

SA cricket  
supremo, Ali  
Bacher's family was  
threatened. Now  
he'd think twice.



# FAME AND INFAMY

Not one South African “rebel” agreed with Apartheid. In fact, many actively protested against it. Opinion is divided as to whether they should be ashamed of the choices they made to play against the world’s best at a time when they were starved of company and competition, or happy to have made the most of rare opportunities. **CRISPIN ANDREWS** speaks to some of the main players in the dramas of WSC and the rebel tours.

**A**ny successful person from any walk of life will have memories from their personal and professional lives that make them feel fulfilled.

For a cricketer, this might be a successful game, series or season; maybe a match where they reached a treasured milestone or helped win a big competition. Of these memories, the player can feel proud, without inhibition or fear of ridicule or judgement.

That is, unless you happen to be a South African cricketer who played during the 1970s and 1980s, the decades during which the country was banned from international cricket as the rest of the cricketing world took a stand against its appalling Apartheid system.

In the eyes of the world, a South African cricketer of that vintage was, and still is, a South African first and a cricketer second. Even today, when these players recall their special times in the game, all the more important to them as the moments were fleeting, they are expected to do so with reticence, humility and even a tinge of embarrassment and guilt about what was going on in their country back then.

In 1969-70, South Africa had thrashed Bill Lawry’s Australians 4-0 to become unofficial world champions. Soon after, they were banned. They wouldn’t return until 1992. By then, African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela had been released from prison and measures were being taken to end Apartheid.

Back in the mid-’70s, though, established South African stars such as Barry Richards,

Eddie Barlow, Clive Rice and Mike Procter had long given up hope of their country returning to the Test arena. Even youngsters like Garth Le Roux and Kepler Wessels looked at their futures with pessimistic eyes.

All these players were in England for the start of the 1977 season. It was a particularly wet April, and Richards was starting his ninth year at Hampshire, increasingly fed up with the daily county grind.

Procter was in his first season as Gloucestershire’s captain, his ninth at the county. Rice had been at Nottinghamshire since 1975. Barlow joined Derbyshire in 1976. Le Roux, still at University in South Africa, studying to become a physical education teacher, would have a trial with Barlow’s team later in the year. Le Roux would later join Tony Greig-led Sussex in 1978. Kepler Wessels was Greig’s man for 1977.

Many of their county teammates, some of them lesser talents, would play international cricket during 1977, for England, Pakistan, India or the West Indies; the best these South

African stars could have hoped for was another year playing domestic cricket in England and back home.

Of those six, only Richards knew something was brewing in Australia that would change their lives. He was playing in Perth during the 1976-77 Australian season and had been approached by businessman Austin Robertson,

