

“Afrikaners like men of action”

and ne never thought he was going to produce millionaires, which he has done. So the importance of a modern industrial society is almost irresistible. I wouldn't like to say that black people are abandoning their culture. ZK Matthews, he was a member of the Native Representative Council, and it was addressed by Hofmeyr, and Hofmeyr took up this same line, don't desert your own

culture, because that was a kind of liberal cry in those days, that you must help Africans to preserve their own culture, and ZK said don't worry about our culture, we'll look after it. And I think that this is quite the right view to take.

TYLER: What about the future of South Africa. Everybody worries, and so on. Are you a long-term optimist or a pessimist?

PATON: I'm neither. I don't . . . I think that optimism and pessimism are, ah, rather characteristic of your temperament, your nature. I think that the difference between optimism and hope is very great, but we can't go into that (laughs) now. But I'm certainly a man of hope. And, when I realise that the Afrikaner, because I know the history of the Afrikaner, I was going to say almost backwards, but . . . I can't see that he's going to allow himself to be destroyed. Which Treurnicht would do.

TYLER: You said that the power for good and evil — or evil — lies mainly with the ruling National Party. Would you like to point to people in the National Party in government who give you some room for hope.

PATON: (Sniff) Well, PW is so unpredictable. He's got a very short temper, and when he loses it as he did with Hendrickse (over the issue of swimming in the then “white” sea), um, he doesn't show up very well. Magnus Malan, is a soldier. And I'm sure he believes that you can do things with a gun that you can't do with politics. I think Pik Botha's quite a decent chap. But I don't think he's very high in the hierarchy, myself. I would say that the three highest in the hierarchy are PW and FW de Klerk and Magnus Malan.

TYLER: And a person like Gerrit Viljoen? Does he . . .

PATON: Too brainy. Too clever!

TYLER: Too clever?

PATON: Afrikaners, they admire brains, they admire cleverness, they admire learning, but they don't choose learned men to rule them. It's very interesting. They like men of action.

TYLER: Dr Paton, thank you very much . . .

PATON: I'll close by saying that when you're on the point of turning 85 and you realise that your active life is more or less finished, and it's a great comfort to have the fact that so many people still want to come and see you and they want to know what you think, and they want to write this, to write that, and I've no ways been put on the shelf. And I'm very thankful for that. But my great pleasure is now becoming more and more literature, the field of literature. I've even started reading Dante, not in the original, I'm afraid, but I've got the English and the original on opposite sides of the page.

TYLER: Voltaire suggested that the most sensible thing one can turn to in later years is to garden. Do you have hobbies?

PATON: Well, I do a lot of supervising in the garden. I don't actually garden with my hands any more. For one thing, you know, you can't bend over. And if you do, then you can hardly stand up again. Things like that. Those are the penalties of old age. But I'm very lucky that my mind is still clear. And I get great pleasure out of . . . I think I could recite (Blake's poem) “Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright” every day, and “Fiddler of Dooney”, verses from the *Rubaiyat*, verses from the Bible, too, of course . . . I get a very great pleasure out of words. © H. Tyler



Paton in the garden with his second wife, Anne. He said he supervised work in the garden but no longer gardened with his hands. “For one thing, you know, at my age, you can't bend over . . .”

What makes FW tick?

In a book about power, Big Brother's biography doesn't say how the President puts the boot in when it matters. RALPH LAWRENCE discusses *The Man in His Time*.

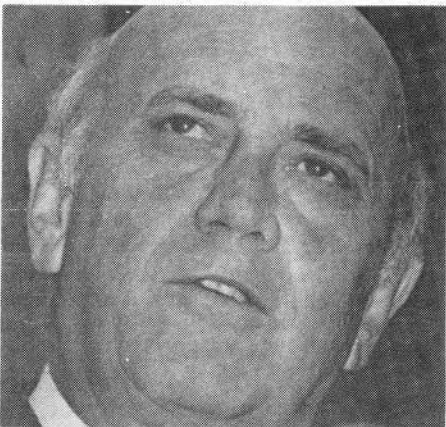
TRY this on. Any political system to retain white control in a professedly multi-racial state, however subtly contrived, and even if put forward as an intermediary step in the future, would diminish neither the attacks (from the international community) nor the pressure and uncertainty. Expediency would prove self-defeating. Thus 'the only alternative is the road of national reconstruction based on differentiation and with due regard to the interests of the different sections of the population.'

To wit, apartheid.

Is this not the Nationalist government's dilemma despite the bravura about a 'New South Africa'? Relinquishing power may well mean losing control over one's destiny. What price one's political constituency then? React and dig in as Treurnicht advocates?

He who uttered these statements would have approved. It was Prime Minister Verwoerd, opening the South African parliament in bleak 1962, as brother De Klerk reminds us.

Nearly 30 years on President FW has set course firmly along the path of expediency, notwithstanding the attendant risks. The exact destination is inherently unpredictable, so he concentrates fixedly on the journey, with one eye trained keenly on the horizon.



FW . . . the principled pragmatist. Is he a tiger in the Tuynhuis?

