

PORTRAIT OF A CABINET MINISTER

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UNTIL 30 November 1954, Afrikaner politics was a patriarchal affair. In the tradition of the Voortrekkers the Afrikaners chose as their political leaders the elders of the clan, men with their roots deep in the soil, men of years and of wide experience. They were more than political leaders; they were an expression of what the Afrikaners saw as the mature personality of Afrikanerdom.

The four Prime Ministers since Union had all been cast in this mould—Botha, Hertzog, Smuts, Malan. But Malan was the last of the patriarchs. There was another patriarchal figure ready to succeed Dr. Malan—The Minister of Finance, Mr. N. C. Havenga, a Boer War veteran still limping from his wounds, with a lifetime of experience in the service of Afrikanerdom.

But by the time his turn came the personality of Afrikanerdom had changed. The agricultural economy of South Africa had been replaced by an adolescent industrialism. Afrikaners in their thousands had forsaken the land for the more sophisticated delights of the industrial city.

With this sophistication came subtle changes of personality—and it was the younger, impatient, extremist Afrikaner politicians who first sensed this change; they laid their plans accordingly.

So it was that at a caucus meeting of the Nationalist Party in the old Transvaal Republic Raadsaal in Pretoria on November 30, 1954, Dr. Malan's choice as a successor, Mr. Havenga, was pushed aside and instead Mr. Johannes Gerhardus Strijdom, "the Lion of the North", was elected to the national leadership of the Party, and thus to the premiership.

It was a dramatic coup, but not entirely unexpected. It had been

preceded by as intensive an undercover campaign as South African politics had ever known. Carefully keeping aloof from all the lobbying which centred around him, Mr. Strijdom, for the first time in his life, left the country. He took his wife on a holiday trip to England and the Continent, a journey that he had always pooh-poohed as unnecessary and even undesirable for the right-thinking Afrikaner.

On his return by air to Jan Smuts Airport, Johannesburg, a curious scene was enacted. As he stepped from the aircraft a welcoming roar went up from the hundreds of Nationalist Party supporters who had gathered for the occasion. Before he reached the waiting crowd, however, a little group of men went running across the tarmac to meet him. They held a whispered, conspiratorial conversation with him, and only then did Mr. Strijdom go on to meet his followers.

And on the day the chairman of the Nationalist caucus announced Mr. Strijdom's victory in the Raadsaal it was the members of the airport group who were first to surround him again—but this time to shower him with exultant congratulations.

Photographers' flashbulbs popped as the little knot of conspirators followed Mr. Strijdom to the steps of the Raadsaal. Next day, when the news of Mr. Havenga's political "assassination" was announced in the Press, newspaper readers saw pictures of a smiling Mr. Strijdom surrounded by this triumphant group.

Most of the faces in that group were familiar: Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs, Mr. C. R. Swart, Minister of Justice, Mr. Eric Louw, Minister (then) of Economic Affairs. But at the new Prime Minister's right elbow stood a burly, balding man in a dark suit. His was not then a nationally well-known face. The captions recorded that he was Mr. Jan de Klerk, chief organizing secretary of the Nationalist Party in the Transvaal.

What the captions did not say was that this was the man who had organized and administered the intricate campaign which had resulted in Mr. Strijdom's victory. They did not say either that this was a man about to emerge from the Nationalist Party's back-room onto the very centre of the stage, a man who was to become a powerful figure in South African politics—a man who typified the "new" Nationalism.

Within a few months, however, the whole country knew the name of Jan de Klerk. Before that Raadsaal victory almost his sole claim to public fame had been his platform reference, while a member of the Transvaal Provincial Council, to Mrs. Lakshmi

Pandit, President of the United Nations Assembly, as "*daardie ou koeliemeid*" (that old coolie woman).

As a king-maker, however, Mr. de Klerk could expect a royal reward. Mr. Strijdom was prompt in discharging his obligation. Mr. de Klerk was taken up immediately into the Cabinet in the portfolio of Minister of Labour, although it was some months before a seat could be found for him in Parliament. Eventually he was put into the Senate.

When South Africa learnt that Senator de Klerk was also Mr. Strijdom's brother-in-law there were cynically understanding nods. But those who saw this as the sole reason for Mr. Strijdom's favour both did Mr. Strijdom an injustice and underestimated Senator de Klerk.

The fact is that not only Mr. Strijdom but the Nationalist Party of the Transvaal as a whole had good reason to feel indebted to Mr. de Klerk for the contribution he had made personally to the spectacular Nationalist election victories of 1948 and 1953.