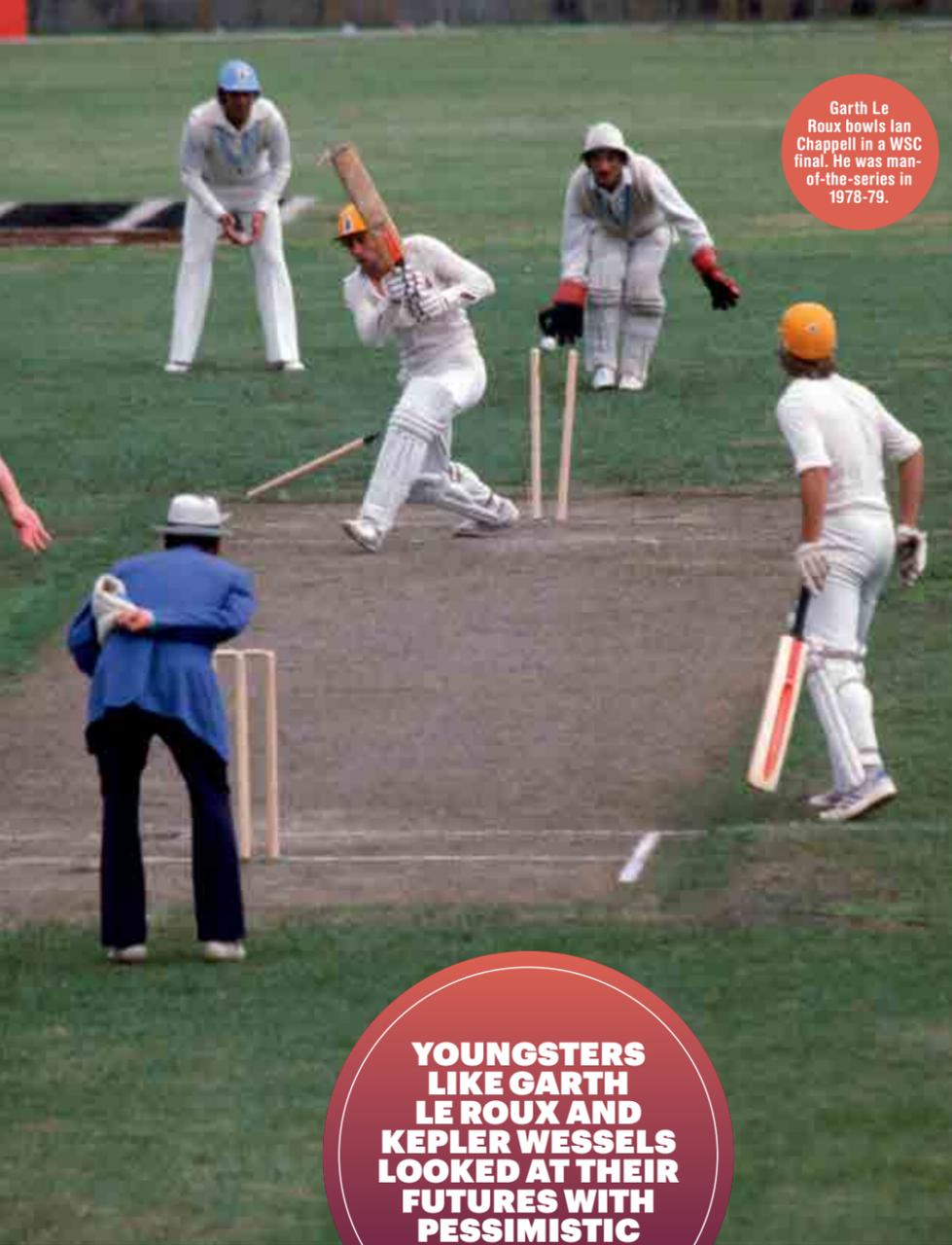
on behalf of television mogul Kerry Packer, about playing for a world XI in an unofficial tournament the following summer in Australia.

Richards had been told all the world’s best players would be involved, but he couldn’t tell his mates. No one was allowed to know about it until Packer had signed up all the players he wanted, sorted out their contracts and was ready to make his big announcement to the world.

“At the start of the 1977 season, there was still a concern that the cricket authorities might find out about World Series Cricket and nip it in the bud”, Richards recalls.

Things started moving during late April, 1977. As the rain continued to fall,

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Garth Le Roux bowls Ian Chappell in a WSC final. He was man-of-the-series in 1978-79.

**YOUNGSTERS LIKE GARTH LE ROUX AND KEPLER WESSELS LOOKED AT THEIR FUTURES WITH PESSIMISTIC EYES.**

Greg Chappell's touring Australians sat around in English dressing rooms and hotels, waiting for the Ashes to start. The English press looked forward to the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations and debated whether Geoff Boycott would make himself available for Test selection. No one really noticed that a large Australian businessman had started taking rooms at the Dorchester Hotel in London. Kerry Packer was in town to keep an eye on the Australian players who had already agreed to play for him and, with the help of Tony Greig, to recruit the world's best players from English county cricket. In 1977, all the top West Indians and Pakistanis were there and, of course, most of the best South Africans. Procter recalls meeting with Packer, Greig and Barlow, at the Dorchester, where they discussed who should be in the World XI. "Denys Hobson and Graeme Pollock, we all agreed", Procter says. Packer signed both, but later in the year,

when Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley objected to West Indian cricketers playing against South Africans who weren't in county cricket, the WSC supremo had no choice but to leave out Pollock and Hobson. But Packer did pay their contracts in full. The Gleneagles Agreement was cited during in these negotiations. In June 1977, the Commonwealth Heads of State had signed it, discouraging, but not outlawing, sporting links with South Africa. Presumably it was okay for West Indian cricketers to play against, and with, South Africans in county cricket. You can imagine what Viv Richards, Andy Roberts, Clive Lloyd and the rest would have told Mr Manley, if he'd tried to take away their county contracts. There were always contradictions. Richards remembers a call from Packer early that summer, asking him to bring Hampshire teammate, Gordon Greenidge, to the Dorchester so Packer could sign up the West Indian opener for WSC. "At first, I thought



Sylvester Clarke – a fast-bowling talent banned by the West Indies board.

it was one of the Hampshire guys taking the mickey", Richards says. This was how Packer did business. The following summer, Le Roux had hardly stepped off the plane for his trial at Sussex when a big limousine arrived at Tunbridge Wells where Sussex seconds were playing Kent. "The driver took me all the way to London, and there in the hotel foyer was Mr Packer with Greigy", Le Roux says. "Hey, Garth," Packer called out. "Tony tells me you can bowl fast. I'm going to take him at his word and give you a go." Packer then put £500 in Le Roux's pocket, told him to go out and have good time in London and then get back to Sussex and get the county contract that would make him eligible for WSC selection. A couple of years ago, I interviewed the late Clive Rice. Here was one of the toughest cricketers speaking about his time in WSC with the glee of a schoolboy in a sweet shop, after years spent peering through the window. Rice was just grateful to be there, loved every second and was even scared that if he didn't play well enough, he'd be sent home. Rice is said to have wept uncontrollably when he found out in 1979 that Packer had come to terms with the Australian Cricket Board and that there wouldn't be a third year. As Procter says: "For us South Africans it was a no-brainer." Richards adds: "We didn't have anyone to play against." Le Roux remembers telling Greig that he would swim to Australia to play for Packer. When Ali Bacher offered Le Roux a big contract to stay in South Africa and play for Transvaal, the fast bowler looked at the South African cricket supremo like he was mad. "It was a very short conversation with Ali", he says. "I had been playing in the Currie Cup

