

ESTABLISHED 1969

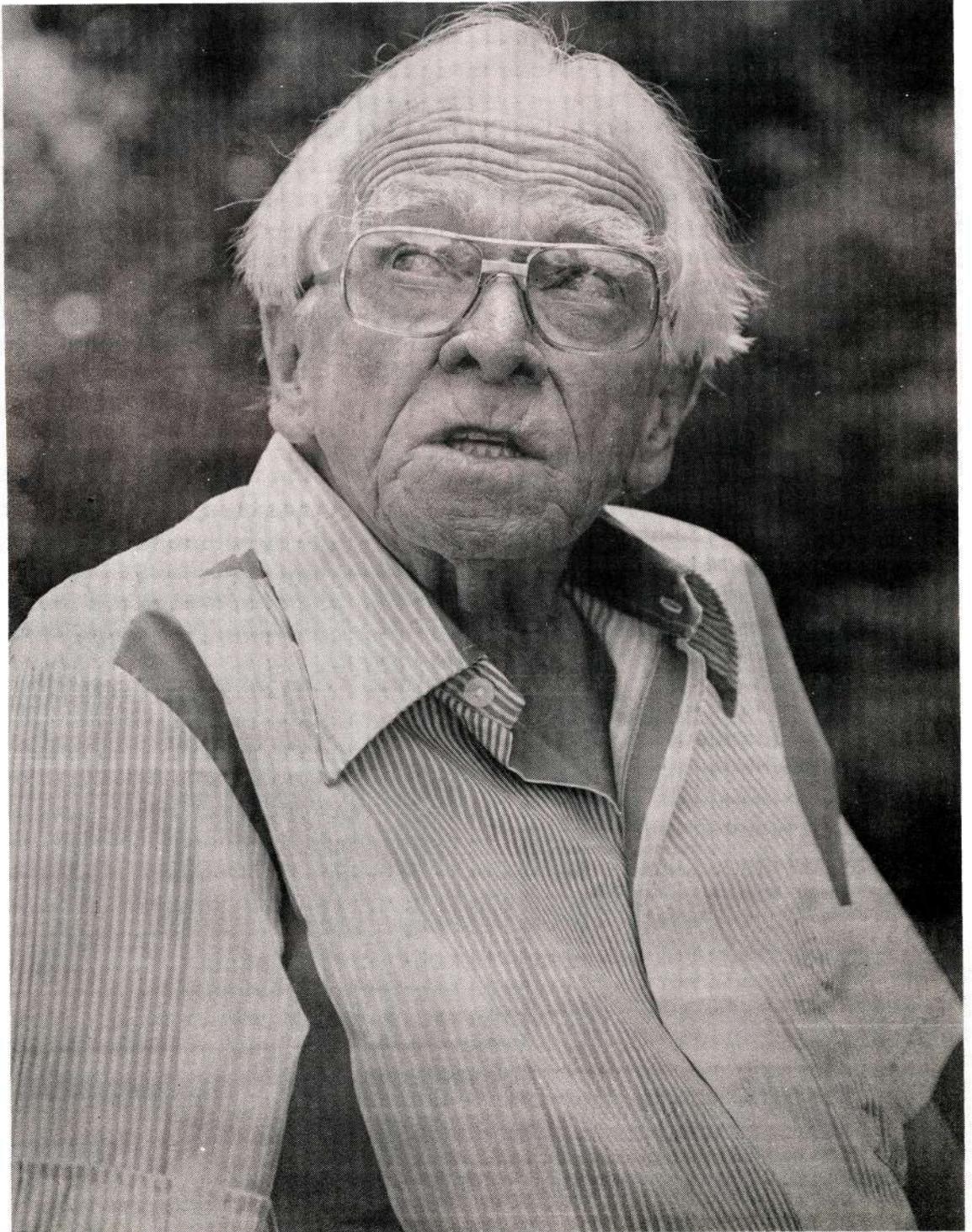
Reality

MAY 1991

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Comrades: Who they really are

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LATE RELEASE

Mbeki : Notes from Robben Island

DAVID WELSH reviews
the *Prison Writings of
Govan Mbeki: Learning
from Robben Island.*
David Philip.

As Colin Bundy remarks in his introduction, South Africa has sent many of its finest citizens to gaol. Govan Mbeki received life imprisonment at the Rivonia trial in 1964 and was incarcerated on the island until his release a few years ago.

His book contains a wide variety of essays that were written, copied (often by the most painstaking of means), circulated, and, ultimately, smuggled out of prison. They show that the prisoners did not vegetate during their long years: they kept their minds active through formal and informal study — youngsters who were loathe to accept the discipline of study were cajoled into enrolling for study courses. The island became a university-in-miniature.

