could not contain his bitterness: 'I want to see him through the sights of an AK.'

Chapter 30

Seeking Amnesty

When Williamson squeezed into a chair at his amnesty hearing late in 1998, he had already met two of the Truth Commission Act's requirements: his crimes had taken place within the period specified and he had filed his application before the deadline. He now needed to satisfy the three Amnesty Committee judges presiding over the hearing that he was telling the truth, that he had fully disclosed all relevant information and that his crimes were politically motivated. However, for the judges to be convinced that he had told the truth would require knowledge of what the truth was. The flaw in this model is that one doesn't know what one doesn't know. While the TRC established investigation units to gain the necessary knowledge and information, the units did not receive the resources they needed, and in many cases it was left up to the victims themselves to investigate and interrogate the perpetrators' version of events.

Ramula Patel, a lawyer employed by the TRC, was given the task of leading evidence in Williamson's application amnesty. She says the commission had been set up in haste and the refrain from her bosses was: We don't have much time, we have limited resources, we must do the best we can. 'And we did,' she says. Her role was to facilitate the process between the perpetrators and the victims. When she received an amnesty

application, she asked the investigation unit to find information about the incident. She would receive boxes and boxes of files from the investigators, which she then compiled into a bundle of documents that was sent to all the parties involved.¹

In an undated letter to the TRC's deputy chairperson, Alex Boraine, Gillian Slovo expressed her frustration with the TRC's investigation and said the Commission would be worthwhile for her and her sisters and for the memory of their mother, Ruth First, *only* if the details of the case were properly investigated. Slovo called on the TRC to question Williamson about when the bomb was sent, and from where; the command structure involved in the action (who gave the orders and which politicians were implicated); why First was targeted; and Williamson's effort to blame the bomb on their father, Joe Slovo. She complained that the TRC had been sluggish. 'We understand how busy you are, but a Commission which does not respond to the families of victims cannot do the job for which it was established. Apart from that by ignoring us, the Commission may well miss out on information which might help pin down exactly what happened.' Slovo wrote that she and her sisters, Robin and Shawn, were not prepared to remain silent in the face of inaction. If the TRC wasn't in a position to carry out this investigation, they would continue to do so.²

Prior to Williamson's amnesty hearing, the Slovo sisters and Marius Schoon joined forces and engaged the attorney Karien Norval. She then gathered the legal firepower of the formidable human rights advocate, George Bizos, with Advocate Danny Berger as Bizos's junior, to oppose the amnesty bid by Williamson and by Roger Raven, who had manufactured the bombs in both cases.

The amnesty hearing was set down for 8 September 1998.

So began three weeks of tense testimony and robust cross-

examination. Williamson says he felt like ‘an exhibit in a zoo’.³ His first task was to protect his mentor and handler, Johann ‘Coco’ Coetzee, who had become the country’s police commissioner in 1983. Coetzee applied for amnesty for the bombing of the ANC’s offices in London but denied any involvement in – or even knowledge of – the letter-bomb murders of First and the Schoons. He testified that he would not have given his approval for them.

According to Williamson’s testimony, the order for the parcel bombs had come from Brigadier Piet ‘Biko’ Goosen, head of Special Branch’s Section A. Goosen, who had presided over the interrogation of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko, died a few months before the TRC hearing – which was very convenient for both Williamson and Coetzee.

According to Williamson, the police intercepted a letter to First with the logo of an international organisation, possibly the United Nations. Goosen, his superior officer, asked him to arrange for an explosive device to be inserted into the letter without significantly changing its shape and weight. Williamson assigned the task to Roger Raven, a warrant officer in the police’s technical section.

Raven made the IED (improvised explosive device), using an electronic circuit with sheet explosives, which is a dry substance that looks like blotting paper but thicker. He chose this because it is odourless, stable and lighter than plastic explosives. He put the device into a hollowed-out bundle of papers and then inserted them into an A4-sized envelope. The device would go off when the recipient tried to remove the bundle.⁴

Raven returned with the envelope and said the bomb – containing 100 g of explosives – had been successfully fitted. Williamson claimed at his hearing that he could not recall if the letter bomb, which was sent to the Eduardo Mondlane

University in Maputo, was addressed to Joe Slovo or Ruth First or both.⁵ He said it didn't actually make a difference whom the letter was addressed to because, although it would have been better if Joe Slovo was killed, both he and First were important enemy targets.

Williamson testified that First's death was 'noted' at a security police meeting without any reference being made to police involvement. 'Brigadier Goosen looked directly at me and nodded slightly,' Williamson said, adding that he assumed Goosen was acknowledging that her death had been the result of the parcel bomb. As Williamson gave his evidence, Gillian Slovo cried.

Ramula Patel remembers little about her time at the TRC – it was years of working nonstop, very little sleep, travelling and horrific evidence – and she has only two memories of Williamson's amnesty hearing. The first is of 'a big burly chap who was not even remotely apologetic'. Her other memory is of sitting next to the Slovo sisters one day. 'They were very angry. The process was so brutal. I couldn't imagine being in their shoes, forced to listen to such hogwash. They left the hearing even more traumatised. The TRC could have done better by them,' says Patel.

When the hearing turned to the killing of Jenny and Katryn Schoon, Williamson said he was again asked by Goosen to have a bomb made to be sent to the Schoons in Lubango. The security police had intercepted a parcel for Marius, and the same procedure was followed. The letter bomb only detonated about six months after the security police sent it. Once more, Williamson was indifferent about whether the bomb had been sent to Marius or Jenny, justifying the attack because, in his view, the Schoons were an important link in the ANC's network in Angola. He said that any high-ranking member of the ANC

or SACP was a legitimate target ‘as far as we were concerned’. ‘The idea was the psychological destabilising of the organisation as well as the disruption of the practical, logistical infrastructure of the organisation.’

In an affidavit handed to the TRC, Roger Raven said he did not know who the parcel was intended for, and only after he heard of the death of Jeanette and Katryn and was congratulated by Williamson did he realise the Schoons were the targets. He said Williamson had told him the letter had been intended for Marius, but ‘it [the death of Katryn] served them right’ because, Williamson said, the Schoons had used their children as their bomb disposal unit. Raven claimed that Williamson had told him Marius and Jeanette would throw suspicious parcels in the backyard and let the children play with them until such time as they deemed it safe to open them. Marius was naturally outraged. Later, Williamson denied he had said ‘it serves them right’ when he heard that Katryn was killed in the blast, but admitted it was possible that other policemen could have said something to that effect at the time. ‘But you congratulated Raven after receiving news of the blast,’ George Bizos told him. ‘The device killed a child. Any person with a drop of humanity would have said “woe to us, we have killed a child”, or anybody with any human decency.’

Williamson testified that hearing about the death of Katryn was like being hit in the face with a bucket of cold water. He said he did not know the children were with their parents in Angola. ‘There is nothing in my life I regret more.’ Williamson was adamant that his actions were taken in support of the National Party government’s war with the ANC. He saw people involved in the ANC as the enemy and dehumanised, regarding them not as ‘individual humans’, but as targets. ‘I want to say I am sorry. What I did was wrong,’ Williamson declared – according to a

news report filed by the South African Press Agency, without showing any emotion.⁶

In the absence of any new evidence, the Schoons' and Slovos' lawyers tried to poke holes in Williamson's testimony to show that he wasn't telling the truth and should therefore be denied amnesty. Their advocate Danny Berger says they tried to do their own investigation but there wasn't much information they could gather, so they were left to cross-examine Williamson on his own version. Their objective was to show the three Amnesty Committee judges that Williamson's evidence was so absurd that it was palpably false.

They brought a number of witnesses to contradict Williamson. In the course of their submissions, Williamson would lean over and give his lawyer pointers during their testimony. Dirk Coetzee testified that sometime after the Angolan blast, Williamson 'smugly enquired whether I had [heard] about Jeanette Schoon ... and with our very intimate rapport with each other, [he] made me understand very well what is going on. Unless Craig overestimated me in such references to conversations between us, I was justified in taking this to mean that his Section A claimed credit for the murder.'

Danny Berger asked Coetzee if he had the impression that Williamson was proud of what he had done in relation to the killing of the Schoons.

'Yes,' answered Coetzee, 'as we all were after operations.'

