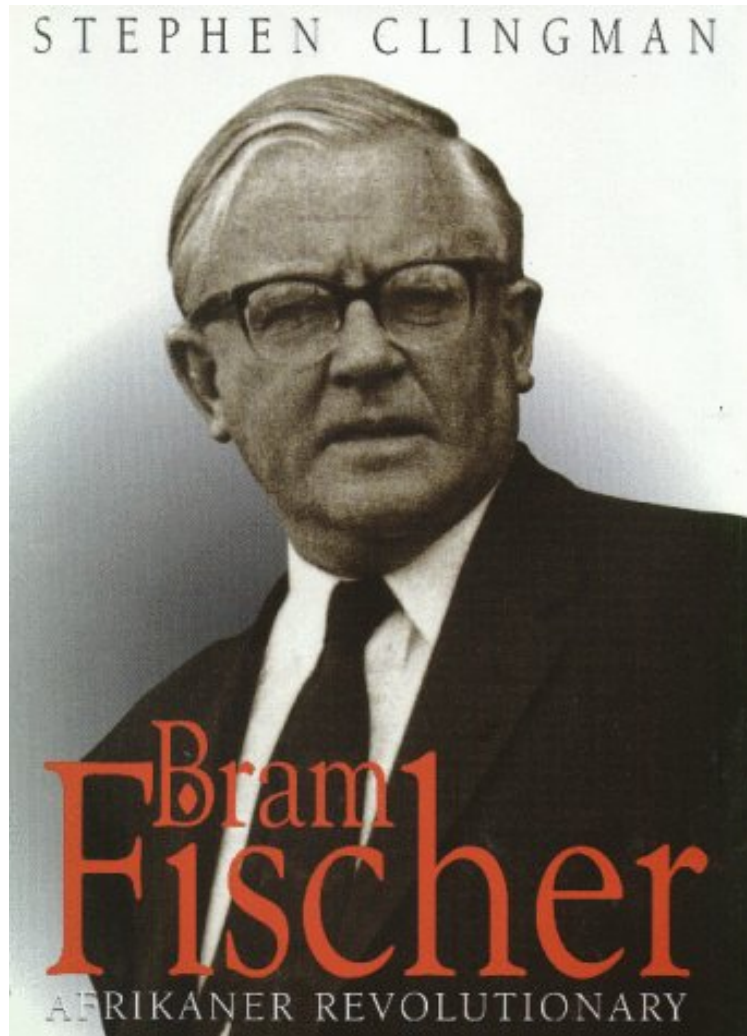


Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary (Myibuye Literature and History Series)

Stephen Clingman

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Stephen Clingman : Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary (Myibuye Literature and History Series) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary (Myibuye Literature and History Series):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Bram Fischer; Conscience of White South Africa By Diana Legg
Abram Fischer was a name I had never heard of until I happened to read Nelson Mandela's autobiography "Long Walk to Freedom". As Mandela detailed his relationship with Fischer, the courageous Afrikaner attorney who led Mandela's defense in the famous Treason Trial, I became at once intrigued and inspired. Upon research, I found this

superb account of Fischer by Stephen Clingman. Clingman, himself a white South African, has written an account of Fischer which brings the character of the man alive as he tells the story of his life's work, hopes, ideals, and dreams for a free and just South Africa. The book reads like a good novel, only it is not fiction, but the account of a man who actually lived as a white South African during the height of Apartheid. In his country's darkest hour Bram Fischer faced ostracism by his own Afrikaner community, and risked his own physical safety until he eventually faced imprisonment and death rather than leave the country he loved. Besides giving a brilliant account of South Africa's history, Clingman brings Fischer alive for the reader as a human being; His deep compassion and concern for the oppressed, his commitment to social and economic justice in his own country as well as worldwide; his great moral and physical courage in the face of tremendous odds, and his deep love for his wife Molly and his three children, Ruth, Ilse, and Paul. Bram Fischer, like Martin Luther King in the United States, had a dream of a world where all would be judged not by their colour but by the character of their own heart. In my own view, he was at times misguided in his tendency to idealize Stalin's Russia, but nonetheless, never lost his moral compass in his own life. I highly recommend this book for anyone who is tempted to lapse into cynicism and believe that it is human nature to choose expediency over principle. Decades after his death Bram Fischer continues to be living proof that it is possible to live in the "real world" nobly, according to the highest moral principles, even if that means losing one's professional and social standing in one's own community and risking loss of freedom and death.