Willem applauds. His book is about the journey, how it transpired, what the terrain is, and who is behind the wheel. And the author himself betrays the ambiguities of the backseat driver. For peering over the statesman's shoulder we have no other than older brother. Big brother. Bleep . . . bleep.

You see, Willem was always the enlightened one. Sure he was an inveterate Nationalist; but never 'ultra conservative' like . . . In any event didn't he add 'verkrampste' to our political lexicon?

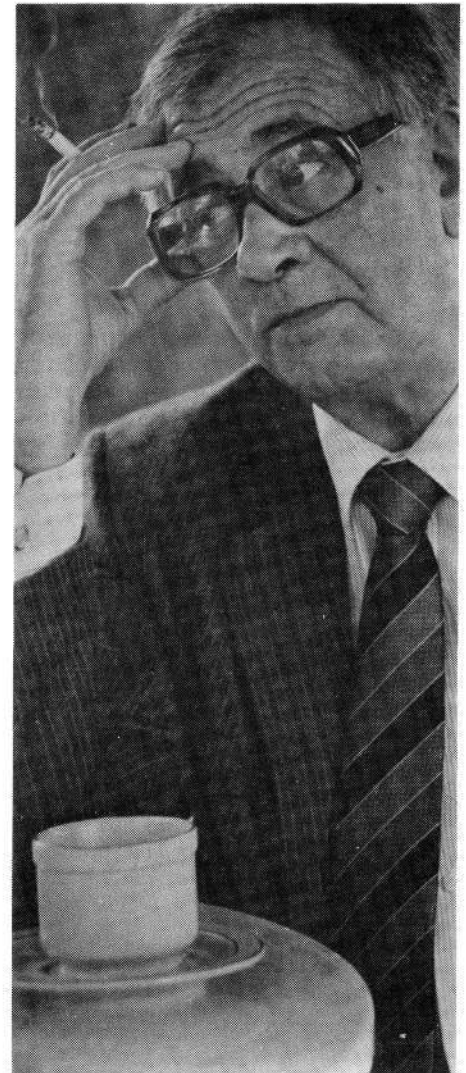
Later when light showered upon the National Party faithful, where was Willem? A step ahead of course, talking to the ANC and ministering to the birth of the Democratic Party. Now, thank goodness, the government has absorbed the DP programme. Welcome to the fold, lil' bro'. You've made it. Willem is pleased. Sixty thousand odd words testify as much.

On the one hand, elder brother (by eight years) is inordinately proud of the way in which FW's political career has blossomed. Rightly so. The president's 'political conversion', ever virtuous, has been a joy to behold.

Yet remember who's really senior! Whilst acquiescing in the obligatory homage to highest political office, Willem cannot resist chipping in his contribution as to how South Africa's endgame is proceeding. Bleep . . . bleep.

These lengthy staccato passages are trite. A political analyst's job is not merely to list every conceivable cause and jot down interminable consequences. The golden rule is to be incisive and decisive. This rather than that, here not there. Instead we get a ragbag of faddish phrases run together indiscriminately. Here commentary masquerades as analysis.

What of FW the man, the politico, the tiger in Tuynhuis? Who better qualified to offer an assessment both personally and professionally than the author in question?



Wimpie de Klerk . . . the ambiguities of being a back seat driver.

Maybe. Yet his tale is frustratingly disappointing. Family skeletons can rattle in the privacy of closed cupboards. I agree. But in such a hierarchical polity, as South Africa is, the role of the presidency is crucial. Learn about the driver and we might discover exactly how he will drive, and where to.

In Willem's estimation, FW is a chain-smoking political saint. Success, integrity and discerning judgement have infused our leader's being throughout his post-nappy existence. An apposite public relations image hoves in sight. Something for the grandchildren.

A key omission remains: political power. For power is the essential currency of political life. FW is forever the loyal party man, rooted in the culture of Afrikanerdom, we learn — a principled pragmatist.

But a thinking toady he is not, surely? Isn't he canny in the clinches? His rise from backbencher to cabinet was meteoric. And when PW Botha stumbled he was shuffled back to the Wilderness.

Just who won? Being State President is not because you doffed your cap at primary school, although that helps; it's more a case of knowing how to put the boot in when it matters. Of this Willem is unknowing, or perhaps disingenuous.

Left none the wiser, *The Man in His Time* fails to let us get a proper grasp of what makes FW tick when he has his hand on the gear-knob. Bleep . . . bleep. Vroom. ●

Dilemmas for writers

By MATTHEW KENTRIDGE, researcher in the Innes Labour Brief, and author of *An Unofficial War: Inside the Conflict in Pietermaritzburg*.

OVER the last year two collections of short stories, written in English by white South Africans have been published by David Philip publishers. The two books are very different both stylistically and thematically, and serve to illustrate the dilemmas confronting writers who seek to come to terms with the literary dimensions of contemporary South Africa.

Ivan Vladislavic's *Missing Persons* was the first to come out. The 11 short stories constitute a surreal South African landscape in which reality and expectations are constantly subverted and the author switches between the prosaic and the fantastic as the mood takes him.