It was Mr. de Klerk who planned and administered the election campaign in the Transvaal—and influenced the campaign in other provinces too—with a shrewd understanding of the psychological change that was coming over the Afrikaner, and a drive that extracted the last ounce of enthusiasm just where it counted most.

Nationalism's victory in 1948 was, in fact, less the result of any electoral "swing" than of the efforts of an army of professional political organizers like Mr. de Klerk. Most of them have since been transferred from the Party's to the taxpayers' payroll and form the Nationalist élite corps in Parliament.

They are a very different type to the farmer-politicians who, with a certain peasant shrewdness but perhaps more gusto than guile, had fought the Afrikaner-Nationalist battle for so long. But while they might not in themselves express the character of Afrikanerdom, they have mastered all the means of manipulating Afrikaner sentiment. They have psycho-analysed nationalism and adapted it to the Afrikaner psyche, reducing it in the process to a matter of conditioned reflexes, push-button controlled.

There is a sameness about these Nationalist professional politicians—they are slick, sleek men for the most part. And Senator de Klerk is the archetype of them all.

Jan de Klerk was born in Burgersdorp, in the Cape, in 1903, the son of a minister of the "Dopper" sect—the most Calvinistic wing of the Dutch Reformed Church.

He went to school and to university in Potchefstroom, educational

cradle of northern Nationalism, and grew up as a Transvaler, rather than in the tradition of the Cape.

Like so many Afrikaners of his generation, landless and lacking either the capital or the "contacts" to give him the entrée to the commercial world, he became a teacher. Unlike many others who have become prominent Nationalist leaders, however, he did not go on to great academic heights.

But he gained experience in a sphere which was to make him most valuable to the Nationalist cause. He became a townsman teacher—on the Witwatersrand, where the Afrikaner communities were swelling rapidly as industrialisation enticed more and more young Afrikaners away from the boredom and near poverty of their existence on the land.

He saw around him the changes in Afrikaner character and psychology wrought by this change in environment. And in his school he saw the new generation of urban Afrikaners growing up.

In 1937 he became principal of the Primrose Afrikaans School at Germiston and was soon welcomed onto the committee of the Reddingsdaadbond, the Afrikaner-Nationalist co-ordinating organization which was just then setting out to ensure that those Afrikaners who were being absorbed into the economy of the cities were not lost to the Nationalist fold.

The aims of the Reddingsdaadbond were unambiguously stated by its chairman, the Rev. Jac Conradie:

"The Afrikaner worker will for many years to come still represent the largest number of white workers of our land. That means that they will still in the future form the kernel of our nation. That is why we must see the inclusion of the Afrikaner worker as one of the main objects of the Reddingsdaadbond.

"The Afrikaner worker is today forced to subject himself to the existing trade unions so that approximately half of the Afrikaner nation is to-day ensnared in the powerful machinery of the trade unions . . . an enormous task awaits to rescue the Afrikaner nation from the claws of this un-national power . . ."

Jan de Klerk was one of the key men selected to carry out that task.

In 1945, at the early age of 42, Mr. de Klerk rather precipitately gave up teaching. The Reddingsdaadbond had a job in mind for him, however, for which, with his knowledge of that new political animal, the urban Afrikaner, he was well suited.

He became the founder secretary of the Blankewerkersbeskermingsbond (White Workers' Protection Society). This was

an offshoot of the Reddingsdaadbond, a "Christian-National" workers' organization whose main aim was to keep the new class of Afrikaner workers from drifting into "foreign" trade unionism and thus perhaps being weaned from sectional grouping based on race to new political allegiances based on economic interests.

The chairman of this "workers'" organization was a clergyman; its secretary was a teacher; several of its executive members were prospering Afrikaner capitalists. The Bond, nevertheless, did succeed in inculcating in many Afrikaner workers the idea that their group loyalty should be towards Afrikanerdom rather than to any common workers' front.

The Bond, with Mr. de Klerk's drive behind it, became the spearhead of Afrikaner Nationalism's campaign against the trade unions. It was an all-in campaign. Agents within the unions worked for their disruption; the Dutch Reformed Church brought pulpit pressure to bear on Afrikaner workers; the Nationalist newspapers and politicians used every opportunity to smear and vilify the trade union leaders as "communists" and "*kafferboeties*" (nigger lovers). The "*swart gevaar*" (black peril) was, of course, the main propaganda lever used to prise Afrikaner workers away from the other workers.