Heinz Klug, who had worked with Jenny and Marius in Botswana, told the TRC hearing that Williamson's motive was one of retribution. He testified that the Schoons had been suspicious of Williamson and had instituted an investigation against him which led to his unmasking as a security police agent. Klug said Williamson didn't have a political motive, but had sent the bomb out of malice. 'This is news to me,' Williamson

responded, saying it was BOSS agent Arthur McGiven's defection to the UK that had led to his breaking his cover.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was meant as a forum for victims to share their stories and their pain and – although not a condition of amnesty – a space for the perpetrators to show remorse. Sherry McLean says that Marius and Fritz found Williamson's testimony unbearable. Fritz, who was 16, sat beside his father every single day. 'It was horrible,' recalls McLean. 'After the hearings we drove from Pretoria to Johannesburg and no one would say anything. We were all completely gutted. It was the enormity of it. By the final day Fritz was ashen.'

McLean watched Williamson during tea breaks. 'It was clear watching Williamson's facial expressions that he didn't think he had done anything wrong. He did not even give a hint of responsibility. It was just "up yours" every single step of the way.' McLean says she also watched Williamson, Eugene de Kock and other amnesty applicants share jokes and slap each other on the back. De Kock was at the hearing as a prisoner, two years into a 212-year jail sentence after having been convicted on 89 charges, including six counts of murder, conspiracy to murder, attempted murder, assault, kidnapping, illegal possession of firearms, and fraud. During his trial he had dropped a bombshell, implicating Williamson in the 1986 assassination of Swedish prime minister Olof Palme, saying Palme was killed because he strongly opposed the apartheid regime. Williamson denied the allegation. When Swedish investigators visited South Africa, they were unable to uncover any evidence to substantiate De Kock's claims. Thirty years after Palme's murder there is still much speculation and endless conspiracy theories about who was responsible.

It wasn't only with his former security police colleagues that Williamson reconnected at the TRC. Williamson told one of Mac

Maharaj's bodyguards that he wanted to speak to Maharaj, then the Minister of Transport, who was present at the hearing. 'My bodyguards advised me not to see him because they said he was very agitated,' recalls Maharaj. 'But I was satisfied that he couldn't be armed so I said OK. I met him in the courtyard. He attempted to have a conversation with me and said, "Let's make the bygones be bygones." I said to him, "You haven't told the truth. When you really tell the truth we can talk." And I walked away.'⁷

At a tea break after listening to Williamson give evidence, Alan Fine, a friend of Jeanette Curtis's and a former trialist whom Williamson had testified against, went to the toilet and found himself standing at the urinal side by side with Williamson. 'I had no desire to talk to him. I looked at him and I glared at him with what I hoped was bravado, anger and hatred because that was what I was feeling. I also hoped my look said, "We won and you lost." He returned my look with a smirk as if to say, "I'm going to get away with this and there's nothing you can do about it." We didn't say a word to each other.'

Sherry McLean says Williamson also sent his lawyer to Marius with a message: would Marius have a beer with Williamson? 'Was that his idea of reconciliation? A beer? After all the horror he caused, killing Marius's wife and 6-year-old daughter? A beer? Marius told the lawyer to fuck off.' According to McLean, Marius's bravado – 'put him in front of me and I'll kill the bastard' – was just that, bravado. She says that Marius felt a deeper level of sadness: bereavement, huge loss and the injustice of people's lives being taken away senselessly.⁸

On the last day of the hearing, a 'haggard and haunted'⁹ Marius took the stand and testified that Katryn, his remarkable daughter, had been overlooked in the news coverage of the amnesty hearing. He wanted the world to know that Katryn would have been in her early twenties at the present time and

an active participant in South Africa's democracy. Marius dismissed Williamson's apology as nothing more than crocodile tears. For the TRC commissioner Hugh Lewin, a former prisoner with Marius and a former 'friend' of Williamson's, his abiding image of Marius was of a man who refused to back down from his demand that justice be done 'in the case of the murdering policeman'.¹⁰

Williamson did not come to the TRC to ask for forgiveness but to rationalise what he did, relying on his patriotic narrative that he was protecting his country from the communists. But he wasn't a mere theoretician. He seemed to be proud of getting his hands dirty. In an interview conducted with him during the course of the hearing, he was quoted as saying: 'I respect a person who's willing to die for his country, but I admire a person who is prepared to kill for his country.'¹¹ He befriended activists – and then betrayed them. Subsequently, as the political situation in South Africa changed and former enemies came to the negotiating table to settle and reach an accord, Williamson and others like him became an embarrassment to their former bosses. In a sense, he was thrown in the dustbin by his superiors.

In his submission to the TRC, former president F.W. de Klerk claimed that the National Party government had never authorised human rights violations and said any criminal actions that had been committed were either bona fide misinterpretations of lawful instructions or bona fide actions of people who were overzealous or they were simply mala fide (in bad faith). He insisted that the perpetrators were bad apples.

Williamson's own boss, Johann Coetzee, also distanced himself from these 'bad apples'. At the amnesty hearings he testified that he had no knowledge of unlawful operations being carried out within the country and denied ever having issued an illegal instruction. 'I did not ... I did not give any policeman

any unlawful instruction to assault a person, or to kill a person. If a policeman stepped outside that, then he must explain his actions. I haven't given any policeman – not a single policeman – any order to commit an illegal act. Whether he constructed what I said in a wrong way or whether he constructed what I said in another way other than what I meant, I cannot comment on it. He's the man and his mind must be probed, not mine.'

One of the criticisms levelled against the TRC was that its framework was too limited: it had a very narrow lens. By focusing on individual violations, it didn't get very far up the chain of command. The one cabinet minister it touched was Adriaan Vlok, the former Minister of Law and Order, who gave the instruction in 1986 to bomb Khotso House in Johannesburg where the trade union federation COSATU had its headquarters. 'That was the whole part of the compromise – we won't go down each other's rabbit holes,' says Piers Pigou, a former investigator with the TRC. 'There was a sense that if the ANC went for the security cops, there would be a counter-attack. It was a chess match that ended in a stalemate. People like Eugene de Kock and Craig Williamson may have been senior foot soldiers, but they were foot soldiers nonetheless and have become the symbolic trophies who are wheeled out as the perpetrators who did terrible things. But that was just papering over the cracks; it enabled a conspiracy of silence.'¹²



On 29 September 1998, the 21-day hearing into Williamson's application for amnesty came to an end. Bizos, Berger and Norval felt they had argued convincingly that there were more than enough grounds to deny Williamson amnesty. The former spy returned to Johannesburg to wait to find out if his application

was successful. In the meantime, he continued to insist he was 'just following orders', and it was the politicians who had issued the orders that needed to be held accountable. 'There hasn't been a lot of open-hearted honesty from high political levels,' he said in a British documentary *The Ones That Got Away*, which was aired two months after the hearing. 'Cowards,' he spat. 'Lack of moral fibre. LMF. Total. Unbelievable. It's a joke. They have been the three monkeys – they didn't see anything, they didn't hear anything and they didn't say anything. That wasn't my experience. That wasn't anyone else in the system's experience. This to me is the really sad thing.'¹³

Nevertheless, the documentary portrayed Williamson as seeking a fresh start. There was a shot of him in a green golf shirt and khaki chinos, walking through the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market. 'He's perhaps one of the most despised men in South Africa today – an apartheid spy, a killer who wrought his havoc on opponents of the government. He's a man whose bloody past sits uncomfortably in the new South Africa,' says the journalist as the camera zooms in on Williamson asking a fruit and veg seller about the day's price of potatoes and chillies. The journalist continues: 'Today he's a successful businessman selling produce to markets in Angola, but in 1982 his business was death.'

Williamson, described in the doccic as a man of wealth and privilege who enjoyed the best that South Africa has to offer, was then interviewed next to rhino and elephants on a game reserve on which he planned to build a holiday retreat. When asked if he felt he had been forgiven, Williamson replied, 'No, but I don't think that's what it's about ... There was this airy-fairy belief that if we just sprinkle some Mandela stardust over everything, everyone will love each other; and everything will be super. I think we have to be a lot more realistic. I think we have to accept that there will be people in this society who will hate

what I did. I accept that if they want to hate me as an individual they are free to hate me. But what's important is that they don't point a gun at me and shoot at me ... because if they point a gun at me, I'm going to point a gun back.'

While Williamson was creating a fresh start, Marius Schoon, who had been diagnosed with lung cancer, was preparing for his death. When Marius received the diagnosis, he turned to Sherry McLean and said, 'This is it, isn't it?' She nodded. 'Right, OK, now we know what to do.'

'We talked every night and there was no unfinished business between us,' says McLean. 'He was very weak. It wasn't an easy death. He had a tumour on his lungs and that prevented him from breathing. There were several false alarms where Marius would say, "I think it's tonight. I'm going tonight." We'd rush to the hospital only to find he was having a huge panic attack because he couldn't breathe. He faced his death with the same courage he lived his life.'