Mbeki himself is one of the Grand Old Men of the ANC. Interesting biographical details are presented in Bundy's introduction which provides a valuable context of his background as an activist, and the incredible difficulties under which these writings were produced. Whatever the merits of Mbeki's thoughts (and he is no Gramsci), the value of the book lies in its discussion of various points of the ANC's policies and its strategies, its relationship with the South African Communist Party (which Mbeki joined after 1953) and other political movements. All of this will be valuable grist to the historian's mill.

The essays cover a wide range of issues: there are tributes to Ruth First and Moses Mabida, analyses of the rise of Afrikaner capital, hints on organisation — always with Mbeki's characteristic insistence that the rural areas not be neglected, 'retreaded' (or, rather, sieved through Mbeki's distinctive views) UNISA economic study guides, and internal debates on the exact meaning of the Freedom Charter.

As a whole, the collection lacks coherence but prison is hardly the ideal place for producing polished collections.

Bundy acknowledges that many might disagree with Mbeki's radicalism. Liberals



Blinkered by uncongenial ideology . . .

will find his unreconstructed Marxism-Leninism uncongenial — and former members of the Liberal Party will be annoyed at his mistaken belief that the party 'jet-tisoned' its black members after the enactment of the Political Interference Act in 1967.

The heavy ideological tone of the collection is set by Harry Gwala's (Stalinist) foreword.

Gwala tells us that these essays 'helped lay a foundation for our young comrades who needed to be armed with a correct theory' *Mein Gott!*

Sadly, one of the main conclusions about these writings will be their confirmation of the ideological blinkers that have been so conspicuous a feature of the South African left.

EDITORIAL

Reality's new look

WITH change in South Africa has come the need for this journal to find a new approach if it is to widen its influence on a society now potentially more receptive to the liberal ideals to which we have always been committed.

There is little doubt that the obvious iniquities of the old order provided liberals with an easy target. Liberals moved quite effortlessly on to the moral high ground and not a few succumbed to the temptation of smugness.

The process of constitutional reconstruction which is just beginning confronts liberals with an infinitely more difficult challenge.

Scrapping constitutionally entrenched apartheid does not automatically guarantee an end to repressive legislation and individual freedom. Talk about reform is largely talk. Great as was the iniquity of institutionalised racialism the iniquity of the laws that gave its enforcement muscle, was greater. And those laws are still firmly in force.

Nor is it by any means certain that the enemies of National Party illiberalism are themselves supporters of liberal ideas and institutions. After becoming an anti-imperialist, said George Orwell, it took him twenty more years to realise that "the oppressed are not always right."

Because liberalism has been trapped for so long in a reactive phase (reacting, that is, to the illiberalism of the old order) it has never really come to grips with the immense problem of translating the liberal ideal into a viable political programme. There was a tendency in some to

assume the relevance and workability of their values in this kind of society. When social scientists ask whether the conflicts engendered by ethnically-inspired nationalism within a society can be resolved without coercion, they are raising a serious question which liberals dare not duck.

It is clear that a new and enlightened order will not spring effortlessly out of the ashes of the old. Constitutional reconstruction will be long and painful enough. Social reconstruction could be decidedly more painful.

In this there will be many compromises with the principles and policies to which we hold. Which of these compromises will be called for? Which will be beyond the pale, in the sense that they would undermine the liberal ethic? For instance, can liberals accept some form of detention without trial if the transition to the new South Africa is attended by extensive social instability? *Reality* believes it could have a critical role in examining these issues.

But all is not gloom.

In the fast changing South Africa there is much that is creative, constructive and exciting. In their personal lives, on the playing fields and beaches, in the theatres, in business, in schools and at universities more and more South Africans are joining in moulding a normal society.

Reality will reflect these changes too. Every issue will deal with some aspect of the new thinking among writers, artists and on the stage — with the whole revolution that is part of the dynamic of this nation in the 1990s.

Join the debate on
changing South Africa.

Write to:

The Editor

Reality

P.O. Box 1104

Pietermaritzburg 3200

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THE WEEKLY MAIL

LEAVE to appeal has been granted in the action against the Weekly Mail.

Death squads: Momentous issue still to be faced

ANTHONY S. MATHEWS, Professor of Law at Natal University and author of *Law, Order and Liberty in South Africa*, analyses the wider implications of the Vrye Weekblad judgment.

IN October 1989, a policeman and deathrow prisoner named Almond Nofomela, in an effort to ward off his impending execution, provided a startled world with the first statement from inside the security forces that death squads existed and had carried out murderous missions against political opponents of the government. He declared on oath that the Durban lawyer Griffith Mxenge, who was found brutally murdered late in 1981, had been eliminated by him and a number of his colleagues on account of his ANC connections on express instructions from security police captain Dirk Coetzee and another high-placed officer of the same branch.

