

For the sake of Afrikaner power?

The release of racist murderer Barend Strydom was not a mistake, says HANS PIENAAR. Rather it was part of the calculated creation and manipulation of racial chaos for the sake of preserving Afrikaner power.

THE MOST distressing thing about the death of American student Amy Biehl was not its suddenness, irrationality, or arbitrariness. On the contrary, it was that she died in the service of a terrible logic, in the playing out of an inevitable and entirely predictable scenario.

Not that there is anything acceptable about the current pathetic politics and puerile pontifications of the parasitic PAC. The logic and rationality is that of the current Afrikaner power elite, which has laid the parameters enabling Biehl's death in a series of calculated acts which, I am sure, will ensure for it a place in history as one of the most evil regimes of the century.

Most of us will fondly remember the goodwill that blossomed after the unbanning of the ANC and other political organisations. The first act that began to erode this goodwill was the freeing of multiple murderer Barend Strydom, the first of many releases of racist murderers, the most recent a policeman who had served only three years of a 20-year sentence.

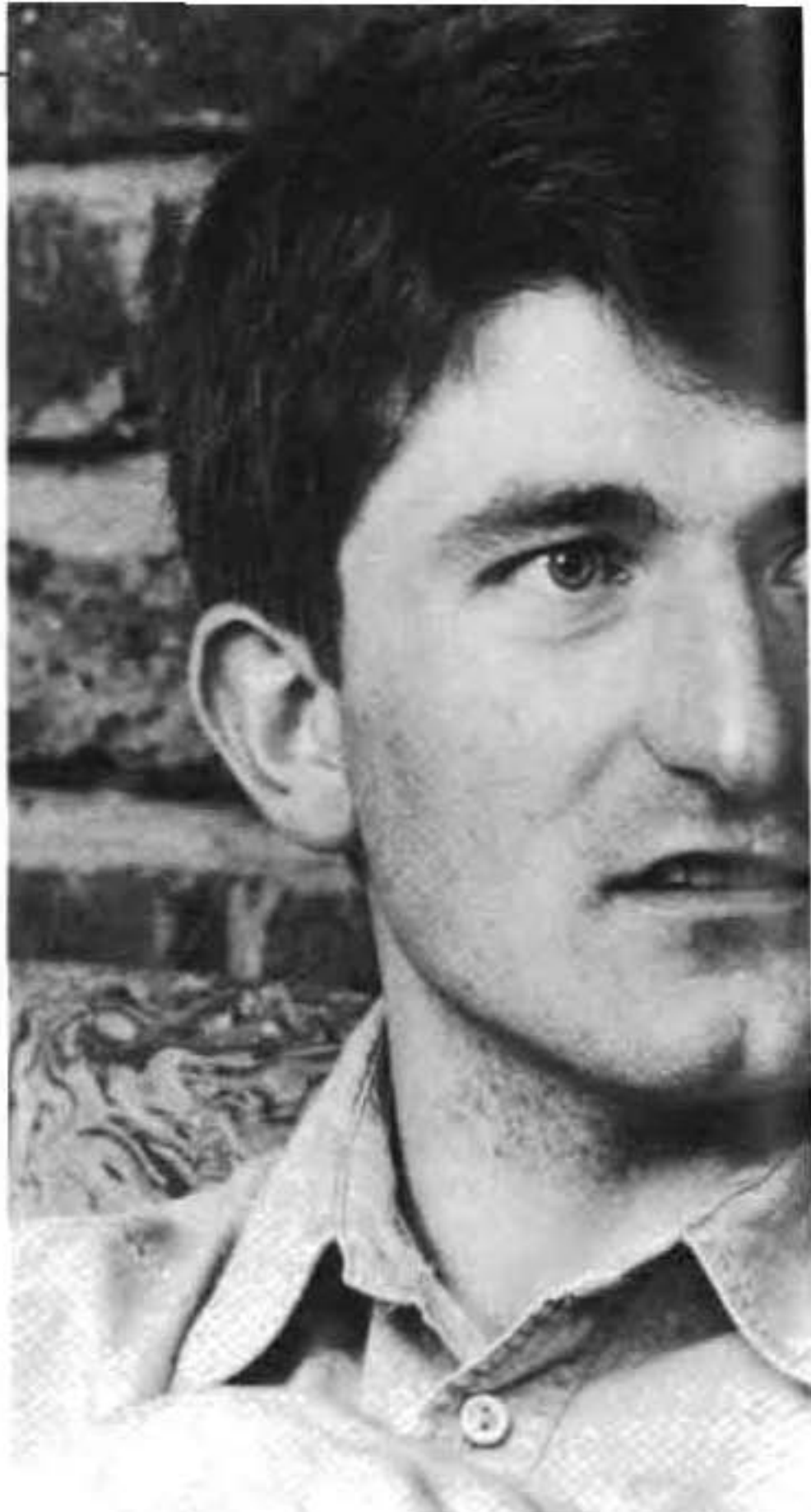
What these releases did was to write in stone that it was acceptable to kill members of other races. Already at the trials of those accused of the Biehl and Saint James killings placards are being brandished that use Barend Strydom's name as a defence, while across the country right-wing attacks on blacks continue unabated.

