

Mandela's release a stunning change

It was 1962. Kennedy was still in office; Dallas was still far away. The Yankees took the Series. The Berlin Wall was a year old. And Nelson Mandela went to jail.

But that was 27 years ago. George Bush is president, the A's dominate baseball, and the Wall is no more. And finally, Mandela is a free man once more.

Though South African President Frederick de Klerk last week declared Mandela's "imminent" release, the actual event came sooner than most people expected. In 1964, Mandela was convicted of sabotage for starting a guerrilla war against the South African government. On Friday, he had a private meeting and posed for pictures with de Klerk.

Just another case of the incredible change that has overtaken the world in the past year.

It's almost impossible to gauge the level of Mandela's importance to the African National Congress movement. Even while he was in jail, the outlawed ANC saw him as their leader. He still is. Over 50,000 supporters — black and white — came out to Victor Verster prison and stood unshaded in a boiling sun to see Mandela's release. The moment he walked through the prison gate, he became one of the most powerful men in South Africa.

By releasing Mandela, de Klerk has shown he is committed to reforming South Africa and perhaps even ending apartheid. But while world leaders proclaim de Klerk a hero, the South African president is being cursed by a percentage of the white minority in his own country.

The South African conservative party's policy is to keep the country's 27 million blacks out of power. The recent decisions by de Klerk, they say, are "guaranteed" to end white minority rule. They have already declared their opposition to lifting the ban on the ANC. They have said they will fight any restrictions on apartheid, with force if necessary.

Before Mandela's release, conventional wisdom speculated on how long he would remain free. Since returning Mandela to jail would mean vehement political condemnation for de Klerk (and possibly, revolution), that doesn't look likely. Now, with the uproar the decision has caused, the question is how long Mandela will remain alive.

Mandela's release signals incredible change in South Africa. The possibilities for the country are enormous. However, the future is totally unknown. Anyone who thinks they can predict what will happen in the next few months is kidding themselves. De Klerk's concessions have created an unprecedented situation in South Africa.

But right now it's a joyous occasion. After Mandela was free, Bishop Desmond Tutu danced in the streets. His happiness is understandable. We feel it too.



U.S. drags heels on helping disarm Europe

In recent years, debate on three issues has kept the United States and Soviet Union from negotiating on several important agreements: air- and sea-launched cruise missiles, and the controversial Strategic Defense Initiative or "Star Wars" space-based anti-missile system.

The Soviet negotiators always had trouble bargaining with the United States on cruise missiles because the numbers of the short-range weapons are tough to verify. For instance, they wanted the United States to count each B-52 bomber as carrying 20 missiles, while the U.S. said it wanted to count each plane as carrying 10.

The Soviets also did not want to negotiate on a long-range missile treaty until the United States halted testing of SDI systems. The U.S. government's answer: no way. Then, suddenly, Secretary of State James Baker, who had been meeting with Soviet negotiators, announced late Friday night that the two sides had overcome the obstacles between themselves and the long-awaited Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) treaty.

Most importantly, the Soviets have taken away their Star Wars ultimatum, and on Saturday, the path looked clear for a major strategic arms treaty by June 11, the target date for the next summit meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush.

But Baker has been criticized by Soviet diplomats for not really meeting the Soviets' concessions in kind. Bush, since the announcement was made, has even told the American people not to hold their breath for a pre-summit treaty. The most encouraging quote from Baker was, "I think the relationship (between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.) is in better shape than it has been in the past."

This is disappointing, especially in light of the Soviets' most recent move: a complete unilateral troop withdrawal from Eastern Europe by 1995. All 555,000 troops would go home.

Recent events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are good tidings for all who have favored a relaxing of the superpowers' trigger fingers. Sadly, however, these changes in Europe also have been largely ignored by the United States government. The promised "Peace Dividends" have failed to materialize as the defense budget continues to grow, and it looks as if most of the Soviets' offers will remain as they are now: unilateral and ignored.

After 40-plus years of the Cold War standoff with Moscow, it is difficult to understand why the United States is not doing more to help speed the disarming of Europe, and thereby insuring the safety of the world. The foot-dragging by Baker and Bush is extremely discouraging.

Letters

Distortion

Ali Atoui's commentary (ODE, Feb. 8) about the supposed massacre of Azerbaijanis smacks of the media distortion he complains about.

I base the following information on reports in *Newsweek*, *The Oregonian* and *The Christian Science Monitor*. First, the initial conflict was not the Azeris rising in revolt against the Slavic Russians, but rather ethnic fighting with Armenians of the region. Only after the unrest had become practically open warfare did the Soviet army step in.

Yes, tanks crashed through barricades, but people were shooting at them from those barricades. Also, there were many reports of general attacks on Armenians by Azeris, including a woman thrown from a balcony onto the street.

In such a situation, military intervention seems reasonable. If the residents of Oregon and Washington started a shooting

war over the border, would not the military be called in to quell it?

I don't doubt that the Azeris consider themselves oppressed. The republics of Latvia and Estonia are similar examples of forced Russian integration with the native cultures. In this case, however, one must remember that it started as a regional dispute with the Armenians and transformed into an armed conflict.

People were being killed. It is quite possible that the Soviet intervention stopped the bloodshed from getting worse. To say that Muslims were the target of the action is ridiculous.

David Zartman
Eugene

Audience

A few weeks ago, I attended a theater performance put on by the University's Pocket Playhouse. Being far from theatrically literate, I was at first hesi-

tant. The biology department, you see, is trying to teach me to get excited about mold cultures and mutant gene; not the fine art of dramatic presentations.

Before going, I was assured that Pocket Playhouse productions are limited to an hour's length and the only cost is a dollar donation. This was a great comfort to one who hates to spend a lot of money to fall asleep in a padded chair.

The show was fantastic. My initially skeptical mind was pleasantly surprised. I enjoyed it so much that I went back the next weekend and watched another show.

The Pocket Playhouse is entirely student-directed and operated. Their enthusiasm, pride, and love of drama is hard to ignore. Do not overlook this extraordinary opportunity to see live theater. Take advantage of it. Without an audience, the show cannot go on.

Bradley Noren
Biology

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