These allegations soon triggered the flight of Dirk Coetzee and contemporaneously with it the publication in *Vrye Weekblad* of wide-ranging claims of a similar sinister kind of the operations of a death squad under Coetzee's control known as the Vlakplaats unit. The tale told by Coetzee was a frightening one of official hit-squad activities against the "enemies" of the state involving the

whole range of dirty tricks from theft and abduction through to cold-blooded murder.

In the course of these allegations Coetzee spoke of attempts to drug and poison some of the victims and identified the South African police forensic laboratory under Lieut-General Lothar Neethling as the source of the drugs and poisons. This led to a defamation action by Neethling against *Vrye Weekblad* and the *Weekly Mail* (which had also published allegations of his involvement in the supply of drugs and poisons).

On January 17, 1991, Mr Justice Kriegler handed down a judgment in which he dismissed Neethling's claim against the two newspapers. This judgment, the full text of which has just become available, is one of the most dramatic and significant documents of contemporary legal and political history to see the light of day.

The matters canvassed in it are of far greater moment and import than the issue of whether Lieut-General Neethling was correctly or incorrectly identified as the source of the drugs and poison and whether he was or was not therefore defamed by the defendant newspapers.

Since Lieut-General Neethling is to appeal against the dismissal of his claims, this discussion will avoid any comment on the narrower issue. It will focus on the wider implications of the court's finding on the government's anti-subversion campaign, and on the legal and moral implications of that operation.

The *Vrye Weekblad* judgment (as we shall call it) was preceded by the publication of the Harms Commission report on political violence against the opponents of the apartheid system. It is not too strong to say that the Harms Commission is now widely seen as a huge waste of public money. Its publication did nothing to satisfy the public clamour for an enquiry that would pare to the bone the truth about the clandestine operations of the state security machine.

After Harms these operations seemed to recede more deeply into cloud and darkness

except for some largely unsuccessful stunts that were admitted to by agents of the Civil Co-operation Bureau.

It is true that Mr Justice Harms became the victim of a barely concealed cover-up operation by members of the CCB. Though in his report the judge seemed somewhat pained by the concealment (which appears to have included the large-scale destruction of documents) he is clearly far removed by nature from the Anton Mostert who, confronted by the post-Muldergate concealment, blew the state's cover by going direct to the Press.

The effect of the Harms report may be summed up in one word: anodyne. With Coetzee branded as a liar, the Vlakplaats unit as non-existent and allegations of state-directed killings as unproved, it seemed that the public concern about death-squad and like activities was little more than the mental meanderings of an overheated liberal conscience. And so it was that the Commissioner, though invited to do so in at least one memorandum submitted to him, made no proposals for the wide-ranging reform of public law and government practice to counter the abuse of power implicit in counter-insurgency of the dirty tricks variety. It appeared, therefore, that what Coetzee described as the Eleventh Commandment in security force operations — thou shalt not be found out — had triumphed even after a public enquiry.

The *Vrye Weekblad* judgment has broken the spell of complacency and unconcern that had settled over the death-squad issue. Mr Justice Kriegler found it necessary to place the specific matter before him — the allegations about the source of the drugs and poison — in the wider context of Coetzee's evidence about the security police counter-insurgency campaign. A large part of his judgment is concerned with whether this campaign was of the kind described by Nofomela and Coetzee.



Anton Harber, co-editor of *Weekly Mail*



From Page Four

After a lengthy analysis of Coetzee's testimony, of the weight of his evidence, of the relative credibility of witnesses who testified before him, and of inherent probabilities and improbabilities, the judge answers that question with a resounding yes.

His judgment is a superb example of qualities not usually found together — a keen analytic power, profound appreciation of character and human motivation and expression, and a style of expression that is lucid, logical and lively. These are fused together in an intellectual tour de force that sweeps before it the subtle evasions, half plausible justifications and the elaborate obfuscations that have characterised the official response to Nofomela and Coetzee.

In answering the question why Coetzee — "n rampokker van Olympiese aard" — should be believed Mr Justice Krieger cites the following; the absence of major deviations between his various accounts of what happened, the inexplicability of his flight from South Africa if the allegations were false, the fact that much of his story quite unnecessarily puts him in a bad light, his failure to settle old scores in his testimony, and the contrary that he implicates many of his old working friends and, above all, the correspondence between the dirty-tricks missions which he describes and the known indisputable facts.

With regard to this last point it is noteworthy that in many cases where Coetzee describes the involvement of individual security officers in a mission, the documentary evidence confirms their presence there at a particular time. The judgment finds that the substantial truth of Coetzee's allegations lies in their coherence with a great web of surrounding fact and circumstance.

The implications of the *Vrye Weekblad* judgment are clearly momentous. The arm of state entrusted with the duty to uphold and enforce the law, systematically violated it. In the course of the counter-insurgency programme, agents of the state committed heinous crimes and carried out dark and dastardly deeds of revenge and retribution.