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(South Africa's domestic competition) for a few years, I wanted to go to Australia and see if I could play against the best." Richards earned next-to-nothing playing for Natal. And at Hampshire, there was always an administrator standing between players and a pay rise. "I had been out of it [international cricket] for a long time, and was in my mid-30s," he said. "I wasn't quite sure if I was up to speed or not, but I didn't want to miss out." It turned out that Richards was very much up to the challenge. He averaged 79.14 in his five Supertests over the two seasons, although he fared less well in the limited-overs games and against lesser players in the WSC Cavaliers. Procter and Rice chipped in with some good performances with both bat and ball, as the World XI won five of its six Supertests. Barlow did well when called on in the one-dayers, although he got a pair in his only Super Test, the 1978-79 final. "Eddie was 38 by then and past his best," Procter says. "But his attitude was always the same: competitive, excited. Whether it was the beginning or end of his career, Eddie was always Eddie." Under Barlow, the WSC Cavaliers, a team of "second-string" players, were surprisingly competitive against the big-three WSC sides. The most notable South African successes in WSC were the two youngsters. Kepler Wessles, playing for Australia in year two (he was called up for national service in South Africa and so missed the first year of WSC) because Kerry Packer and Ian Chappell thought that Australia needed another opener, scored 126 against the West Indies. He was Australia's second-top scorer in the 1978-79 Supertests and third in the one-day averages. The same year, Le Roux was the second-best one-day bowler and topped the Supertest list, out-bowling Dennis Lillee, Jeff Thomson, Imran Khan and all the West Indians. "When I first arrived in Australia I remember seeing Viv Richards in the hotel foyer, where the teams were staying, looking at this brand new Holden Commodore, the reward for the man of the series," Le Roux says. "Viv obviously fancied his chances of winning that car. But he didn't win it. I did." Pretty much all the players say that WSC was the toughest cricket they ever played, a nod to the quality of the contest and a mark of respect to the players and their efforts. When those South Africans say this, however, also in there is an acknowledgement that they were as good as the world's best and better than the rest. Unfortunately, should any of them dare express the slightest resentment at how politics ruined their sporting careers, they are castigated as selfish, insensitive and unaware, at best. At worst, they are looked at as beneficiaries of and apologists for, Apartheid. Or worse still, closet racists. The Apartheid system and the South African regime was abhorrent, their actions and attitudes indefensible; no reasonable person could claim otherwise. But teams from the so-called free world have played sport against other regimes responsible for widespread death, destruction and the suppression of human rights – such as Stalin's Russia, Pinochet's Chile, Milosevic's Yugoslavia and Mugabe's Zimbabwe. Even Hitler's Germany was allowed to play

at football's 1938 World Cup. And two years earlier, the world turned out for the Nazis' very own Berlin Olympics, where, thankfully, black American athletes Jesse Owens, Ralph Metcalfe and a few others shoved a dose of reality up some seriously deluded Aryan backsides – not before the US had withdrawn two Jewish runners from their crack relay team so as not to embarrass Hitler. On the rugby field, the British Lions, France, Ireland and England toured Apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. The South African rugby team also toured New Zealand in 1981. Back in the late '70s, cricket was still the establishment's game. It was also, however, the game of the Commonwealth. Many well-to-do Englishmen still had business interests in South Africa and some might have even secretly shared the South African regime's views. But dissent about

government wrongdoing was more vocal than ever and English governments were keen to pursue more co-operative policies towards Commonwealth partners. Of the older South African players, Barry Richards retired after WSC, uninspired by the thought of more domestic drudgery. Barlow and Procter, carried on. "I had nothing arranged for life after cricket," Procter says. "I just wanted to keep playing for as long as I could." Rice put his all into Nottinghamshire and Transvaal. Le Roux bowled for Western Province and Sussex. Wessles joined Queensland and spent the next four years qualifying to play for Australia. It wasn't too long, however, before a new opportunity appeared for these players to be tested at, almost, the highest level. South African Cricket Board officials had for a while been hoping to tempt top players from Test-



Clive Rice was just grateful to be selected.



Fan protests cut short the English rebel tour.

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playing countries to play unofficial Tests in South Africa. When the first England tour was announced for 1981-82, the cricketing world joined forces with the opponents of Apartheid to condemn the project.

Whereas WSC had been mocked as a circus, the 1980s games in South Africa were derided as “rebel tours” and “pirate cricket”. The players, especially the West Indians and Sri Lankans, who toured in 1982-83 and 1983-84, were castigated as mercenaries who would happily take blood-money to prop up a diabolical regime.

The English players had short international bans; the Sri Lankans and West Indians were banned for life. Many of them, on returning home, were ostracised by their communities. Some were forced to leave their countries.

“I understand why they did it,” Richards says. “Other people might think you are selling out your country, your race, but they might think, ‘I have to do this for my family.’”

Le Roux adds: “You only have a small window as a cricketer to make some cash, and honestly, these guys were paid peanuts back in the West Indies.”

At the time, however, the South African players weren’t thinking of the repercussions. They were just excited at the chance of playing for their country. According to Le Roux, England was “a decent side, who knew their way around a cricket field”. However whilst the South African board marketed them as the actual England team, minus Ian Botham, in reality captain Graham Gooch and off-spinner John Emburey, were the only Test regulars in their prime. Geoff Boycott, Alan Knott, Derek Underwood, John Lever and Chris Old were at the end of their careers. The rest were on the fringes of the Test selection.

South Africa won comfortably and the following year, hammered a weak Sri Lankan side. It was the West Indians who gave South Africa its sternest challenge.

West Indian captain Lawrence Rowe and

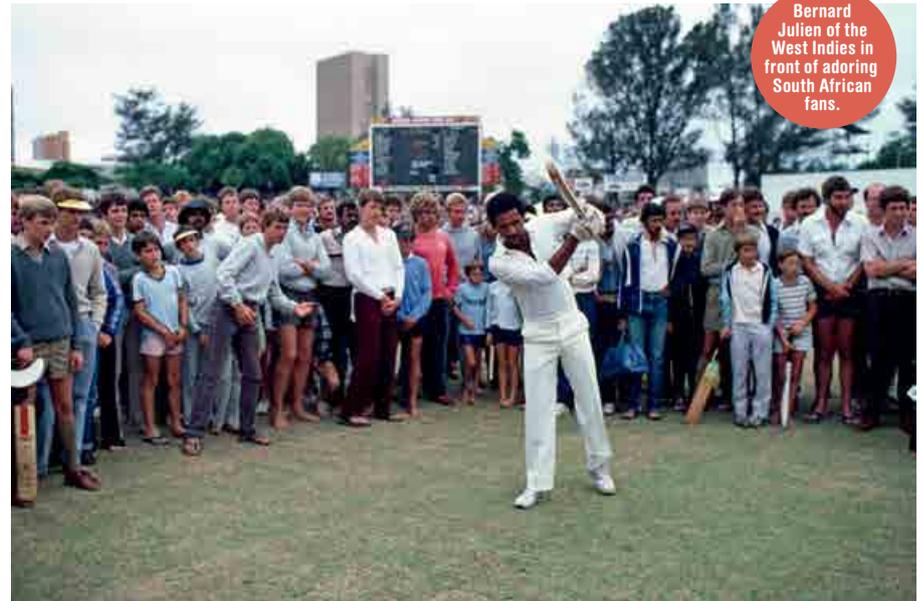
Alvin Kallicharan were still high-quality players. Sylvester Clarke, Colin Croft and Ezra Moseley may not have been getting into the West Indies team, such was the strength of their fast bowling, but they still made for a formidable pace attack.

“Sylvester Clarke was the fiercest competitor you could come across”, Le Roux says. “For a split-second you’d think you’re hitting it and then, before you knew it, you’d be wearing it. We had some wars. Whoever got the first bouncer in was one up. I loved all that.”

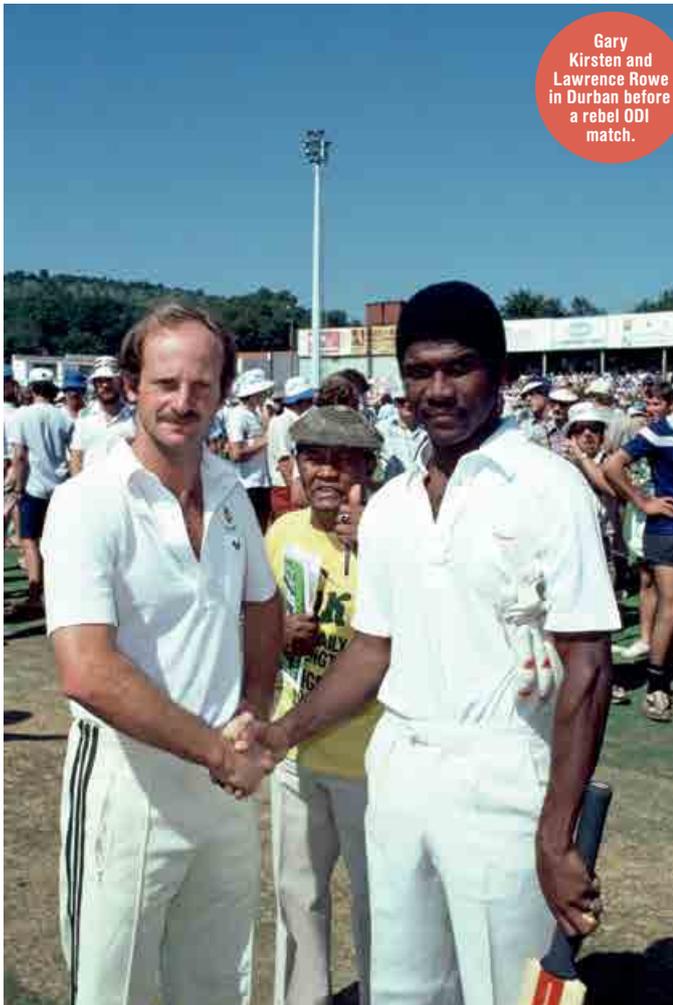
Procter believed that South Africa needed the rebel tours to keep cricket in the country

alive. “The Currie Cup was a high standard, but we needed more,” he says. “Fewer people were watching, players were dropping out early or going abroad to play. We needed international cricket and big names.”

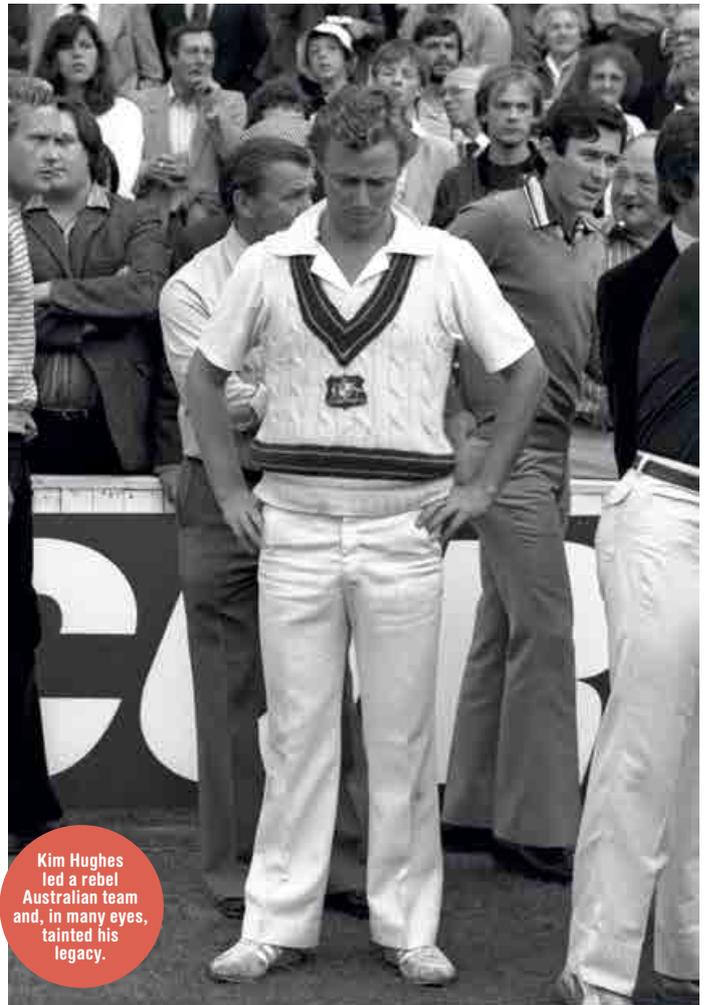
Only Barry Richards was less-than excited by the rebel tours. He was 38 when the England team arrived and felt pressured by the South African Cricket Board to come out of retirement. “I played a few games against England and the West Indies. The board wanted big South African names to hang the series on. I wasn’t interested in playing against Sri Lanka. They were a very poor side.”