Was Strydom's release an error of judgement? A cynical political ploy that went awry? My experience in the bosom of the Afrikaner establishment has led me to believe otherwise: that it is part of the calculated creation and manipulation of racial chaos, for the sake of the quite remorseless promotion of Afrikaner power.

At the time of Strydom's release I worked for *Rapport* as a sub-editor. *Rapport* was the newspaper that gave Strydom money for his "life story", which amounted to a page full of happy photographs and reports written in a style that can only be described as yellow press praise poetry.

I refused to edit any of these reports and wrote a memo to editor Izak de Villiers requesting leave to make my opposition to the newspaper's action public. I also stated that I would desist from this if *Rapport* gave the same amount of money to Strydom's victims, and if De Villiers would prohibit the racism that broke out among staff members at the time.

To my surprise, De Villiers agreed. But after some months it became clear that nothing was going to happen. On the contrary, racist remarks increased and *Rapport* fed readers a steady diet of further right-wing praise poetry.



BAREND STRYDOM: Racist pawn of Afrikaner establishment?

After the David Webster inquest, for example, most of a page was devoted to Ferdi Barnard of hit squad notoriety, serving also as free advertising for his new business as a private detective. *Rapport* hailed Oupa Gqozo as a leader of the future just before the Bisho massacre. It urged votes for Jonas Savimbi just before Unita refused to accept the result of the Angolan election.

The right-wing sympathies of *Rapport* under De Villiers are clear. Indeed, the tendency has been to write him off as a maverick, because the right wing is so out of touch with reality.

But De Villiers is no maverick. Quite the contrary: he is a member of the Broederbond and seems to enjoy the backing of the Afrikaner establishment.

Complaints from the public about *Rapport*'s engagement with Strydom yielded no fruit, for example. The newspaper enjoyed a technical acquittal on charges of contravening the ethical guidelines of the Media Council, then chaired by another Broeder-

bonder, Kobus van Rooyen.

Indeed, De Villiers himself told me not to make the mistake of dismissing him as a maverick. The Afrikaner establishment was behind him all the way, he said, adding that he would deny saying this were I ever to repeat it.

At a subsequent Afrikaanse Skrywersgilde meeting I heard from writer Braam de Vries that a number of "progressive Broeders" like himself opposed De Villiers's editorship but their hands were tied and they were being sidelined.

I personally am therefore satisfied that De Villiers was telling the truth about having the backing of the Afrikaner establishment. All that remains is to ask what part people like Barend Strydom play in the establishment's plans.

His release could not have been an error of judgement, for there

myths, relentlessly propagated, to mobilise Afrikaners. But the problem with mobilising Afrikaners today - and Ton Vosloo of Nasionale Pers, for one, believes Afrikaners can only survive as a group with "power" - is that the huge right wing has only its racism to go on. The only way in which the right wing could be drawn into some kind of unity with the establishment was if the latter accepted its racism.

Thus racism had to be legitimised in some way or other. The "necessary illusion", as American media theorist Noam Chomsky called it, had to be created that the racism of the right wing existed in the service of a greater ideal, that of Afrikaner survival.

When I asked De Villiers how he could do such a thing as give Strydom money, he said one had to have "deernis" (a word meaning both "sympathy" and "charity") with him. Here is the myth: Strydom and people like him are not criminals but tragic victims of history.