By these actions they discredited not just themselves but the entire legal system. The casualties of the programme were not just its pitiful victims but justice itself and, in fact, the entire tradition of decent and moral government which the government claimed to represent.

These issues are so momentous that Mr Justice Krieger found that the public interest in the report overrode any individual interest not to be defamed by them.

The compelling need to have such matters publicly aired and debated has the effect of depriving defamatory statements of the element of unlawfulness upon which their actionability depends.

This point, however, may well be argued if there is an appeal.

The *Vrye Weekblad* judgment reopens the question that the Harms Commission report prematurely and unwisely sought to put to rest: what should be done to purge our legal and political system of the cancerous growth that has been shown to lie at the very centre of its being?



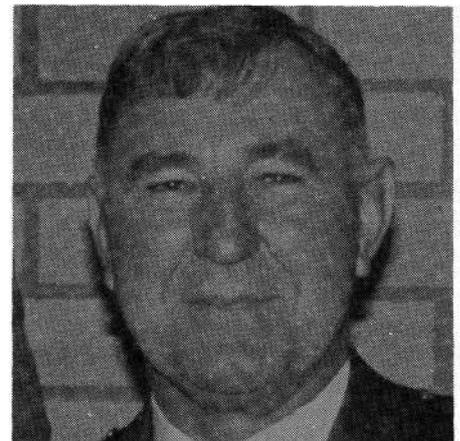
Max du Preez, editor of *Vrye Weekblad*

What reforms and actions are needed to ensure that government agents will not in the future pervert the ideals of justice and arrogate themselves above the law?

The *Vrye Weekblad* judgment warns us of the urgency of seeking sound answers to these questions, and of the cost of failure to act upon them.



Mr Justice Louis Harms



Lieut-General Neethling

Vrye Weekblad

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL Lothar Neethling applied for leave against the Court's finding in the action against the *Vrye Weekblad* that he had supplied poison for political assassinations. Mr Justice Krieger decided after a three-day hearing that there was no chance the Appeal Court would overrule in favour of Neethling in his bid to sue the newspaper for R1 million for defamation. The general issued a statement later in which he said he would instruct his legal representatives to petition the Chief Justice for leave to appeal.

THE COMRADES

ARI SITAS, Professor of Sociology, based his findings on research conducted through the Youth and Unemployment Project of Natal University's Centre for Industrial and Labour Studies of comrades in Natal and KwaZulu.

THE TYRE, the petrol-bomb, the knife, the stone, the hacking: death. The words "comrade" and "amaqabane" conjure them up. The television screen, the newspapers and indeed many black youth initiatives all over South Africa have contributed to the conjuring act.

There is a "comrade-type reflex" with the mention of "comrade." The hint of a communist fraternity in the word is partly the reason, but, the word also frames images of unemployed black youth with no future, no home, busy destroying everything in their way: homes, shops, schools, infrastructures and traditions — hardly expropriating the "expropriators" (some have argued). They rather have been expropriating the "vulnerable", perpetuating lawlessness.

The media picture is of young men, hungry men, with hardened features and red eyes: the myth of a primal Africa when patriarchy collapses and the age-sets run loose: a new version of barbarism. The "older" version, Inkatha, strikes back.

As thinking creatures we surely need to expect more than that?

Sociologists have identified comrades with two broad social indicators: black youth unemployment and "anomic" behaviour.

I would like to argue against both indicators. It is not helpful crudely to identify or equate "comrades" with black youth unemployment.

Yes, most comrades are young (below 35); yes, most comrades come from embattled working class homesteads and households; yes, most of their cultural codes emerge outside households and kinship relations; yes, many are unemployed. But among the phenomenon called comrades we will find full wage-earners, informal sector vendors, university graduates, political activists, schoolchildren, shopstewards, petty-criminals and lumpenproletarians.

The question is, what binds them together? "Anomic" is not the correct concept to capture the process of mobilisation. Rather, what Mark Orkin called "contranomia" its direct opposite, is more apt: an attempt, desperate at times, to control and defend their areas after the collective efforts of protest action against the "system" were attacked, fought against and almost destroyed.

We are dealing then with a social movement, with its peculiar Natal overtones.

In 1983 the UDF launched its campaign in a new era of mass mobilisation against apartheid. Although many felt that a disciplined mobilisation would forestall Government's attempts to reform and to change the currents of its Rubicon, by 1984, after the police shot at the Langa demonstrators, protests turned to insurrection. By 1985,

South Africa was engulfed in a black youth uprising.