The 61-year-old Marius died on 7 February 1999 after President Nelson Mandela phoned him and hailed him for his contribution to the struggle. It was the day after Fritz's 17th birthday.¹⁴ 'There's no good time to lose your father, but this was a bad time for Fritz to lose his dad,' says McLean. 'There was a lot of unfinished business and, like many adolescent sons and their dads, it was a sparky time for them.'

On 15 October 1999, Williamson and his co-conspirators received amnesty for the bombing of the ANC's London office. Then on 13 June 2000 Williamson and Raven were granted amnesty for the murders of Ruth First and Jeanette and Katryn Schoon. The Amnesty Committee found that the killings were committed in the course of the conflicts of the past and that Williamson and his accomplice had acted in the course and scope of their authority. The ruling stated that the Schoons and First

were at the time of their deaths still involved in the struggle, and hadn't bade farewell to politics. Katryn, the committee ruled, was not an intended target but was killed in the crossfire.

The committee didn't accept the victims' argument that Williamson had acted out of personal malice. The judges ruled that there was no evidence that he chose the victims and concluded that he had a political motive, which was to destabilise the liberation movement. Williamson testified that he had acted under orders of Brigadier Piet Goosen, and the committee said there had been no evidence to contradict this. It found that the deaths were severe blows to the ANC and SACP and shocked many people, which is what Williamson wanted to achieve: therefore the acts were not disproportionate to their objectives. The Amnesty Committee was also satisfied that all relevant facts had been disclosed and that the contradictions in Williamson's evidence were to be expected after the lapse of more than fifteen years.

Says Sherry McLean, 'Marius never lived to hear that Williamson had been granted amnesty. Thank God.'

Chapter 31

The Victims' Quest for Justice

The legal right given to perpetrators of human rights abuses to apply for amnesty was, in the words of one of the commissioners, Hugh Lewin, the cruellest provision of the TRC legislation, and the granting of indemnity one of the TRC's most painful compromises. 'Was that justice?' he asked.¹ In the case of Craig Williamson, many people did not think so. Karien Norval, attorney for the Schoon and the Slovo families, was not happy with the decision to grant Williamson amnesty. She felt her team had shown that he was not truthful and hadn't disclosed fully. Besides, she believes the main issue was whether Ruth First and the Schoons were 'legitimate targets'. 'It sounds so dehumanised when you put it that way, but the perpetrator had to show that there was a real connection between the armed struggle and the victim,' says Norval.²

Advocate Danny Berger explains that one of their lines of attack at Williamson's amnesty hearing was on this very issue of proportionality. At the time of the bomb, Jeanette and Marius Schoon were involved in underground structures, but not in the armed struggle. Ruth First was a member of the ANC but she was an academic, not a foot soldier. Neither she nor Jenny Schoon was a legitimate target, and therefore the crime of killing them was disproportionate to the political objective. As for

Katryn Schoon, ‘Not even someone with his level of immorality would seek to justify the killing of Katryn. For [Williamson], it was collateral damage. But he must have known – even if he didn’t admit it – that the children were living there – and if this was a carefully thought-through military operation, you do your reconnaissance and you get intelligence about your targets.’³

Advocate George Bizos believes the murder of a mother and child could never be justified, and thinks there were sufficient grounds to refuse Williamson amnesty. Bizos believes one of the amnesty hearing’s three judges, Advocate Chris de Jager, who had been a member of the Conservative Party and a staunch supporter of the apartheid regime, probably persuaded the other two judges to grant amnesty.

Ramula Patel, the TRC’s evidence leader, wasn’t surprised with the decision on Williamson’s application. She believes the TRC bent over backwards to grant perpetrators amnesty. ‘From my experience, as long as the applicants were able to prove a political motive, the issue of proportionality made no difference. That was across the board – from the ANC to the Pan Africanist Congress to the Security Branch. If the principle of proportionality had been applied, the bulk of the applicants wouldn’t have got amnesty, which would have defeated the aim of the TRC process.’⁴

In the event there were less than 2,000 amnesty applications made to the Truth Commission, of which 1,167 were successful. One of them was Williamson, who got amnesty and walked away. As Norval puts it: ‘It is part of the deal of our history and, as hard as it is for people to live with, it is what it is.’

Alan Fine, who was then an associate editor at *Business Day*, was furious when he heard that Williamson’s amnesty application had succeeded. In a stinging editorial leader he called the TRC’s decision poorly justified, arguing that the

committee was forced to give Williamson amnesty because it had already given amnesty to PAC members responsible for the St James Church massacre in Cape Town on 25 July 1993 and to a group of young men who killed the American student Amy Biehl in Gugulethu, outside Cape Town, on 25 August 1993. 'As for Williamson,' he wrote, 'it would be nice to think he will live out the rest of his days haunted by his conscience. That is unlikely. It does not happen to psychopathic personalities. He may, however, live in fear that someone, some day, will seek their own kind of justice, though that cannot be encouraged or condoned, of course.'

Fine's leader took many of his colleagues by surprise for its emotional intensity, which went beyond the border of *Business Day's* style, but it was the most discomforting thing Fine could think to say to Williamson and, he says, it gave him personal satisfaction.⁵

After the amnesty decision was reached, the Slovo daughters and Fritz Schoon, who had taken the baton to hold Williamson accountable from his father, decided to launch a judicial review to challenge the amnesty decision. They submitted an application in the Cape High Court in November 2000, arguing that Williamson shouldn't have been granted amnesty in the first place because he had not disclosed the full truth, his testimony was full of inconsistencies, and he had acted out of personal malice.

According to Fritz, two things happened that made them later abandon the review. Firstly, they realised that overturning Williamson's amnesty decision could set a precedent and open the floodgates for challenges to other amnesty decisions. Secondly, in 2002 Williamson offered an out-of-court settlement on condition that the review was withdrawn. Fritz and the Slovo daughters agreed – they were tired and despondent and didn't

have the appetite for reliving the pain of another hearing into the murder of their loved ones. On 17 September 2004, after two years of protracted negotiations between lawyers from both sides, a confidential deal was finally struck.⁶

The clause that was meant to be kept secret was that Williamson would pay Fritz R325,000 in monthly instalments of R50,000, and make a contribution towards his legal costs. There was an escalation clause to the effect that the full amount would become payable immediately if he missed a payment. The settlement agreement was made an order of court on 30 August 2005.

‘It was never about the money,’ says Fritz. ‘It was about punishing him. The judicial system has two ways of holding people liable for their actions – prison or fines. The former was unlikely to happen, so we agreed on a financial settlement.’ For Fritz it felt like receiving a financial reward for his mother and sister’s death, but he wanted to set up a scholarship fund for other people. ‘If I used the money for myself, he would think he was being generous. He would be able to buy his peace. I don’t want him to rest in peace.’

During the TRC hearing, Williamson’s lawyer had sent a message to Marius saying that Williamson wanted to pay for Fritz’s university fees. This enraged Sherry McLean, Marius’s wife. ‘It was as if he wanted to be seen as Fritz’s benefactor; like he was some sort of kind uncle. It’s so twisted: you kill someone’s mother and sister and then you want to be seen as the good guy. Of course, he didn’t pay a penny to Fritz,’ says McLean.

Williamson paid the R100,000 legal costs in October 2005. It was his first and last payment. He didn’t make a single payment to Fritz thereafter. Fritz’s lawyer, Karien Norval, was baffled. Why would Williamson go through the effort to settle and then not settle? ‘He is a highly intelligent individual – there’s no

doubt about that – but he obviously has no morals,' she says. 'The settlement got rid of the amnesty review, and whether he had any intention to pay I don't know.'

Norval launched an application in the Johannesburg High Court, which ordered Williamson to pay the R325,000 with interest. Williamson ignored the order. In August 2006 Norval issued a writ of execution, and the court instructed the sheriff to attach Williamson's property to the amount of his indebtedness. It took the sheriff five months to find Williamson, who was not living in the Johannesburg home he'd listed as his address on his legal documents and who hadn't told his lawyers where he had moved. Norval hired private investigators, who found his new address in Beaulieu, where Johannesburg's wealthy citizens live. It is said the suburb has the highest ratio of horses to residents in the world.⁷ In January 2007, the sheriff went to Williamson's house to attach his assets, but returned with only a document pleading Williamson's poverty. 'Williamson declared that he had no money, moveable or disposable property wherewith to satisfy the said warrant – and, after a diligent search and inquiry, no property could be found at the given property. Williamson was requested to declare whether he owns any moveable property which is executable, to which the following reply was furnished: No.' In other words, there was nothing. Not even the Discovery Land Rover with the personalised number plate bearing his initials CMW 001 GP belonged to him. Everything was in his wife's name, and they were married out of community of property.