Bernard Julien of the West Indies in front of adoring South African fans.



Gary Kirsten and Lawrence Rowe in Durban before a rebel ODI match.



Kim Hughes led a rebel Australian team and, in many eyes, tainted his legacy.

There would be more rebel tours to South Africa. An Australian team, under Kim Hughes, came out in 1985-86 and 1986-87. Then the final tour, an England side under Mike Gatting, took place in 1989 and faced fierce protests from locals. It eventually had to be cancelled after a few games.

By the time the Australian team toured, only Rice and Le Roux remained from South Africa's World Series cohort. Wessles played for Australia in '86-87 and South Africa in 1989. Graeme Pollock, still going in his mid-forties, was the only player left from the 1970 Test side.

South Africa was still too strong for Hughes's Australians, but Le Roux, by then the veteran leader of the attack, admits standards had slipped from what they'd been ten years earlier. "We could hold our own with the West Indies' second-string, but no one would have been able to stand up to their Test team, with those fast bowlers and dominant batsmen, they were too good for anyone."

Richards and Procter think, however, that the South Africa team of the early-to-mid-1970s would have beaten anyone from that time.

"Great players were stepping out", Richards says, "Trevor Goddard, Peter Pollock, Colin Bland, Ali Bacher and Denis Lindsay. But even better players were coming through: Rice, Le Roux, Wessels, Vince Van der Bijl, Lee Irvine, Ken McEwan and Peter Kirsten. Add Denys Hobson, one of the better leg-spinners

I ever saw. Openers Jimmy Cook and Henry Fotheringham were coming on the scene. I think we would have tested the best."

In spite of what they were and might have been, today, this collection of good, great and all-time great cricketers, are largely ignored by the cricketing authorities in their own country. They played when the country was ruled by an illegitimate regime, which in the authorities' eyes, makes them illegitimate cricketers.

South African Test numbers (the numbers allocated to players upon being selected for the national team) start with the 1992 team. The likes of Graeme Pollock, Eddie Barlow, Barry Richards and Mike Procter don't have one.

Gerald Majola, Cricket South Africa's chief executive after re-entry, even tried to get the Marylebone Cricket Club at Lord's to remove pre-1970 Test matches involving South Africa from the record books. The rebel tours are not recognised as first-class matches by the International Cricket Council. Nor is World Series Cricket.

Ali Bacher now says he would have thought twice about organising the rebel tours had he known how many people in South Africa felt about them. Dr Bacher doesn't speak to the media any more after comments made last year, which he says resulted in a bad experience for him and his family.

Wessels doesn't like to talk about the rebel tours other than to say he wasn't too keen

on the idea at the time and to remind people that he dropped out of the Gatting tour after a couple of games. He now works in the media in South Africa these days, and presumably remembers how Richards and Rice were ostracised after making remarks that upset the authorities.

Richards, though, continues to be a vocal critic. "It's just ridiculous. WSC shouldn't be first-class cricket – it should be Test cricket."

Procter is forthright: "Listen to Cricket South Africa today, and you'd think that we were the architects of apartheid. It's as if, before 1992, cricket didn't exist in South Africa."

Procter does think, though, that the original ban was fair and that at no point should Apartheid South Africa have been playing international cricket. Graeme Pollock believes most of the players protested in their own way, but that perhaps, with hindsight they should have done more (see his comments in *Your Call*, page 24).

Richards, Procter, Barlow and the rest were sportsmen, not Nationalist politicians or racist chiefs of police. One injustice doesn't have to lead to another. They didn't play cricket with the Union flag draped over their shoulders, nor carry copy of the 1950 Population Registration Act in their back pockets. They just played the game very, very well and it's for their talents and their deeds on the pitch that they deserved to be remembered and revered. 🍌