Natal had its own dynamics. By 1985 the emerging congress movement and its militant youth was pitted against Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha, the Kwazulu homeland structure and the central state. The Durban explosion around August that year brought together Inkatha's urban power blocs, the Kwazulu administration and the apartheid state in an effort to "normalise" the townships and to roll back the UDF's street mobilisation. By 1987, the war in Natal was officially spoken of between supporters of the MDM, Inkatha and the state, or — as it was spoken of by congress youth — between the "comrades" on the one hand, and (whom they termed, with derogatory vigour) "theleweni" on the other.

The political moments of struggle, 1985-8 are central to our understanding of the comrades as a social movement. Added to the socio-economic conditions of urban poverty that put severe pressure on ordinary black people's lives, there emerged an explosive political process of challenge, protest and change.

It is difficult to find the precise language or, rather, imagery to describe the congress movement's mobilisation over national and sometimes regional issues. Perhaps the best image is one of an unusual octopus with a head and tentacles growing out and outwards; as the tentacles grow too long, a new head grows on them and it, in turn, grows new tentacles. It is a process of growth with core-groups of activists in the townships spreading from area to area and in that spread, new nuclei grow on and on. Calls from the "head" over campaigns and issues are responded to. But within each "tentacle", unique conditions arising from local socio-economic conditions *shape* growth and the way this "octopus" grips onto its environment.

Add to this image another ingredient: the state's repressive arm and, with varying degrees of efficacy, Kwazulu authorities, councillors, vigilantes, and Inkatha-led networks, remove the heads or slash through the tentacles.

With this the growth of the movement can be visualised as a process that constantly coheres and fragments. As leading core-activists get removed, detained, killed, "headless" tentacles grow independently of one another.

Still, since 1985, when the conflict started, congress was small in numbers and vulnerable. By 1991 the comrades were everywhere from Port Shepstone to Paulpietersburg; to Newcastle and Richards Bay.

Growth happened though through *real* township spaces — the streets, the schools, the shebeens, the backyards, the open soccer

spaces, in an oral continuum of communication despite the state of emergency, violence and Caspir patrols.

Such growth was helped by the large numbers of black youth in the streets whether unemployed or at school. But since 1986, Cosatu shop stewards and younger workers started throwing their lot into the fray and, depending on the locality, the self-employed, the graduate, the student and the lumpenproletarian. Since then the ferocity of the movement's repression sprang defence committees at street and area levels.

Comrades then, are not strictly speaking the correlate of an objective structure (eg. unemployment) or a structure's simple 'manifestation', they are a movement involving voluntary (and sometimes coerced) participation, cultural dynamics and a new volatile social identity shaped through mobilisation and conflict.

Comrades are somehow those who cannot escape their social geography, the streets of their township. They distinguish themselves from those, for example, with cars or money who are able to flee their locality.

Initially, the comrades aggressively defined themselves against those with middle-class aspirations — the people with "perms" and with "funky" clothes — but as the conflict engulfed everybody other criteria were developed. They see themselves as the children of the poor and the oppressed.