13 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Superbly researched, beautifully written deeply inspiring
By Richard Pithouse (Pithouse@pixie.udw.ac.za) This book is a work of top class scholarship. But when, probably at 4:00am, you finally put it down you'll feel like you've been reading the most perceptive poetry or listening to the most beautiful music. Like the Pablo Neruda inspired debut Juluka album (Universal Men) it weaves a commitment to truth, a reverence for what's most noble in the human spirit and a feel for tragedy and transcendence together with real wisdom and what can only be described as melody. And, although this book is written with the almost clinical economy of style that characterises J.M. Coetzee's work, there is a passionate undercurrent almost as intense as the more explicit passion of a writer like Frantz Fanon. Bram Fischer, the Afrikaner Communist who is the subject of this book, was never as romantic a figure as Che Guevarra, Frederick Douglass or Steven Biko but Clingman is so aware of the drama and promise of everyday life that this book ends up being far more engaging than Jon Anderson's recent biography of Che Guevarra. The book does have its flaws - for example Clingman's understanding of the South African black consciousness movement is poor - but in a strange way the flaws are part of what give this book its character. That's because this book is about struggle and the flaws make the reader aware of Clingman's struggle to understand and explain Fischer and his country. So while you're reading about Fischer's struggles and South Africa's struggles and being inspired to think about other struggles Clingman's occasional slip ups make you aware of the author's struggle and leave you inspired by his tremendous, although not total, success. This book is important and valuable in itself. It's also an important work of history which, given the extent to which apartheid and 'postapartheid' mimic the new world order (global apartheid?) is profoundly relevant to life in 1999. Buy this book, immerse yourself in its riches until they become part of you, and you'll be a better person.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Communist Saint
By not me This is a gracefully-written biography of Bram Fischer, a South African lawyer who played a key role in the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1950s and '60s. In spite of his prominence in the Johannesburg bar, Fischer rejected the racist system that oppressed the majority black population. He joined the Communist Party, worked underground, and defended Nelson Mandela and other activists. Eventually, he was arrested and jailed during a crackdown on the Party. Unlike Mandela, who lived to see the collapse of apartheid, Fischer never entered the promised land: he died of cancer in 1975, at the high point of Afrikaner power. Nevertheless, his inclusive, tolerant approach to politics and his saintly personal example influenced a generation of ANC and Communist activists, helping to shape South Africa's current multiracial and democratic constitutional order. This lovely book is a moving testament to a lovely life. Although Clingman is a bit longwinded and uncritical, anyone interested in South African history will learn from and enjoy his tome. Law students and young lawyers should also read it. Six stars!

In 1964 Bram Fischer led the defence of Nelson Mandela in the Rivonia Trial. In 1966 Fischer was himself sentenced to life imprisonment in South Africa for his political activities against the policies of apartheid. Before his sentencing he had spent nine months underground, in disguise, evading a nationwide manhunt. He was South Africa's most wanted man, his cause recognised and celebrated around the world. What had brought him to these circumstances? And what led to his untimely death after nine years in prison? This biography follows a fascinating journey of conscience and personal transformation. Fischer was born into one of the most prominent Afrikaner nationalist families, yet came to understand that to be a South African in the fullest sense he had to identify with all of South Africa's people. A Rhodes Scholar and distinguished lawyer, endowed with gifts of intelligence, charisma, and integrity, he abandoned the temptations of power and prestige to ensure human rights and justice for all. Drawn to communism in order to solve problems of race, he offered revised versions and visions of both. Covering more than one hundred years of South African history, the book ranges from the stories of Fischer and his wife, Molly, to the courtroom drama of South Africa's great political trials, to the political intrigue of the 1960s and beyond.

"Clingman has given his fellow South Africans a slice of history to be deeply proud of, and one which may stop in their tracks some of those former collaborators engaged in rewriting history to make out that apartheid was not so very evil". -- (London) Guardian

About the Author
STEPHEN CLINGMAN is the author of *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* and editor of *Nadine Gordimer's The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places*. Born in South Africa, he is Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.