Williamson filled in a 'statement of debtor's affairs', listing his assets as:

- ¾-ton trailer valued at R3,000
- Smith & Wesson .38 special revolver (and ammunition) valued at R1,500

- a North American Arms .22 Magnum revolver (and ammunition) valued at R450
- a wedding ring valued at R200.

His total worldly assets thus amounted to R5,150. Williamson also listed four creditors, including Fritz, whom he owed a total of R1,151,000. He declared that he received R1,000 a month from his wife as income and that his expenses were R500 for relaxing, R200 pocket money for his daughter and R120 for entries for horse shows for her, which left him with a balance of R180.

In a statement outlining the reasons why he had become insolvent, Williamson wrote: 'In 1992 I resigned from the President's Council and began a full-time career as a trader in Africa. All went well until [I was] publicly connected to the Schoon case and the TRC process and various allegations about my role in the SA security forces from 1968 to 1986 emerged. After I was arrested in Angola in 1996, and the legal costs I had to pay during the TRC process [made me] unable to continue trading in Africa. I then turned to the Middle East and did one deal to Iraq via Jordan. I then became involved in the oil-for-food tenders for Iraq. If those deals had been concluded I would have had no trouble paying the R325,000 to the Schoons. However, the Russian company involved refused to work with me because of my background and my business collapsed. From 2005 I have only earned small amounts of money – not enough to pay Mr Schoon. My insolvency is as a result of his action against me and means that I am even less able to pay what I owe.'

Williamson might not have had any money, but he was apparently living in luxury. Norval conducted company searches and found that Williamson was a director of Equistock Properties, the sole members of FFC Marketing – repairer of motorcycles and motor vehicles – and Kial Investment Holdings, and a director of Zameera Trading.

Norval decided to launch an application to sequestrate Williamson, trying to make life as difficult as she could for him, hoping he would honour the out-of-court settlement to avoid being sequestered. But it seemed being sequestered didn't bother him, either because he really didn't have any money or because he didn't trade under his name, so it didn't matter. In an affidavit to the court, Fritz Schoon pointed out that Williamson had been an undercover agent and was therefore capable of concealing assets and suggested that an independent investigation into Williamson's financial affairs 'may well prove to be rewarding to me'.

A provisional sequestration order was eventually served on Williamson. He put in a notice to say he was going to oppose it but didn't file an affidavit. The sequestration order was granted on 27 May 2008. As a result the one victory for Norval was that Williamson cannot hold directorship positions in South Africa. But that was all. Williamson had managed to wriggle out of the settlement. Having secured amnesty, he had outmanoeuvred the legal system to avoid paying an insignificant out-of-court settlement sum to the child of one of his victim's.

Chapter 32

Encountering Williamson

After receiving amnesty from the TRC, Craig Williamson disappeared from the public eye and became media-shy. He developed an interest in the tobacco industry and there were persistent rumours that he was involved in the illegal diamond trade in Angola. When the spying couple came back to South Africa in 1980, Williamson's wife Ingrid specialised as a psychiatrist and built up a thriving practice in Johannesburg. Their daughters went to a well-resourced private school and became competitive horse showjumpers, while their son followed in his father's footsteps and attended St John's College, where a schoolmate remembers Williamson Junior getting drunk in Grade 11 and going on about how his father had fought the communists.

Williamson himself became the stuff of urban legend in Johannesburg. I'd heard from two people that Bernie Fanaroff, a former labour activist and later the South Africa director of the Square Kilometre Array, had ordered Williamson out of his house one day. The story went that Fanaroff's wife knew Ingrid professionally and invited her and her husband for dinner. When the couple arrived, Fanaroff opened the door, took one look at Williamson and then closed the door, forcing Williamson to retreat with his tail between his legs. It's a great story, but Fanaroff says that although his wife knows Ingrid,

Williamson has never been to their house, and neither of them has met Williamson himself.¹ It's apocryphal, just like the story of Williamson being Charles Nupen's best man at his wedding.

'Fink Haysom – not Williamson – was the best man at my wedding,' insists Nupen. It turns out that the 'best man' rumour originated at Williamson's amnesty bid before the Truth Commission.² 'When George Bizos was cross-examining Williamson at the TRC, he put it to him that "as a master of deceit, you even accepted an invitation from Charles Nupen to be his best man". And although it wasn't true, Williamson agreed.'

Another version of the dinner story circulated, but the protagonists in this version were not Fanaroff and his wife, but the artist William Kentridge and his wife, Anne Stanwix, a rheumatologist, who had worked with Ingrid. In the story Kentridge did to Williamson what his father – the celebrated advocate Sydney Kentridge, QC – had done to Williamson when cross-examining him in the Aurret van Heerden trial a decade earlier. In some versions it was Kentridge who slammed the door on Williamson and in others it was Stanwix who sent the Williamsons packing.

'Yes,' says Anne Stanwix, 'Ingrid Williamson did take a position in the rheumatology services (Department of Medicine), working a 5/8th post from about 1991 to 1996. So I got to know her in the context of the clinic services we ran at Johannesburg General and Hillbrow hospitals.'³ Stanwix says Ingrid was a fine person and a very good doctor, whose level of responsibility towards the patients in her care was flawless. She had no idea that Ingrid was married to Williamson. 'I remember saying to William that she was a new doctor in the service and was very sociable and I didn't know anything about her partner/husband. I had overheard her mentioning to someone that he was a businessman.'

On one occasion Stanwix was hosting a dinner. At the last minute some guests cancelled, so she decided to invite Ingrid and her husband. ‘But,’ says Stanwix, ‘to pre-empt the denouement, I couldn’t reach her on the phone – no mobiles in those days. So the supper went on without any drama (and without them).’

A little later Stanwix was at a cocktail party and saw Ingrid at a distance. As she approached, someone came up to Ingrid and asked, ‘How’s Craig?’ ‘I hung back and had that rude shock awakening. Like a panic attack. Shaking.’

Stanwix’s realisation that Ingrid was married to Craig Williamson led to some ‘what if’ speculation. What if Ingrid had answered her call inviting them for supper? What if she had accepted? What if Williamson turned up for dinner? It’s likely that the ‘what ifs’ snowballed and led to the broken-telephone story that cemented the myth.

Stanwix says she did try to discuss Ingrid’s past with her once outside medical hours. ‘I wanted to give her the benefit of believing that she had also not been “in the know” for a long period about Craig, but she said that she had known all along about his spying activities and had shared his convictions. I think that may explain her loyalty to him when he was ostracised. In part an acceptance of her culpability and not trying to distance herself from it. Because so many people said if she denounced him, their attitude to her would shift.’ Ingrid told Stanwix that it was a matter of choosing different sides in history. ‘It was an impasse that neither of us could negotiate. She was someone that I would have looked to for a close friendship if it hadn’t been for the knowledge and acknowledgement of the past that made that impossible.’

Since his ‘retirement’, Williamson may be keeping a low profile, but he hasn’t disappeared. There have been sightings

of him in the gym, in coffee shops, in malls, and with the showjumping set. He circulates in 'polite company'. Although Williamson's presence and circulation in society has not involved him in any public contretemps, some of his former colleagues and fellow perpetrators of human rights abuses have had to face publicised confrontations. The most notable recent incident occurred at the 2016 Franschhoek Literary Festival when the former Vlakplaas commander, Eugene de Kock, out on parole after two decades in prison, attended some sessions. A media furore broke out when the author Lauren Beukes confronted De Kock at an awards evening at the festival and told him that his presence was making people uncomfortable. De Kock apologised and left. One of the people who responded to De Kock's presence at the literary festival was the writer and publisher Palesa Morudu, who was in the audience at a panel discussion with the authors Anemari Jansen, who wrote De Kock's biography, and the former MK commander Stanley Manong, whose autobiography *If We Must Die* had just appeared. De Kock's unit had intercepted several of Manong's operations inside the country and may have played a role in the killing of Manong's mother.