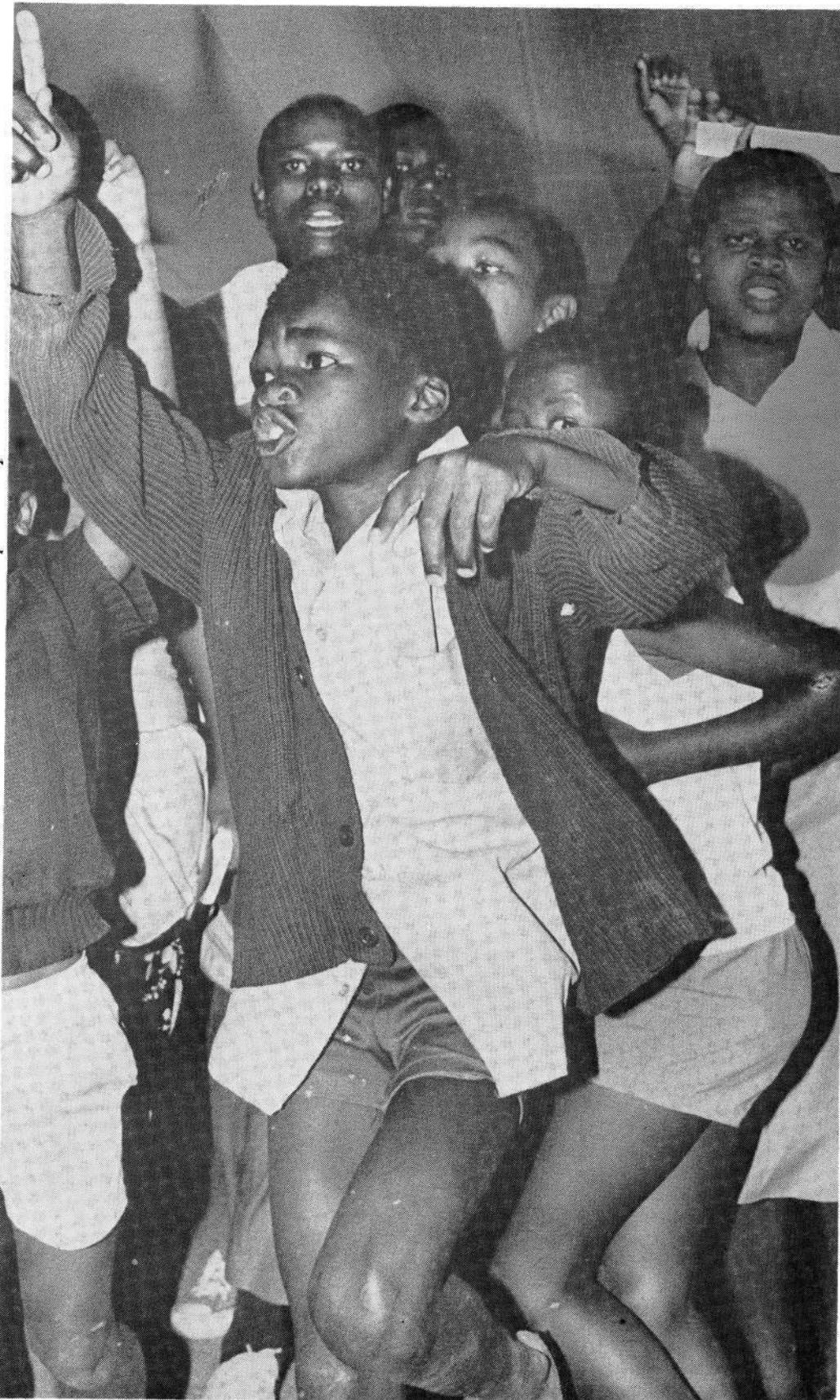
Secondly, they are the soldiers of the liberation movement. A militarisation of their subculture is endemic to any of their gatherings. They are the movement's combatants unto death.

Thirdly, between the levelling idea of belonging to the "have-nots" and the militarised culture of resistance, there is a cultural formation that is about "style" in everyday common behaviour. You belong because of the way you sing, the slogans you know, the lineages you have learnt, the way you speak to each other. With such styles there is innovation and imitation as mannerisms and fashions spread very fast.

Fourthly, there is among comrades a new community of social solidarity and a new gender division. On the one hand, a new brotherhood of combatants have emerged with all the self-sacrifice for the group and for the community/struggle. There are real communities of care and sharing. There is also a new sisterhood — emancipated from the homestead it plays a new supportive role of caring, nursing, risking and feeling.

On this new edge romantic liaisons and social problems proliferate.

Fifthly, there is a fragile combination between two contradictory ideas. On the one level, comrades are fearless, they are the death-defiers. They stand against the



Comrades all: Young children, young men and women demonstrate on the streets in Pietermaritzburg. Clint Zsman took the photograph.

“system” and its “puppets” and “lackeys”. On the other hand this fearlessness needs treatment against fear. There is a proliferation of muti and war medicine in their daily lives and battles.

These pillars mark a boundary of feelings that define some of the comrades’ politico-cultural framework. Such feelings are embroiled in “violence” against the “system” — or better, as comrades see it a process of territorial “counter-violence”.

To understand though why “counter-violence”, we need to explore their legitimating ideas: what defines the core of their ideological positions.

Comrades see themselves as home-defenders. Their violence is seen by them as a counter-violence to the obvious violence of the ‘other’ — the ‘system’, ‘Inkatha’, etc. They react to the actual or even potential capacity for violence of the ‘other’ by acting or pro-acting.

The same, of course, can be said for Inkatha supporters, or ordinary policemen. They also see their violence as counter to others’ violent intentions or initiatives.

Furthermore, the “other” is not an abstraction. Every comrade can name the community person on the other side who either led or participated in an attack on their households or their friends. Unless it was a case of combis in the night shooting at them, or unmarked cars, or sudden night raids, they were fully conscious of the “warlords” who led the attacks, their leadership structures and their residences.

On both sides it is a war between “knowns” within familiar territories. But of note here is that to defend, comrades created the “other” as a surplus person to be physically routed: exactly in the same way as they are seen as such by the opposing side.

Secondly, in the case of community defence, *practise is primary*.

Even when in flight or retreat one’s behaviour continues to measure worth. On retreats, a romantic notion of being “hunted” takes over — you are being ‘hunted’ for a cause, for justice, for being a freedom fighter.

One’s behaviour in protecting and helping fellow comrades in flight is definitive of character.

Thirdly, existence as a comrade is also punctuated by poverty and a total lack of resources. Leading a warring life outside of homesteads demands new support structures but also a respect for common property. What is got is shared and distributed according to need.