The public platform was not in those days Mr. de Klerk's battleground. But Mr. Ben Schoeman M.P. (later to be Senator de Klerk's predecessor as Minister of Labour) was also an executive member of the Blankewerkersbeskermingsbond. And he told Parliament in 1942 what the Nationalist outlook on labour issues was: "Self-government in industry and collective bargaining should be eliminated from our national life. . . . there must be changes in the foreign British system, which does not conform to the character and traditions of the Afrikaner . . . the present (labour) system must be destroyed and a new one created . . . the principal function of the present trade unions will disappear . . . they will not so much be entrusted with the function of obtaining better wages and better working conditions by means of collective bargaining with the employers, they will be mainly entrusted with the task of regulating domestic matters as between the employers and the employees, and for the rest of looking after the spiritual welfare of the workers."

Those were the aims for which Mr. de Klerk was working through the Blankewerkersbeskermingsbond.

In 1947, however, he was called to an even more important post. He became the first full-time organizing secretary of the Nationalist Party on the Witwatersrand and it was in this position that he did so

much towards the 1948 election victory. It was largely as a result of his organizational efforts that the Nationalist Party was able to capture the eight urban seats on the Rand which give it the balance of power.

His contribution to the 1948 election success made him the obvious choice for the job of first full-time organizing secretary of the Party for the whole of the Transvaal, which he took over just in time to plan the Party's election campaign for the 1949 provincial elections.

Although his contribution to the Party's election victories was appreciated, however, the Transvaal Nationalists were not yet sufficiently in the ascendancy within the Party for him to be able to claim preference over Cape men in Dr. Malan's apportionment of Cabinet rewards.

Mr. de Klerk did become a provincial councillor (for Krugersdorp), however, and his ability and standing in the Party won him a place on the Provincial Council's Executive Committee.

But Mr. de Klerk must have known that he was marked out for greater rewards. In 1951 he resigned from the Executive Committee, forfeiting the financial benefit this post carried with it, to concentrate on the organization of the Nationalist Party in the Transvaal for the 1953 election.

The task of drawing up a Nationalist-favouring delimitation plan for the Party to put before the Delimitation Commission—a plan that was very largely accepted by the Commission—was mainly his. And the result of the election—a consolidation wherever it was sought—was another feather in Mr. de Klerk's cap.

Then came, for him personally, the most important campaign of all—the "Strijdom for Premier" campaign. And again everything went according to Mr. de Klerk's plan.

So, in 1955, Jan de Klerk took his place with South Africa's top Nationalists in the Strijdom Cabinet.

If he felt any self-consciousness about having ridden into Parliament on the steps of Mr. Strijdom's triumphal chariot, Senator de Klerk did not show it.

During one of his first appearances in the House of Assembly he was subjected to a sarcastic attack by Mr. S. J. Marais Steyn (United Party M.P. for Vereeniging). But Senator de Klerk retaliated with blunt belligerence: "If he thinks he can bully me he will discover that he will be treated very roughly".

Senator de Klerk's self-confidence must have been the envy of many more experienced Parliamentarians. At times he was even

loftily condescending. Even some of his own colleagues squirmed when the new Minister of Labour (Parliament's most junior member in terms of service) tapped his palm for attention and told the veteran Parliamentarians around him: "Now the House will have to follow me very carefully".

Senator de Klerk's big moment came in his second Parliamentary year. He had the satisfaction of piloting through Parliament, in the teeth of bitter opposition, the long contested Industrial Conciliation Bill.

This was the measure which finally broke the power of the trade unions in South Africa. Among other things it provided (1) for reservation of jobs on a racial basis; (2) for the prohibition in future of multi-racial trade unions; and (3) for splinter groups to break away from existing mixed trade unions to form separate uniraical unions.

Looking back to the days when he helped frame the constitutional aims of the Blankewerkersbeskermingsbond—" (1) there should be a clear determination of which occupations must be reserved for Europeans and which for non-Europeans; (2) no undesirable contact between European and non-European workers should be tolerated in their employment; and (3) mixed membership of trade unions of Europeans and non-European workers shall be prohibited"—the founder of the Bond had good reason to be pleased with himself.

With his "enormous task" accomplished Senator de Klerk could afford to be indulgent.

"The Government is in favour of the encouragement and the promotion of sound trade unionism in South Africa . . . collective bargaining is an essential requisite for the regulation of labour matters . . . the Government favours the preservation of self-government in industry . . ."

Time, and the Industrial Conciliation Bill, had apparently greatly changed circumstances since Mr. Ben Schoeman, executive committee member of the Blankewerkersbeskermingsbond spoke a little over ten years before.

From the sworn enemy of trade unionism, Jan de Klerk had become the Lord Protector of the trade unions.

The odd thing is that Senator de Klerk resembles nothing so much as a certain kind of trade unionist—the type that has grown fat on the successful conduct of his erstwhile working mates' affairs. He has a breezy, down to earth manner: the air of a "working man's friend". In fact this is perhaps the most valuable part of Senator de

Klerk's stock-in-trade, for he was one of the pioneers who laboured, after industrialisation began to seduce rural Afrikanerdom, to present the Nationalist Party not only as the "farmers' party", as it had always been regarded, but also as the "workers' party".

As he strolls cheerily through the Parliamentary lobby, Senator de Klerk looks like a convivial clubman seeking an audience for a *risqué* joke. He has a hearty chuckle which sounds often from the centre of the little groups which gather round him. He teeters to and fro, rocking on the balls of his feet, thumbs hooked into his waistcoat pockets, while he exchanges pleasantries with opponents and colleagues alike.

But behind this genial exterior is a ruthless purpose. "Forceful" and "relentless" are words which come immediately to mind when one seeks to describe the character of Jan de Klerk. And it is perhaps significant that he should have chosen these words to epitomize the character of Nationalism.

Speaking on the Government's decision to pack the Senate as its trump card in the constitutional dispute, he recalled a statement in which the four provincial leaders of the party had once promised "forceful and relentless" action.

"Now people are surprised that we are acting," said Senator de Klerk. "Our action will remain forceful and relentless".

Senator de Klerk's philosophy is revealed, too, in a number of other statements he has made since, as one of the Party's Big Five, he began publicly to set the pace for Nationalism.

Colour: "My consistent attitude will be the maintenance of the White man's position and the domination of the European in South Africa".

Dedication: "Afrikaners must be prepared to work, work, work for *baasskap*" (domination).

Power: "Wherever you allow the economy of your country to slip out of your hands you yourself disappear".

Deviation: "Liberalism (or internationalism) among the Afrikaners is more dangerous than the 'Hoggenheimers' could ever be; the only antidote is the proper teaching of national history".

Constitution: "The republic will come as sure as the sun will rise—and it will be a Calvinist republic".

Education: "Afrikaner children should be brought up on stories of their national heroes, not on fairy stories".

And perhaps the most revealing of all: "We are taking this step (packing the Senate) because we are Calvinists who believe that God is sovereign and delegates that sovereignty to the lawful rulers of

the land. We therefore have the right to determine what must be done and no court, even if it is the highest in the land, can take away the sovereign power that God gave to his people”.

This, then, is the typical Nationalist politician of the South African industrial age: a sophisticated townsman with the technique of power politics at his fingertips; a master of mass psychology; a white-collar representative of the working man; an intransigent authoritarian who claims his authority on spiritual grounds; a party official who has become a party boss.

The patriarchy has given place to an autocracy of party officials. And such is the trend of things in the Nationalist Party to-day that the king-maker could yet be king.

THE EVATON RIOTS

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THE riots precipitated by the bus boycott at Evaton, the non-White township twenty-four miles south of Johannesburg, have been the strangest on record in this country. When the Evaton residents organized pickets last year to boycott the Italian-owned bus company running the Johannesburg route, they little suspected that they would find themselves split into two violently opposed groups—boycotters and anti-boycotters. And yet the boycott has hardly ever been an ideological one in the accepted sense. It has had none of the features of passive resistance such as characterized the Montgomery bus boycott in the United States or the recent short-lived one in Cape Town. It started because the bus company raised the fares. And since July of last year boycotters and anti-boycotters have been at war with each other, killing, assaulting each other, and burning down houses, making their township a hive of unrest and bitter civil strife. And the Government and the bus company have been watching, doing little or nothing about it.

The White Press has been at pains to try to prove that the Evaton riots were precipitated by a group of irresponsible young men who dared to start a boycott against the bus company. A reporter even wrote in the *Rand Daily Mail* that the boycott had been engineered by “hired political agitators” who wanted to use Evaton as a base for a mass political campaign.

A *Star* editorial said that the bus boycotters had no case because