At the panel discussion of their books, De Kock walked into the hall and sat next to Morudu. She froze when she realised who he was. 'There is a history between my family and De Kock. I always wondered how I would react if I ever met him in person,' she wrote in a piece for the online publication *Daily Maverick*.⁴

Morudu says that when Manong spoke about some of his operations that De Kock had intercepted and of the people De Kock had turned into askaris or else killed, De Kock started to have a quiet cry. 'Only five people in the room knew he was in the audience, and only those in his immediate vicinity would

have noticed the tears coming down his face. Jansen mentioned the work De Kock is doing with the Missing Persons Task Team [a unit within the National Prosecuting Authority to locate the bodies of victims and return them to their families]. At which, it was my turn to have a quiet cry.’

Morudu explained that her mother had met De Kock to ask him about her missing son, an MK soldier in Mamelodi. ‘De Kock delivered. The details are gruesome, but the chapter is now closed. I always wondered what I would do if I ever met De Kock. Now he was sitting next to me. He has been crying. I have been crying. History is a messy business. The session ends. Do I walk or do I talk to this murderer, a broken man? I choose the latter. He remembers meeting my mother. “I’m glad I could help,” he says. I am completely conflicted.’

During the course of interviews with people who had encountered Williamson during his career as an apartheid agent, I asked what they would say or do if they bumped into him.

Eric Abraham, anti-apartheid activist whom Williamson used to gain credibility by fleeing the country with him:

I did speak to him on the phone when I made *Betrayal* [a radio drama about Abraham’s experiences as a journalist and activist under apartheid]. His nonchalance was chilling. If I had to bump into him now I would ask him, ‘Does Jeanette and her daughter’s killing ever wake you up at night?’

Guy Berger, activist who was interrogated by Williamson:

The last time I had seen him he was being bombastic in court and then I saw him at the airport and I got the shock of my life. I not only had a shock because I wasn’t expecting to see him, but he was also enormous – he was bigger than Orson Wells. At my trial and when he interrogated me he was large, but he wasn’t

gross; now he wasn't just gross, he was grotesque. I was upset because he was walking around and I was pleased because he had physically become a walking abomination. I had very mixed emotions. I think he recognised me, but I kept on walking.

Ronnie Kasrils, ANC leader in exile, who worked with Williamson:

I encountered him in 1992 when Robert McBride asked me to meet Williamson. The guy was enormously fat by then. I tried to pry – get some information – but he wasn't forthcoming. He probably wanted to see if I could help him, but nothing came of it. Williamson was very devious, untrustworthy and played his cards very close to his chest. A very self-controlled guy, except for the weight factor – that's probably a Freudian sign, the way he had to cope. I tried to see what I could find out about him when I was Deputy Minister and Minister of Intelligence, but his file was destroyed. They destroyed everything of value.

Mac Maharaj, ANC leader in exile, who encountered Williamson's ANC cell:

Williamson has no remorse and has not told the truth. If we saw each other on the street now, I think he would take a turn to avoid me. Not that I would beat him up but because he knows I'm likely to say something that he would not be able to handle and that someone would be a witness to me belittling him. But Craig did fuck-all to me. I'm all right.

Aziz Pahad, ANC leader in exile, who worked with Williamson:

I heard that he was doing business in Angola and I thought, I hope the Angolans know who they are dealing with. I want to talk to this guy. I don't want to persecute him, but I want some

clarifications about his IUEF objectives. Whenever I met [the former head of South Africa's National Intelligence Service] Niël Barnard, I asked him about Craig Williamson – he would never name names. When we were involved in secret talks, in the informal chats, he would hint that they had infiltrated us, and say: 'We know what you guys discussed in the NEC [National Executive Committee].' I would say, 'Who were your guys who infiltrated us, Niël, who are your bleddy people?' He said, 'Forget it. If I didn't tell Mandela, why would I tell you?'

Paula Ensor, Jeanette Schoon's best friend:

I've often thought about that and instinctively I've thought that I would assault him. And then I say to myself – no. I don't think it bothers him what he did – I don't think he gives a shit. I cannot tell you how shocked I was when I found out she'd been murdered. I was watching TV and Katryn's face appeared on the screen. When I saw her face, I just knew. I just knew ... I just knew what had happened. She was absolutely beautiful – she looked like a little angel with these blonde curls. She would have been in her thirties now – and nothing would have given Jeanette greater pleasure than having grandchildren. Oh wow. I can't talk about that ... it's too painful.

Duncan Innes, who was interrogated by Williamson:

When I was NUSAS president, Jenny was on my executive and we became very close. I was horrified when she and her daughter were killed. I didn't know Craig did that sort of thing. I thought he was a spy – not a man who sent parcel bombs. I thought, When I get a chance I'm going to tell him what a shit I think he is. I did get a chance. In about 2012 my wife and I were driving from Johannesburg to Cape Town for a holiday and broke the journey by staying on a farm just outside Colesberg. We went into the bar

at the farm for a drink before dinner. I greeted the fellow guests as I walked in with a general ‘hello, hello’ and there in the left-hand corner I spotted this fat man. He wasn’t looking at me. I thought, Jesus, that’s Craig. I was stunned. I’d just been handed a glass of wine, which I was tempted to throw over him. Instead, I turned and walked out. I suppose I would ask him, What kind of person are you to kill Jeanette and her daughter, and Ruth? Maybe if it had been closer to the time they had been killed, I would have hit him in the face and kicked him in the balls.

Janet Love, ANC member and Jeanette Curtis’s housemate:

He’s one person I feel I won’t be restrained towards — I feel anger; seething anger towards him. I don’t know what I would do if I saw him. I don’t feel terribly rational about it. He was part of so much evil. Williamson hasn’t told the truth and hasn’t acknowledged what he did. He damaged so many lives and deprived people of their lives – and has just been able to move on. That’s not right. I remember speaking to Marius [Schoon] about Williamson – and there was a sense that while part of the TRC was about recognising the contribution, dedication and heroism of people like Jeanette who got us to democracy, there was also a part where there needed to be a huge amount of accountability – but with Williamson, there wasn’t any accountability. The idea that someone like Jenny, who had the level of gentle strength and commitment that she had, could be gone in a flash because of an insane, murderous and hateful individual is just unbelievable.

Auret van Heerden, NUSAS president who was detained:

The guys who tortured me are the same guys who killed Neil Aggett. I never ever felt any malice towards them for what they

did to me. A couple of them were evil guys but they were a product of the system. I got to know them and developed a kind of relationship with them because I spent so much time with them during interrogation. Williamson was different – he was a product of the system, but he was more than that; he was an agent of the system. I think he bears a lot more responsibility than the policemen who were torturing us. Williamson made very clear choices – in a way the other guys didn't see they had choices.

Harry Nengwekhulu, Black Consciousness leader and IUEF representative:

I don't think I hate him – he is just one of the foot soldiers. I'm angry about De Klerk, who got the Nobel Prize for Peace but never took responsibility. I feel angry at the political leaders who just washed their hands. The foot soldiers like Williamson were small fry – they were just doing what they were told. He killed people and should be punished, but big punishment should be reserved for leaders like De Klerk, who are now experts in democracy. I lost my youth in the struggle and now these people are flourishing as experts in democracy. I feel anger that Williamson participated in killing. I met up with Marius [Schoon] a year before he died and we talked about Craig – he was very bitter. I would ask Craig to tell me about his dishonesty and I would tell him that Marius died a very unhappy man because of him. I would ask him how he felt about the fact that he killed people who accommodated him, who took him into their house, and who believed he was part of the struggle.

Sherry McLean, Marius Schoon's wife and Fritz's stepmother:

I was driving back from Pretoria one day after Marius had died.

I was in the fast lane – not going too fast – and the next thing this huge Chrysler comes up behind me, right up against the bumper. Clearly I wasn't going fast enough for him. I looked at the number plate: it was CMW – Craig Michael Williamson – and behind the wheel was this gross lump of a man. It shows you that his personality is to push people out of his way. I was driving a little Golf and he didn't know who I was. It's just an indication of the type of character he is.

Charles Nupen, NUSAS president who was friendly with Williamson:

If I had to bump into him? That's a difficult question to answer in the abstract. I can't be clear, but there would be no attempt to engage him constructively. How do you respond to someone who was responsible for the murder of people who you really liked and who you regarded as a good friend? You can only respond with complete and utter contempt. As the story unfolded and his nefarious activities were revealed, I had increasing disdain for the man. And when I heard he had been responsible for Jenny [Schoon]'s death I felt ... Well, words fail me. Disgusted. I despise him.

Danny Berger, who argued against Williamson's amnesty application at the TRC:

I would rather not be contaminated by him. He escaped everything – and he still walks around, but he's not the kind of person who feels shame or remorse. The TRC was an imperfect system; and some cases worked better than others. This case didn't work.

Tad Matsui, clergyman who worked for the WUS and whom Williamson befriended in Switzerland:

I was part of the election observer team organised by the World Council of Churches in 1994. I thought of contacting Williamson when I was in South Africa. I went to a party where I met a journalist who heard that I had been friends with Williamson. The journalist was fascinated and he found an address for Williamson for me. I was tempted to go see him, because I was curious, but I couldn't do it. I guess I was scared. I'd want to know how he managed to lie all the time like that. I just couldn't imagine someone who looked like a nice guy living a lie 24 hours a day. Of course, I hated him when I found he had something to do with Steve Biko's death, but I don't have any hatred towards him anymore.

Renfrew Christie, anti-apartheid activist Williamson testified against in a trial in which he received a 10-year jail term:

In the end we got what the ANC wanted – a democracy in which everyone votes. He lost. What else is there to say? Not that I'm gloating. I was fighting a democratic war against Nazis – and my answer to Craig Williamson is: we won.

Chapter 33

Spying on the Spy

In the age of social media, intelligence agents can embark on espionage from the comfort of their own keyboard. They can scoop up personal information about where their target lives, works, eats, who they hang out with, and whether they are having an affair (and with whom), and in this way build a profile based on their political interests and social habits. Agents can track their targets on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. I decided to turn the tables and spy on the spy, to see what I could find out about Craig Williamson by stalking him on social media.

If you punch ‘Craig Williamson’ into Google’s search engine, it throws up (at last count) 17,700,000 results. There’s a Wikipedia entry about Williamson, a profile about him on a WikiSpooks website, which is devoted to ‘deep politics’, and a website called With Malice, which places Williamson at the centre of a conspiracy theory about the assassination of the former Swedish prime minister Olof Palme.

There are a host of other Craig Williamsons. There’s a shaggy-haired English literature professor at Swarthmore College in the UK who teaches Medieval and Renaissance literature and publishes poems about Africa. His book, *African Wings*, has a foreword by Alan Paton. Another Craig Williamson in the UK

was in the news for killing a teenage girl. This Williamson, a cab driver, was speeding and hit the teenager. He cried in court and apologised wholeheartedly to the young woman's family. In America, one Craig Williamson is on the University of Tennessee's political science advisory board, and another is the president of the Cigar Association of America. There's also a Craig Williamson Menswear shop in Napa, California.

Back in South Africa, I discover two more Craig Williamsons. One is involved in business development at Investec. I track him down and he tells me he arrived on Wits campus in 1987 to study commerce. He was based on the more conservative West Campus, but whenever he ventured across the political divide into the humanities-dominated East Campus and people heard his name, their eyebrows would shoot up. People have asked if he's the notorious Craig Williamson, but he doesn't live in the former spy's shadow. Only once has sharing a name with Craig Williamson caused him any problems, and that was when he applied for a visa to the United States in 1999 and was flagged as a security risk. He persuaded the official to compare him to a photo of the *real* Craig Williamson, and was granted the visa.¹

The second South African Craig Williamson owns a restaurant in Hoedspruit, and was the innocent Craig Williamson whom Gavin Evans almost had bumped off in the late 1980s. That Craig Williamson, who was then living in a cottage on his parents' Johannesburg property, remembers waking up to find the house sprayed with graffiti and swastikas. He has also had his fair share of raised eyebrows and strange looks when people hear his name, but other than the graffiti there have been no other consequences because of his namesake's past activities.²

Although Williamson has not had much media attention since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, his name is occasionally pulled into news stories and columns. When

former Minister of Arts and Culture Pallo Jordan fell from grace after misrepresenting his academic credentials, the Wits journalism professor Anton Harber wrote in a *Business Day* column that while Williamson walked free in Johannesburg, Jordan had withdrawn from public life. Jordan was injured when Williamson's letter bomb killed Ruth First in 1982. 'Justice, you have to say, is not always apparent in our society. I am not defending Jordan's foolishness, only contrasting the fall of a man based on a vanity that caused no one much harm with that of a cold-hearted multiple murderer whose victims' families are still in pain,' wrote Harber.³

This was a similar sentiment picked up by the Wits student Raees Noorbhai two years later during the #FeesMustFall protests when two of the movement's leaders were arrested. Noorbhai tweeted: 'We live in a country where Mcebo Dlamini and Masixole Mlandu are in custody, while Craig Williamson and Wouter Basson continue to walk free.' The tweet was retweeted 387 times and sparked many responses, including this one from @ayandaayzo: '*ke mang craig?*' (Who is Craig?).

The last three tweets on Williamson's own Twitter account were fired off in quick succession in September 2016.

- Random mention of my name by Trevor Manuel and @MarianneThamm re #SarsWars is a red herring.
- Funny. I've heard something like the BAT [British American Tobacco] comment on today's *Daily Maverick* story before! 'We didn't order or know about anything illegal.'
- Smoke and mirrors! Cloak and daggers! Who knew that the tobacco industry makes the Intelligence and Political worlds look tame.

His tweets were a response to the latest news story involving Williamson, which was published on the *Daily Maverick* news website. The story revealed details of a massive data leak

pointing to ‘wide-scale industrial espionage, fraud, racketeering, corruption and bribery by agents representing and working on behalf of British American Tobacco SA (BATSA)’. According to the *Daily Maverick*, the explosive documents show how members of the South African Police Service, the state security agency known as the Hawks and the South African Revenue Service (SARS) were drawn into BATSA’s attempts to eliminate competition in South Africa. ‘These actions ultimately led to the destabilisation of SARS and the purging of its top executive structure in 2014,’ wrote the journalist Marianne Thamm.⁴

Williamson was named in the data leak. It is a complicated and convoluted war between BATSA and the Fair Trade Independent Tobacco Association (FTITA), involving a sex scandal, dirty cops, former security force agents, a multibillion-rand tobacco industry and possibly a battle for control of the Treasury. At the centre of the saga is François van der Westhuizen, an apartheid-era policeman, hired by Forensic Security Services (FSS), a company contracted by BATSA as its security arm.⁵ Van der Westhuizen said that FSS employed him to root out illicit tobacco. He defected with huge amounts of data and became a whistleblower, claiming that FSS had bribed law enforcement agents, including SARS, and pulled political strings to harass BATSA rivals like Carnilinx. The BATSA–FTITA saga is set to play out in the courts.

Carnilinx, a cigarette manufacturer, was formed by Adriano Mazzotti, Julius Malema’s generous benefactor, who paid the EFF’s R600,000 registration fee in the 2014 election.⁶ Williamson was initially a silent partner in Carnilinx but left early on and, realising there was big money in tobacco, set up his own tobacco group – Benson Craig – in Botswana. According to its website, Benson Craig is the only cigarette manufacturer in Botswana and was established through a government-supported

project but is now privately funded. It says its mission is to provide Botswana and South and Central African markets with value brand cigarettes, of equal quality to imported international brand cigarettes, but at half the cost.

What made the story particularly explosive was that at its core were allegations of a SARS rogue unit, which played into the hands of the Hawks and the National Prosecuting Authority, who had been targeting the Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan. Talking about this unit, Gordhan's predecessor, Trevor Manuel, noted that when he was finance minister he had approved the formation of a special unit to investigate people who didn't make honest tax declarations. He said that under his watch the unit operated within the framework of the law, but since then it seemed that all kinds of agencies had an interest in one part of what was being investigated – the tobacco industry. 'I saw a press report that tied in spy Craig Williamson into the network of people that operate ... it just seems like a cesspool of activity that we must get out of.'⁷

The saga caused Williamson to end a Twitter drought. The last tweet before the #SarsWars tweets had been dispatched a year earlier:

- Tamara LePine Williams obviously hasn't read any Le Carre featuring non heroic spy functionaries who understand their moral ambiguity.

This was in response to an interview which the radio journalist LePine Williams had conducted with the former apartheid spy Olivia Forsyth about her recently published memoir *Agent 407* on Classic FM. LePine Williams asked Forsyth if Williamson – whom she described as 'not a very nice man' – had really recommended that Forsyth read Le Carré novels to get an idea of what being a spy was about. 'That sounds very odd,' she said.⁸ Twelve days earlier Williamson had tweeted that Forsyth's book

was well written and said: ‘Spy vs Spy. What a trail of detritus of human lives ideology leaves in its wake.’

In May 2015 he tweeted:

- John Hanks obviously thinks it was preferable to let rhinos be poached rather than have people like me involved in protecting them!
- John Hanks in his book on the WWF Operation Lock sounds like the political and generals at the TRC. ‘I didn’t know.’ Hahaha.

Hanks, a conservationist and former director of the Africa Programme for WWF International, wrote *Operation Lock and the War on Rhino Poaching*, which documents a covert and controversial plan in the late 1980s to infiltrate rhino-poaching syndicates and assassinate rhino horn dealers. It’s yet another convoluted saga that involved former British security force agents who had made contact with South Africa’s intelligence underworld. The leader of the operation, Ian Crooke, a former Special Air Service (SAS) operative, made contact with Williamson and planned to employ some of Williamson’s men. There were concerns that Williamson, then at the firm Long Reach, had tried to infiltrate Crooke’s team under the pretext of giving intelligence.⁹

Williamson’s Twitter stream doesn’t provide much insight into his inner thoughts but it does reveal that he tends to lash out when he feels criticised. Perhaps Facebook, where Williamson is much more active, may be more illuminating. Williamson’s Facebook wall is securely locked down, but there are some public posts that give a glimpse of what is happening in his life. His profile picture is of his granddaughter sitting on his dog Parker. His banner picture is of his three children dressed in yellow overalls and festive gear – one has colourful hair accessories and one has oversized yellow glasses – standing in front of a car

adorned with South African flags. It was probably taken during the 2010 Soccer World Cup.

Although his list of Facebook friends is private, he is still in contact with the former Special Branch agent Vic McPherson, who is a serial liker of Williamson's photos. His likes are Tim Noakes and the Banting bible, *The Real Meal Revolution*, which is the only book on his Facebook likes list. Could he have joined Noakes's carb-free crusade? If so, perhaps he has slimmed down. He also likes the St John's College Facebook page and various St John's posts about the successes of their old boys, including one congratulating Chris Froome on his third Tour de France win in July 2016. He also likes the page of his tobacco company, Benson Craig, and, unsurprisingly, the CIA and Israel Defence Forces pages.

There are numerous photos of his granddaughter – at the Scratch Patch and on various car and rocket children's rides. He also posts motivational pictures with maxims like 'Share if you love your granddaughter with all your heart' and 'Share if you love your grandchildren to the moon and back'. If you met Williamson on Facebook, you would see him as a loving husband, an involved dad and a doting grandfather.

After spying on him in the virtual world, I thought it was now time to meet Craig Williamson in person.

Chapter 34

Making Contact

I looked at the string of numbers written on the piece of paper. All I had to do was press those numbers into my cellphone and 1,500 kilometres away Williamson's phone would ring. I couldn't put it off much longer. I dialled '082-746 ...' and paused. Wait, I thought, let me just drink a cup of coffee. I drank the coffee. I'll phone straight after solving a crossword puzzle. Just one more cup of coffee. Eventually, after several hours of procrastinating, I picked up the phone, took a deep breath and dialled his number. The phone rang. There were a few beeps and then silence. 'Hello,' we said simultaneously, which gave a spooky echo.

'Mr Williamson?'

'Yes.'

'I want to speak to you about a project I'm working on.'

Silence.

'I live in Cape Town but will be in Johannesburg next week. Would you be able to speak to me?'

'OK,' he said. 'What's the project?'

I took another deep breath.

'I'm writing a book about you ...'

He chuckled.

'OK, give me a call or send me a WhatsApp when you're in Johannesburg.'

And that was that.

My initial plan was to doorstep him. Maybe imitate Derek Watts in a *Carte Blanche* exposé and shove a microphone in his face. I wanted to go on an auspicious date: Katryn Schoon's birthday, and say, 'You know Katryn would have been 36 today *if* you hadn't taken her life.' I wanted to emulate activist documentary maker Michael Moore and confront Williamson with the weight of his victims. But in the end I decided this might be the wrong tack. I realised that if I turned it into a trial, he would shut down and I would miss the clues in what he told me – and what he didn't tell me – that might reveal his mindset.

I arrived in Johannesburg and called, but I just got his voicemail. I sent a WhatsApp message to arrange a meeting. Two blue ticks told me he'd seen the message, but there was no response. Maybe he had changed his mind or never intended to meet me. An hour or so later I received an email from business network website LinkedIn informing me that 'someone has just viewed my profile'. It must be him, spying on me. I googled my own name to see what he would see and if there was anything there that might cause him to change his mind about meeting me. But all the links Google throws up are innocuous. Finally, the next day my phone pings, alerting me to a message. It's from Craig Williamson: '10 a.m. tomorrow at the Life Grand Café in Hyde Park.'

Chapter 35

Face to Face

I have a restless night but no Williamson nightmares. On more than a few occasions in the past three years I've woken up in a cold sweat from anxious dreams in which Williamson is chasing me and I'm trying to escape but my legs are wooden. During this time he has occupied my consciousness and stalked my unconsciousness.

I make my way through Johannesburg's northern suburbs to Hyde Park Corner, a luxury shopping centre with boutique fashion stores, extravagant art shops and posh restaurants. I am concerned he will try to manipulate me; after all, he was a professional spy, skilled in the art of deception. I've also heard people describe him as 'charming', 'convivial' and 'jolly' and, if I'm to be honest, I'm worried that I may end up liking him.

I arrive at Life Grand Café and take a seat. I have a digital recorder, three pens, a notebook and 51 questions. After three years I know the Williamson story quite well. I've dug through archives, scanned newspaper clips, listened to recordings, read countless books, scoured social media, visited some dark corners of the internet, and interviewed dozens of people who crossed paths (and swords) with him – from a former school boy in his boarding house half a century ago, to an ex-president, four former cabinet ministers, an Academy Award winner and

a young man who witnessed his mother and sister being blown to bits.

Unless he confesses to involvement in the murders of Olof Palme and Samora Machel, I'm not expecting new information from him. What I'm here to do is search for clues that will reveal something about the man himself. I also want to look in his eyes and see if there's any remorse when I ask him about the murders of First and the Schoons.

I look up, and there walking towards me is a familiar face and figure. It's Craig Williamson. He's got a neat grey beard and is wearing a large green-and-blue woolly jersey. He is clutching a leather 'man bag'. He is physically imposing, and while he may not be as bulky as he once was, the 67-year-old former Security Branch agent has a paunch. He's three steps away from me. I stand up – and as I do, I suddenly panic. He's going to extend his hand ...

I had thought long about meeting him but I hadn't thought about 'the handshake'. In the BBC's interview programme *HARDtalk*, Tim Sebastian ended each episode of the show with a customary handshake with his guest. It became a signature of the show. When Sebastian featured Williamson on the show in 2001, after the interview he refused to shake Williamson's hand, an act he later justified by saying he never shook hands with killers.

Now Williamson extends his hand. I notice a gold ring on his pinkie. With no time to think I shake his hand. His palm is damp.

He sits down in a chair with his back against the wall so that he can have an unobstructed view of any lurking danger. Old habits die hard.

He orders an Americano with pour-in cream. He folds his arms across his chest and starts to tell me about growing up in the Williamson household, 'a traditional Johannesburg

northern suburbs family'. 'I have always been an individual, not really a team player. I went in the opposite direction to the herd. St John's was really liberal – lots of well-known liberal and left-wing families – and I was definitely a supporter of the free enterprise system. I wasn't liberal. I was,' he says – and then corrects himself – 'I am conservative and very anti-communist. I was always aware of the East–West conflict – the Cold War.'

He always wanted to be a politician and recounts the tale of the 1966 St John's election. His eyes flicker with pride. He actually wanted to represent the National Party but the teacher wouldn't let him because he knew Williamson would win – which would not do for the liberal St John's. If he couldn't represent the NP, he would represent the right-wing Republican Party, and the teacher couldn't stop him. 'I won the election anyway,' he grins.

His political career was derailed when he received his call-up and joined the police, which is where, he says, everything just fell into place, and he was invited to join the Special Branch to become a spy. Although, he says, 'spy' is a pejorative term. 'We were agents. We worked against spies.' Like the terms freedom fighters and terrorists, the difference between a spy and an agent depends on which side you're on.

Discussing his motives for spying in terms of the conventional Money Ideology Coercion Ego (MICE) framework, Williamson says his reasons were ideological, 'definitely ideological', and he excelled at it (and, yes, he believes he deserves the 'super-spy' label) because of his ability to 'compartmentalise'. 'That's vital,' he says. 'The biggest danger is you forget who you actually are, which can happen when you're spending 90 per cent of your time in your target community and you've got to interact with them genuinely because people know if you're not being genuine.'

He became friendly with 'them' ('a lot of them were nice guys'), but feels no guilt about betraying his friends because they

weren't the target. They were a stepping stone for a longer-term goal: penetrating the ANC. 'Who really cared what NUSAS thought?' he asks. 'The threat to the stability of the state wasn't going to come from liberal white students; it was going to come from the masses. It was all a game.'

'Game' is a word Williamson utters frequently. Infiltrating NUSAS was a game; inciting bad blood between the ANC and the Black Consciousness Movement was a game; disrupting the Communist Party was a game. 'It was a four-dimensional chess game – they do this, we do that – and you're just trying to create a reaction.'

At the heart of the 'game' is the manipulation of public opinion. He grins when he talks about events he manipulated – such as convincing the IUEF to officially support the ANC as the sole liberation movement. 'I don't know how I pulled it off. I don't know how the IUEF went for it. I still laugh about it.' He's still proud of the havoc he caused at a 1979 UNESCO conference in Paris where he was on the steering committee and insisted that the final resolution equate Zionism and apartheid. 'The Jews left, the Americans left, the British left. Aziz Pahad was chuffed. The ANC said, "You're toeing the line." My guys in Pretoria were chuffed. They said, "Well done, boy." I had blown the whole conference up. That's what we do. When I read the newspaper and see what's going on in the world, I see the intelligence agencies are still playing the same games.'

In this smoke-and-mirrors world the only person who really knows who anybody is, is themselves, he says, and then he becomes coy. 'People don't know who you are working for and many people still wonder who I really worked for. I hope you don't waste too much time trying to work out who I'm working for ... because I'm retired from the game.'

His mouth coils into a smirk, which I guess is meant to look

mysterious. It's a similar expression that appeared when I asked him whether there were any campus spies from the pre-1994 days who have yet to be unmasked. 'Of course,' he says. 'Some came out and mea culpa'd, but anyone with brains would just keep quiet and get on with their lives.' When I press him for names, he takes a sip of his Americano and says: 'I've forgotten. I'm getting old.'

He may be bluffing about spies who have yet to come in from the cold, but he is likely to have dirt on people. In the spy world dirt is currency – dirt is leverage and leverage is power. Williamson threw money around in the 1970s, and was in a position to collect intelligence and compromise people. Undoubtedly, many politicians today have managed to cling to power despite accusations of corruption because of the bags of dirt they have in their arsenal.

Dirt still gets flung in Williamson's direction, such as the persistent allegations that he was involved in the killing of Olof Palme and Samora Machel. It was Eugene de Kock who named Williamson in Palme's assassination. Why would De Kock implicate him? Williamson's face goes red.

'Because he was told. Something that completely fascinates me is how gullible the intelligence community is – and, I have to say, some of the most gullible intelligence people I've ever come across in my life are the ANC. After 1994 a team of bottom feeders from the old intelligence community – your Dirk Coetzees – went full out to milk the new boys for as much money as they could. They found any operation that had never been explored and, using forged intelligence reports, pinned it on the old Security Branch and Military Intelligence. This was a big money-making exercise for them and they produced a *ronde nul* [a round nought].' He says it was these former apartheid agents that tried to pin Palme's murder on him, and De Kock

believed them. He says the accusations about Palme and Machel have given him more grief than anything he actually did.

He keeps in touch with his former colleagues in the security force at the occasional braai – ‘just to touch base’ – but, he says, he mostly keeps to himself. He has bumped into people from the NUSAS days but only to look at, not to talk to. He steers clear of ‘liberal’ hangouts such as the Market Theatre and book launches because he knows he will bump into someone who will be upset and he doesn’t want any unpleasantness. People do recognise him when he’s out in public, and it’s not all negative, he says. ‘Just two days ago, someone approached me and thanked me for my service to South Africa.’

He’s no longer worried about a man waiting behind a tree with an AK47 for him. ‘I’m more worried about someone wanting to hijack my car or come into my house in the middle of the night than someone from the past coming for me.’ But, he insists, he is not worried about himself. He’s worried about his kids and how long it will take for South Africa to pull out of ‘this nosedive’. ‘I worry about my grandchild, who is three. What future is there for her?’ I remember Paula Ensor’s photos of Katryn Schoon. I also wonder what Williamson’s parents thought when their son was born, what hopes and dreams they had for him, and how they felt about how his life turned out.

In my quest to get to grips with what motivated Williamson to do the things he did, I wondered if a clue to understanding him could be the fact that he grew up with a father who had lived through unspeakable violence. After all, there is some truth to the cliché about damaged people damaging other people. Perhaps his father’s own trauma contributed, along with a whole range of other experiences.

As he enters the autumn of his life, I wonder whether he feels it was all worth it. Maybe he can tell what I’m thinking,

because all of a sudden he says he has regrets. ‘How can you not have regrets? The thing about life is that it happens. Regrets come with hindsight. We all have 100 per cent hindsight, but when you’re in the battle there isn’t time for reflection and consideration. Things move fast. It was a game that started off innocently but ended roughly.’

I ask him how he would like to be remembered and he turns bright red. ‘Pah,’ he spits, scrunching up his nose, and sneers. ‘I’m not one for monuments. I prefer to be undercover; the *éminence grise*.’ And that’s how he sees himself – the important, powerful decision-maker operating behind the scenes, pulling strings – influencing, manipulating, stoking and causing trouble.

We look at each other. We’ve been talking for more than two hours. I just have one more question. I take a deep breath. What do you think when you turn onto the Ruth First Freeway? He turns red, frowns and launches into a well-worn answer about the chain of command and target lists and following orders and people getting killed being the sad reality of war. I wait for him to finish before trying once more. ‘Do you ever think of the people you killed?’ Once more he goes bright red.

‘Jeanette Schoon, Marius Schoon, the Slovos – they knew exactly what they were doing,’ he says. ‘They knew exactly the threat. It shouldn’t have come as any surprise to them that they were targets. When you’re an operative fighting a war, you think of collateral damage in some kind of a philosophical sense. In the Schoons’ case there had been an attempt on them in Botswana, so why on earth did they think that there wouldn’t be an attempt in Angola where, no matter what they said, they were more involved? It’s a war. At the TRC I said that when I heard the child had been killed, it was like a bucket of water was thrown in my face. I had absolutely no idea the kid was there. We confronted him [Marius] at the TRC: what were

you doing putting your children at risk? He got very upset – understandably. Yes, I accept my responsibility but he must accept his responsibility as well.’

He folds his arms across his chest and leans back, a signal that our meeting has come to an end. ‘Maybe I’ll see you at the book launch,’ he says, picking up his leather man bag and shuffling off into the glitzy shopping mall. I watch him slip unnoticed into the crowd of upmarket shoppers. After three years of thinking about Williamson I have finally come face to face with the man, but I’m left with a hollow feeling. I had hoped our meeting would help me understand why he did the things that he did. He answered all my questions but, like a good spy, he gave nothing away. Perhaps there are not even answers that Williamson can give to himself, should he care to ask. But of his actions, it is painfully clear that many people are still suffering the consequences.

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In 2015 Rachel was diagnosed with bone marrow failure, an illness she has faced with incredible courage. I’m so proud of you, my princess-rap-battling, Lego-loving, monkey-bar world champion. I’d like to pay special tribute to Rachel’s team of healthcare workers led by Dr Marc Hendricks at the Red Cross Children’s Hospital.

And, finally, to Jean, you give meaning to my life.

Jonathan Ancer
Cape Town

Endnotes

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Craig Williamson was in the bath in his home in Switzerland in 1980 when he heard a radio news bulletin that a South African spy had defected to Britain. Williamson had been the vice-president of South Africa's student liberation movement and had gone into exile where he'd become the deputy director of a powerful anti-apartheid funding organisation and an ANC operative. He wasn't concerned when he heard the report about the spy. However, the defection set in motion a series of events that exposed Williamson as an apartheid secret agent who had been leading a life of deception for almost a decade.

Through interviews with people he interacted with while he was undercover and after his true identity was eventually revealed, *Spy* details the life and double life of Craig Williamson – South Africa's 'super-spy' turned parcel-bomb assassin. The book also documents the stories of a generation of courageous activists he betrayed, jailed and killed.

Spy seeks to understand how Williamson succeeded in forming friendships with his 'comrades', manipulating his way into the heart of the liberation movement. The book explores themes of betrayal, justice, accountability and forgiveness – and culminates when the author comes face-to-face with South Africa's most infamous spy.



Jonathan Ancer is a journalist who has held various positions on a variety of publications: reporter on *The Star*, editor of *Grocott's Mail* and crossword columnist for the *Cape Times*. He has won awards for hard news, features and creative writing. Jonathan has one wife, four children and the largest Billy Bunter collection in South Africa.



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