Fourthly, there are not only the fighters, the lions — there are too, the thinkers and the resource people. Leadership demands a study in its own right — it has to do with martyrdom, experience, connections, popularity, charisma . . .

Central, too, are the varied “resource” people — those, that is, who help overcome the scarcity of resources and provide goods, weapons, fuel, muti, money, guns, cars, pamphlets, information.

Such resource people range from workers in anti-apartheid projects, workers in church and charity extension programmes, KwaZulu administration people, civil servants, criminals.

Fifthly, “struggle” is legitimated practically. Here two connections are central: the peers who crossed the borders to join MK to “fight for freedom”; those who have come back and died or who had been jailed and those who were detained, tortured, victimised, killed.

Sixthly, processes of conflict within existing institutions: at school, the struggles over democratic SRC’s, against Inkatha membership drives, against sexual abuse in schools, boycotts, stay-aways, strikes. They all spilled out into the streets to confirm the comrades resistance folklore. Conflicts at home between elders and youngsters, conflict over overcrowded home-spaces, flowed into the youth-bias of the movement. The parallel struggle of workers in the factories confirmed for all of them that this was a total struggle for “freedom”.

Finally, the idea of a general strike: *the* strike — that would mobilise *all* in a final action that would crumble the structure of



A movement that's not only about matches and toy-toying

From Page Seven

apartheid. The vigour through which comrades mobilised for boycotts, stayaways and campaigns was animated and energised by the ideal of a final, apocalyptic strike.

What of the *ferocity* of the violence and the brutalization of experience conjured up with their mention? What of the necklace and the lashings?

Most people killed in the Natal violence are young, they are the undoubted recipients of violence. But, it would be difficult to lay the execution of these deaths solely on the shoulders of black youth — whether they are congress or Inkatha supporters.

I argued at the beginning that it was not the *breakdown* of norms that explains the phenomenon of comrades, but its opposite: an attempt to generate a new type of mobilisation, and a new kind of defensive organisation. The ferocity of violence and its effects relate to three different processes.

- Once worker leaders threw in their lot with community initiatives in Natal, in some instances tight-knit defence committees evolved that encompassed everybody at the street and area level. The distance between older and younger generations were bridged and the word comrade came to denote more than being young and militant. However militarised these structures, they began exercising control over significant territories in the townships. Violence here related to skirmishes and clashes between them and the "other", or shooting from allegedly the state structures.

- If the attempt to bridge distances was shattered by police initiatives, warlords and or Inkatha supporters, and no community bonding emerged; or if worker leaders and political activists got into loggerheads with black youth by ignoring them, serious problems emerged.

Comrades, that is, the youth, still asserted their territorial sway and fought their battles but in a volatile situation without coherent legitimacy. Violence here turned inwards.

If the process of mobilisation was fragmented early, then comrades splintered into manifold tentacles and due to the scarcity of resources and competing legitimacies, conflict was not only turned inwards, but between youth structures.

Nevertheless, wherever one turns in every township or village in Natal, if the ears are sensitive and familiar as they move through the teeming streets, teeming with the younger generations, a phrase here, a snippet of song there, betray the echoes of the comrade movement — a movement that has not only been about matches and toy-toyi chants.

DENEYS SCHREINER'S call to students

ONE FOR ALL...

Now an electorate which sustains a true parliament has to be a homogeneous electorate. By that I mean that every part of the electorate has consciously to say, 'We are part of the whole; we accept the verdict of the majority as expressed at the poll' and then . . . the question posed to us is this: Can we believe that now or in ten years time . . . the people of this country would regard themselves as so much a part of an electorate comprising two hundred million to two hundred and fifty million other electorate that they would accept the majority view on taxation, on social policy, on development, on all matters which are crucial to our political life? — (J. Enoch Powell, 1970).

Powell was attempting to persuade Britons not to enter the European Economic Community but, in his argument, there are two points of considerable relevance to South Africans as we are about to design and enter into a new political contract.

The first is the irrefutable statement that 'a true parliament' is based on a contractual obligation on each citizen to be 'a part of the whole'. Those who do not accept this obligation deny themselves the right to claim citizenship, the right to belong to the new nation. Being 'a part of the whole' does not interfere with the citizen's right to oppose the view of the majority; it does not touch upon his or her right to freedom of speech which may be exercised to persuade the electorate to change its view at the next election.

Indeed, it imposes on the majority the obligation to ensure Press freedom, to *impose* regular elections which may result in a change of government and to defend strenuously the right of each citizen to criticise.

