



Renfrew Leslie Christie was born in Johannesburg on 11 September 1949. His mother did not remarry after the death of his father just after his second birthday: she brought him up alone on a telephonist's salary. She later worked full time for about ten years for the liberal women's organisation, the Black Sash, advising South Africans endorsed out of their cities under the Pass Laws and Influx Control.

Her Black Sash offices were located in Cosatu House when it was bombed at night by Apartheid operatives.

His mother's brother, his uncle Lieutenant David Taylor, of Cheetah Squadron, South African Air Force, was killed in action flying over North Korea on 20 March 1952.

He graduated from high school in December 1966 and subsequently worked during a vacation as a Metrication Officer for African Explosives and Chemical Industries (AECI) Limited in 1971, which among other things made munitions for the South Africa (SA) Defence Force at Lenz, near Johannesburg.

He was conscripted into the SA Infantry in April 1967, undergoing basic training at 1 Special Service Battalion in Bloemfontein and thereafter was based at 3 SA Infantry in Lenz, until December 1967. He guarded the Sasolburg oil-from-coal plant for some months.

While guarding the AECI Lenz explosive factory and the Lenz ammunition dump in 1967, he saw something entirely fortuitously which told him that the SA Defence Force was involved with nuclear weapons. He spent the rest of his life hunting the details of the Apartheid nuclear weapons.

He was later to be a whistle-blower about them for the African National Congress.

In this era students were the last vestige of free political activity, because the African National Congress and other opponents of Apartheid had been outlawed. He was vigorously active with the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), attending its national congresses from 1968 to 1972 and its leadership training seminars 1969 to 1972, being elected at the July 1971 Congress to be full time paid Deputy President of NUSAS in Cape Town from December 1971 to December 1972.

Renfrew Christie was arrested for political offences four times before he turned twenty-one. He was arrested for being a "white" person illegally in a "Bantu" area, while praying in a Sovenga church with the University Christian Movement, near the University of the North (Turfloop); he was arrested outside John Vorster Square Police Station for demanding the release of Mrs

Winnie Mandela and 21 others who were being held there without trial and being tortured; he was arrested again near Turfloop for being a "white" person in a "Bantu" area; and he was arrested outside the house of Mrs Winnie Mandela in Soweto for the same thing, while taking a trained guard dog to protect her, when she was being attacked mysteriously by Apartheid operatives at night.

In 1971 he shared a house with the banned and house-arrested Franciscan Priest, Father Cosmas Desmond, who had written the banned book *The Discarded People* and made the outlawed movie *The Dumping Grounds*. Various banned ANC leaders were regular visitors to the house, including Mrs Winnie Mandela, ANC intelligence operative Ms Joyce Sikhakhane and the photographer Mr Peter Magubane, but it was illegal for them to be visiting Fr. Cos Desmond, so ostensibly they were visiting Renfrew Christie or other students in the house. Thus, it came about that on occasion at the age of 21 his lunch was kindly cooked by Mrs Winnie Mandela!

During his time as a student activist and as Deputy President of NUSAS he was an anti-Apartheid organiser, visiting every South African university campus except that in the Orange Free State. With NUSAS President Mr Paul Pretorius, he launched the "Free Education Now!" protest campaign, which resulted in the police riots at St George's Cathedral, Cape Town on 2 June 1972, on the Jameson Hall steps, and then across the country. He was invited by the New Zealand National Students' Association to speak in the debate on the racist SA Rugby tour of New Zealand but his passport renewal was refused and the visit was cancelled.

He was a signatory on the NUSAS Prison Education Fund, which channelled donor money for study in prisons, including Robben Island, where Mr Nelson Mandela and others were being held. He shared an office with Jeanette Curtis, Vice President of NUSAS, when she was, with others, spreading the NUSAS Wages Commissions from Durban to other centres. These Wages Commissions were among the roots of the new trades union movement, which eventually became the Congress of South African Trades Unions, which is now an alliance partner in the South African democratic government. Jeanette Curtis and her young daughter were assassinated by Apartheid operatives a dozen years later by parcel bomb.

Subpoenaed to appear before the Schibusch Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry into NUSAS, he gave "boring" evidence about NUSAS's finances, with the result that no criminal charges were laid and the accounting books were returned. However, eight of his NUSAS colleagues were then banned, after his term of office had ended, including the academic adviser, Professor Rick Turner, whom Apartheid operatives later assassinated by shooting. His application for a passport renewal in 1973 was again refused.

While studying at the University of Cape Town, Renfrew undertook research fieldwork in Windhoek, Namibia, on the Kunene River Hydroelectric schemes, the topic of his 1974 Honours dissertation and of his full length 1975 Master's thesis, which led to an article in *Social Dynamics* in 1976.

A copy of his Master's thesis reached Dr Hein Geingob of the South West Africa Peoples' Organisation. At a later date the Kunene Schemes were put out of operation by bombing. He left Cape Town on 2 September 1975, taking up a Field Marshal Smuts Scholarship in St Antony's College, Oxford, while his SA Army Regiment, the Witwatersrand Rifles, was preparing to cross the Kunene River and invade Angola, which it did in October 1975, without him.

He returned to South Africa on research fieldwork on electricity, coal, oil, and the nuclear programme for six months of 1976 and two months of 1977. He attended the SA Labour and Development Research Unit's 1976 Conference on Farm Labour in South Africa. In 1977 he served as a political and economic consultant to Channel Nine TV Australia, on the making of a documentary, "The Africa Project", about Apartheid, filmed across the country from Umtata to Soweto and from Crossroads to Durban and Pretoria.

In Oxford he spent time in continental Europe researching the use of South African coal and the potential for coal sanctions against Apartheid.

