

MEMOIRS OF A TRIBALIST

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THE most interesting account of the origins of the Bantu National Socialist Party is that which occurs in the *Memoirs* of A. J. van der Merwe. According to van der Merwe, a meeting of the Twelve Apostles of the Broederbond¹ was held in the summer of 1960, at which the subject was introduced by the following speech:—

“Brothers, I think we have all lived through the last few years with a growing realisation of two facts. First, that the Bantu are going to have a larger share of the goods of this country. Second, that the Bantu are going to decide the political future of this country. Some of us have faced these facts with blank despair. I think it will be more profitable to face them with a question. Are the Bantu to obtain their larger share at the expense of the Afrikaner or at the expense of the Uitlander², and are they going to exercise their decisive voice in favour of the Afrikaner or in favour of the Uitlander?”

“I can see some of you shrugging your shoulders. You are thinking, no doubt, that these questions have long ago been answered against us—that the Bantu have long ago decided that we are their enemies and the Uitlanders, comparatively speaking, their friends. Brothers, if our adversaries had taken their opportunities, this would be true. Fortunately, they have not. The history of the Bantu in this country is a history of betrayal by that section of the white population in which they have put their faith. Whenever the Uitlander has had to choose between being true to those principles which could have won him the loyalty of the Bantu, and appeasing us, he has chosen to appease us. For these reasons, I consider that it is not yet too late.”

We have only van der Merwe's word for it that this speech was ever made, and historians are not unanimous as to the weight to be attached to van der Merwe's word. Be that as it may, the Bantu National Socialist Party was formed at a meeting held in the Lady Selborne Location, Pretoria, on the 10th October, 1961. It was a small meeting, largely ignored by the Press. *Die Transvaler*

¹ A secret society under the leadership of 12 “Apostles” to which powerful members of the Nationalist Party belong. Aiming at domination of South Africa, it was exposed and condemned by General Hertzog, former Nationalist leader and Prime Minister.

² “Outsider”, an Afrikaans word for those who are not “indigenous” to South Africa, and usually applied to the English, Indians and Jews.

was the only newspaper which published the "three basic aims" of the BNSP. These were:—

1. Unity of the indigenous nations of South Africa, both Black and White, against the alien exploiter;
2. Separate development of the indigenous peoples of South Africa, both Black and White, in such a way as to give full expression to the racial genius of each of them;
3. Replacement of the alien parliamentary system by a system of government in accordance with the organic will of the indigenous peoples of South Africa, both Black and White.

The public heard no more about the BNSP until July, 1962, when an Indian shop was burned and looted in Germiston. At first the incident took an inconspicuous place in the daily catalogue of violent crime. Then an article was published in *Drum*, pointing out the fact that the emblem of three crossed assegais which had been painted on the walls of the looted shop was the badge of the BNSP. The article went on to allege that a BNSP organizer had been spreading anti-Indian propaganda in Germiston for some months and that this man was one of ten full-time organizers whom the party was employing in the Transvaal. Where, asked *Drum*, was the money coming from? The BNSP replied with an abusive statement about "scurrilous rags, financed by alien capital and modelled on the gutter press of Europe". The question about the source of the party's finances was not answered.

The assegai emblem appeared again on the houses of three African National Congress officials who were murdered during the next three months. All three cases remained unsolved. The alarm which these events caused was increased when the party held a rally at Alexandra to mark its first anniversary. The Supreme Chief of the party, one Ezekiel Ngcobo, was escorted to the platform by a bodyguard of youths dressed in black "tsotsi trousers" and imitation leopard-skin shirts. The proceedings consisted of a two-hour harangue by Ngcobo, composed mainly of obscene abuse of Indians, Jews and Englishmen.

At the next session of Parliament, the Minister of Native Affairs was asked what steps he proposed to take to curb the activities of the BNSP. He replied that he was surprised to see that those Honourable Members who had hitherto been prepared to advocate unlimited freedom of political action for Natives were now calling for the prohibition of Native political parties. He hoped that these Members realised the degree of their own

responsibility for any undesirable trends which might appear among Native politicians. The Government's attitude remained perfectly consistent. The position was being closely watched, and agitation would not be tolerated. There could be no question, however, of preventing the Native from expressing his legitimate aspirations.

The BNSP won its first major success in the following year. A party rally in Alexandra culminated in an attack on Indian and European shops in Second Avenue. The Commission appointed to inquire into the incident reported that the presence of these shops had "created an intolerable situation". A Group Areas proclamation was swiftly promulgated and Ezekiel Ngcobo opened a large grocery store in Second Avenue a few months later.