The second point concerns the fallacy in Powell's argument in which he refers to the two hundred million or more 'other electors', and their effect on *our* political life. The fault in his argument is that he assumes that there are a 'we' and a 'they'; he says no more than that he does not wish, nor does he believe, that Britons were ready to be 'part of the whole'. It is merely a statement that a British nationalism is stronger than any need to belong to a new nation of Europeans.

Our South African situation is different. Our need to belong to a 'new' nation is fundamental to the welfare of all South Africans. This is overwhelmingly recognised and it is under this compulsion that groups designing new constitutions; new frameworks each of which should facilitate the realization of that sufficiently 'homogeneous electorate' upon which a true parliamentary democracy can be securely built.

We cannot escape our past history of political exclusions, racial inequalities and injustices, or our obvious cultural differences. These make the necessary acceptance more difficult than might have been and also mean that the process of reaching an agreed constitution is highly sensitive.

Despite this, at some time in the future, at some gathering of all or many of the designer groups it is anticipated that our new political contract will emerge. A document will emerge which define the framework in which a sufficient majority of South Africans will agree to be governed. But currently things are happening which will make this agreement more difficult to reach.

Like Powell, we have not escaped the 'we/they' problem. Many, if not all, of the constitutionally active groups adopt a refutational approach to published information revealing another group's proposals. Your constitutional plan is wrong because it is: not democratic; has no federal proposals; relies on impracticable consensus; protects too many rights, some of which are not fundamental; has economic assumptions leading to poverty for all; contains economic assumptions perpetuating wealth differences; contains residual racism; eliminates group rights; and an almost endless list of other objections.

Seldom, if ever, is there an intergroup acceptance of the common ground between proposals.

It is probable that some of the intergroup rejection is linked to present poses and strategies that are planned by the participants in the determinant final conference. If this is true, it is not helpful to public understanding of the real differences that exist.

It is also not helpful that, where real changes and conscious forward agreement have already been made by some group they are ignored by their 'opponents' in favour of some earlier and more extreme statements.

All this arises because the current 'debate' is taking place between groups who plan to play a role in the final bargaining process.

But there is still time for a somewhat different stimulus to be introduced into the debate. What is needed is a well publicised forum in which the participants have a knowledge about the many constitutional proposals. These participants must be able to analyse and interpret the terminology in which each proposal is made and an ability to formulate and evaluate the common ground and the real conflicts imbedded in the different schemes.

A conference of senior students from the departments concerned with political studies in all our universities could be just such a forum. Such students have the ability to provide the South African public with an independent review of the realities contained in the proposals.

In determining the regions of commonality, they would isolate the areas of major conflict and help both the public and the proposing organisations to understand where and why compromises must be found.

They constitute a group of well-equipped young South Africans, free of influence from future bargaining positions, and whose future here is longer than many currently involved in designing the new South Africa. ●



A MAN OF HOPE

A few weeks before Alan Paton's 85th birthday he was interviewed by Humphrey Tyler for America's Monitor Radio, the radio service of the Christian Science Monitor. Alan Paton died in April 1988. Here is a previously unpublished transcript of what he said during his last radio interview, what he thought about some prominent politicians (and Archbishop Desmond Tutu) and what he predicted for South Africa.



The interview took place on Alan Paton's verandah. When Tyler identified some birds in the garden as "wild canaries", Paton quickly corrected him. They were weavers, he said.

TYLER: May we go back to that extraordinary, that astonishing book, *Cry, The Beloved Country*. Why do you think it has been such an enormous success and why, not only commercially, but it had enormous human impact round the world.

PATON: Well, I think that the conscience of the white world on black problems is very tender, and this book spoke to them and it's not a kind of a book that antagonises, although there were some people in South Africa who were antagonised by it. I remember one Zululand farmer wrote to me, said the book's full of lies and gross exaggeration and I should be ashamed of myself. Not a true lover of my country and all that sort of thing.

TYLER: That's a point I'd like to raise with you. As a South African, I can't conceive of you as being or belonging anywhere else. Could you see yourself preferring to have lived or to be living anywhere else?

PATON: Well, now my father came out from Scotland — 1900 — and I've often thought, well why didn't he go to Canada, and then realised if he'd gone to Canada I wouldn't even exist (chuckle). So I'm quite glad that he came here. But when you develop a love of country, and so many South Africans have a tremendous love of their country, then, for example, the fact that we are the polecat of the world, well, when I was in politics I would have said, well, we ought to be, we deserve it, and I used to blame it all on the Nats, but now I find myself, uh, resisting these attacks, especially by the sanctioners. Because I just don't think they know what they're doing.

TYLER: They're trying to provide a kind of quick fix for South Africa. Is there a possible quick fix?

PATON: No. If you read the history (of South Africa), if you don't understand that, then you just don't realise how complicated the problems are.

TYLER: The convenient thing for many English-speaking South Africans is to blame the Afrikaner for our predicament.

PATON: That's true. