

What new radicals added to democracy

THE NEW RADICALS: A GENERATIONAL MEMOIR OF THE 1970S

Glenn Moss
(Jacana)

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HE'S GOT a woolly jersey, a gentle face and looks more like a kind uncle than a new radical, but Glenn Moss was once a "terrorist". Of course, he was only a terrorist if you supported apartheid and, as we know, no one in South Africa ever supported apartheid.

South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle has many puzzle pieces: The armed struggle, the prisoners, the exiles, the underground activists, sanctions, the Black Consciousness Movement, Pan Africanists and liberals. Moss's piece of the political puzzle is the "radicals".

Moss, a student activist in the 1970s, writes about his own journey to radicalism from a schoolboy rebel at Pretoria Boys' High until he was eventually detained and charged under security legislation.

There's a large chunk of radical politics – struggles, campaigns, commissions and movements – that takes place between these two events and after his year-long trial, which ended in his acquittal.

Just who were the new radicals?

Well, that depends who you ask.

If you ask Google, the answer is a crap one-hit-wonder rock band that produced *You Get What You Give*.

However, if you ask Moss, he'll tell you the new radicals were a group of idealistic activists from black and white campuses who had the courage to imagine a different world, and then act on their imagination.

The book – to coin a Marxist slogan – "claims no easy victories". Fellow activist Horst Kleinschmidt, who introduced Moss at the Cape Town launch of his book, agreed: "A real and good history, to be credible to the next generation, even when popularised, has to be an honest assessment that shows mistakes, errors in direction and human failures. Glenn does this and does not spare himself."

The book launch was filled with former "new radicals" (and current "old lefties").

It's a well-researched and readable book that loosens political knots and gives a clear perspective of an era that hasn't been that well documented.

According to Moss, some of the most significant initiatives, moments and events of 1970s opposition politics have failed to find a place in the narrative being constructed now.

Moss reveals the politics of the politics. *The New Radicals* adds nuance, detail and texture to the South African narrative, adding not one but several pieces to the great South African Struggle puzzle.

Moss made an important contribution to our democracy when he put his life on the line for a just society.

He has now made another important contribution to our society by helping us understand how our democracy was achieved.