Next came the Bethal coup. There was a minor mutiny in the Nationalist Party when the Government appointed a Commission to investigate BNSP allegations of maltreatment of African farm labourers in the Bethal district. The mutiny simmered down when the Commission sat and it was noticed that the evidence presented by the BNSP organizers related solely to farms owned by English and Jewish farmers. The Commission found that the position on these farms was intolerable and that it was essential to create a Native area in the district so as to give the African inhabitants an alternative to work for capitalist farmers. A block of English and Jewish owned land was proclaimed as a Native group area. The Minister of the Interior announced that this area "might in the future be increased by the addition of other similar land". This threat sufficed to persuade most of the remaining non-Afrikaans farmers in the district to sell out at bargain prices to Afrikaners. The local branch of the Nationalist Party rescinded its resolution of protest and thanked the Minister.

The membership of the BNSP began to increase spectacularly. In its early days, it had recruited mainly among the juvenile delinquents of the city locations, who saw it simply as a bigger and better gang than the Russians or the Spoilers. Now it began to appear to the ambitious African as the most likely road to power and wealth. Those who still boggled at its crudity and its pro-Nationalism were faced with the question "What alternative is there?" The combination of Government repression and BNSP terrorism had smashed the African National Congress beyond hope of repair. There was no encouragement to be

found among the English-speaking whites. Their Press was resounding with frantic appeals for "white unity" and for "the abandonment of the shameful game of encouraging native truculence".

The position which the BNSP had achieved by the end of 1969 may be illustrated by a small incident of that year. Ezekiel Ngcobo announced at a party rally that the smoking of alien cigarettes by the Bantu people had created an intolerable situation. He had asked the Land Tenure Advisory Board for an enquiry into the position of certain tobacco factories which were situated on land which was "historically and inalienably Bantu". Within a month, the factories which he had named were voluntarily transferred, on easy terms, to the Bantu National Tobacco Company (chairman, Ezekiel Ngcobo). The necessary funds were lent by an Afrikaans tobacco concern.

The South African Republic came formally into existence on the 16th December, 1970. The Natal Provincial Convention proclaimed the existence, as from the 1st January, 1971, of the independent Dominion of Natal. A.C.F. units were mobilised by both the Union and the Natal Governments, and an armoured brigade was assembled at Standerton. Both sides expressed the hope that hostilities might be avoided, and for ten days the opposing forces watched each other across the frontier.

In the meantime, the BNSP had called a mass rally in Durban to protest against the secession of Natal. The rally was banned and the Provincial Chief of the BNSP was arrested. The Supreme Chief appealed to the Union Government for "protection of the rights of South African citizens being oppressed by the Natal rebels". He was told that this aspect of the situation was enjoying the close attention of the Government.

On the 12th January, the Acting Provincial Chief in Natal proclaimed a general strike and called for volunteers to form partisan groups. These, he said, would receive arms by parachute from the Union Government.

On the 13th, the Natal forces were recalled from the frontier to maintain order in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Zululand. The strike call was widely obeyed, bands of uniformed BNSP members appeared in the streets of the cities and white citizens barricaded themselves into their homes. On the 14th, troops fired on BNSP demonstrators in Durban, the Acting Provincial Chief was shot while resisting arrest, and two farmhouses were burned in Zululand. On the 15th, the Union Defence Force

was ordered to move into Natal to restore order. The panic-stricken Natalians offered no resistance. The Government denied that it had ever intended to arm BNSP partisans, dealt severely with a few Africans who ignored the BNSP call to return to work and then proclaimed an amnesty for both the white rebels and the African strikers. The members of the Natal Government went into voluntary exile.

The Republican Constitution provided for the election of a Volksleier³ by white citizens, a Supreme Chief by Bantu citizens and an Aliens Representative Council by white and coloured non-citizens. The Supreme Chief had authority to promulgate laws affecting Africans only, and the right to be consulted by the Volksleier on laws affecting the country as a whole.

Ezekiel Ngcobo was the only candidate for the office of Supreme Chief. An election was nevertheless held, and he polled 98.5% of the votes cast. The Nationalist candidate for the post of Volksleier polled 92%. A new era of peace and prosperity, based on the unshakable unity of the indigenous peoples of South Africa, was announced.

On the 16th December, 1975, the Supreme Chief announced that it had been scientifically proved that the Afrikaans people could not properly be regarded as indigenous to South Africa. On Christmas Eve, aboard the *Pretoria Castle*, A. J. van der Merwe dictated the first chapter of his *Memoirs*.

³ Afrikaans for 'People's Leader'.