He took a D Phil (Oxon) in June 1979 for the thesis "The Electrification of South Africa 1905 to 1975". The thesis became a book published in hard back and paperback in 1984, which included a chapter on nuclear activity. South Africa was able to enrich uranium because it had cheap electricity. He concluded: "South Africa therefore has the equipment which is needed to produce a nuclear explosive device should it wish to".

Returning to South Africa in July 1979, he worked as a Coal Research Fellow in SALDRU at UCT, beginning a history of SA coal production. He became a Trustee of the SA Prison Education Trust, which continued to finance prisoners' studies on Robben Island and elsewhere.

His passport was withdrawn in August 1979 and he was arrested under the Terrorism Act in October. He was deprived of sleep and made to stand until he wrote a "confession". (Amnesty International classifies these measures as torture). He was held in solitary confinement for interrogation until he gave "answers to the satisfaction" of his captors, from October 1979 to June 1980. He was held first in Caledon Square Police Station, Cape Town, then at John Vorster Square in Johannesburg, and finally awaiting trial in the old hanging quarters of the Pretoria Central Prison.

In John Vorster Square the ordinary policemen would allow him to shower at weekends, when the political police were away, together with a prisoner named Mordecai Tatsa. Mr Tatsa was being cruelly tortured: each time he showed worse evidence of gross assault. His feet were beaten, swelling to the size of rugby balls; his neck showed rope burns concomitant with strangulation and release, strangulation and release. It is understood that Mr Tatsa's wounds were such that he could not successfully be charged even in an Apartheid court; Mrs Helen Suzman MP negotiated a release under house arrest where Mr Tatsa could not talk of his torture.

Renfrew Christie was tried under the Terrorism Act from 2 June 1980 to 6 June 1980, for conspiring with the African National Congress to supply information to the ANC on coal, electricity, oil and nuclear activity, including work on nuclear explosives research, the Koeberg nuclear power station, certain other Escom power stations, certain coal mines, and the Sasol I, II and III oil from coal plants.

ANC operatives bombed the Sasol plants on the night of 1 June 1980. The newspapers printed spectacular photographs of a smoke plume thousands of feet high. His "confession" had already made mention of his sending material on Sasol to the ANC.

On 4 June 1980, an Ottawa Citizen headline read "White Scientist May Face Death Sentence" (page 60 of 136). On 7 June 1980 the Sarasota Herald Tribune reported "Scientist Spared from Gallows" (page 2). He was sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment, or ten years effective.

From 1980 to 1982 he was imprisoned in the Pretoria Hanging Prison with six other political prisoners, on the row closest to the gallows, which meant that he and they were forced to listen to some 300 prisoners being hanged. Among his fellow prisoners was Dr David Rabkin, who

was later killed with the ANC in Angola. There were some sixty warders for these seven prisoners.

Thereafter he was held in the rebuilt Pretoria Security Prison until his release on parole in November 1986. This release came about after he accepted an offer made by President PW Botha for release, on condition that he would not make himself guilty of planning, instigating or committing acts of violence for political purposes.

However, although others were released after accepting the offer, President Botha still did not release him; so, he sued under law of contract in the commercial courts (an offer plus an acceptance is a contract!). The State President eventually settled at the door of the court and the parole was made an order of court. Renfrew Christie had been behind bars from October 1979 to the end of November 1986, or for seven years and a month or two. He had spent over seven months in solitary confinement.

The original Terrorism trial acted as a whistle-blowing event, regarding the Apartheid regime's progress in nuclear weaponisation. Among other things, he was charged with sending to the ANC an official Atomic Energy Board study of where it would be safe to let off different sizes of nuclear explosions, doing no seismic damage to buildings. The peculiar feature of this study was that it was classified by official race group: that is it studied where damage would be done to White buildings, Coloured buildings, Indian buildings, and buildings occupied by black African people. In a severely segregated country, the document could be read as a study for nuclear ethnic cleansing using very small, kiloton-range nuclear weapons. Remarkably, he was found not guilty on this charge on appeal, because a copy, in Afrikaans, was freely available in the Washington DC Library of Congress!

During his long imprisonment, ANC operatives set off explosives effectively in several of the coal fired electric power stations concerning which he had been charged with providing information to the ANC; in the Sasol complexes as mentioned; and in the Koeberg nuclear power station.

In December 1982, ANC operatives Heather and Rodney Wilkinson walked back-pack bombs into the Koeberg station while it was still under construction, set the timers, and left. The resulting damage was costed by the auditors at \$ 519 million in US 1982 values. Crucially this was done immediately before the reactor fuel was to be loaded; that is, the explosions would pose no radioactive danger to the people of Cape Town.

This timing exactly followed the recommendations in the "confession" in the Renfrew Christie Terrorism Act trial of June 1980, which the judge had kindly read out for reporting by the whole world's press. As predicted in the "confession", the start-up of Koeberg was delayed for a number of years. It was a severe set-back for the Apartheid nuclear programme, achieved by the ANC's Heather and Rodney Wilkinson.

The Apartheid nuclear weapons were never used in anger. In 1993 State President F W de Klerk announced that South Africa had built six and a half nuclear weapons of the Hiroshima size but had disassembled them in 1990.

It remains a puzzle what nuclear weapons were to be installed on the advanced, miniaturised, three stage, low orbit satellite launcher, or intercontinental ballistic missile, which was dismantled at the same time and is to be seen in the SA Air Force Museum today; but it is obvious that it could not be the six and a half weapons which were dismantled, because judging by their photographs they were much too big. It must be presumed that if smaller warheads were built for the missiles, they too must have been dismantled, or exported, because there are no nuclear weapons in South Africa today.

It remains the case that the 1980 Terrorism Act trial of Renfrew Christie played a role in waking the world up to the fact of the building of the Apartheid nuclear weapons.

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