This echoes the John the Baptist syndrome in De Villiers's own political writing, in terms of which the Strydoms of today are heralds of future rebellions, unless people stop pushing the right wing too far. However, such rebellions are already being encouraged by the *Rapport* approach - one of making "house friends" of people like Strydom, which is how Wits academic Gerrit Olivier described it.

I am among that handful of analysts who don't believe that such rebellions will occur to any critical extent. But the problem is that this kind of thinking legitimises all other kinds of violence.

In terms of this approach, the continuing mayhem in Natal is not the result of the ruthless terror perpetrated by another fascist organisation backed by the establishment, but the mythic struggle for survival of an ethnic group forced to use violence, just like the Afrikaners.

PAC violence and Amy Biehl's death would fit a game plan of legitimising racial murders perfectly. They demonstrate firstly that racism is a fact of life, which has to be accepted and accommodated in politics. They also show that the unreasonableness of other groups can only be countered by the "purported unreasonableness" of people like Strydom.

When a mob of right-wingers recently besieged the ANC office in Bothaville, new National Party propaganda chief Marthinus van Schalkwyk was quick to assert that the right wing and the PAC desperately needed each other to survive. An ironic statement, because with the Afrikaner establishment around, who needs the right wing?

Hans Pienaar is a sub-editor at *The Star* in Johannesburg and author of the prize-winning *Die Derde Oorlog Teen Mapoch*.

Editor replies

SO, ACCORDING to Mr Hans Pienaar's "terrible logic" I am a kingpin of the "Afrikaner establishment", deeply involved - along with Ton Vosloo, Nasionale Pers, Marthinus van Schalkwyk of the National Party et al - in a racist right wing Afrikaner plot of some sorts. I give Mr Pienaar full marks for his imagination.

As for being an Afrikaner - why should I be secretive about that? And why should I deny it in public?

As for my being a Broederbonder, indeed a rank and file member: that is no secret either.

As for publishing Barend Strydom's story: quite a few publications were after that one, beating on the doors of the Sentrale, ready with their cheque books, I surmise. Those are the ways of a newspaper, as Mr Pienaar should know.

But part of a "plot"? "Gracious me!" as my maiden aunt used to say. Is Mr Pienaar trying to imitate Robert Ludlum?

As for having the wholehearted backing of the Afrikaner establishment? A wise old cleric of yesteryear, on hearing in a synod that he was the "voice of the church", remarked with a twinkle in his eye: "Ek beswyk byna onder die eer my aangedoen." (And, just to make sure that Mr Pienaar does not completely misunderstand, as in the case of his Oupa Gqozo interpretation, it is meant ironically.)

As for being racist: Even Mr Pienaar cannot believe that. In the hectic days before the referendum when *Rapport* fought tooth and nail for a "Yes" vote, he came to me saying that he saw how I fought the Conservative Party and the right wing and how could he help me nail them still more?

A quick glance at my earliest writings, dating back to the 1960s, should convince Mr Pienaar even more of the errors of his sayings. My lament on the shameful treatment of Basil D'Oliviera should suffice.

As for Mr Braam de Vries and "a number of progressive Broeders like himself having their hands tied about my editorship" - that is news to me. Only Mr de Vries can clarify his "broederskap".

As for Mr Pienaar and his sojourn at *Rapport*: perhaps he may ponder the remark attributed to Prince Talleyrand when told that a member of Napoleon's court was uttering unkind things about him: "How strange," he said, "that this man should indulge in that type of criticism. I have never done him a favour."

Izak de Villiers

have since been numerous opportunities to rectify such an error. The most recent was Strydom's demented statement on an Australian television programme that he would kill blacks again. Despite this clear violation of parole conditions, he is still a free man.

Again *Rapport* seems to supply an answer. When he was freed, its triumphant banner headline - you can't get bigger - was "Wit Wolf is nog hy". This means literally: Strydom (who belongs to a possibly one-man organisation called the White Wolves) is still the person he was. However, it also invokes the well-known ending of a novel from the 1950s, *Bart Nel*.

This told the story of a participant in the 1914 Afrikaner rebellion, which Jan Smuts called the Sixpenny Rebellion because it started after Boer War hero Christiaan de Wet was fined sixpence for flogging a black man tied to a wagon wheel.

The Afrikaner establishment, especially the Broederbond, has always relied on huge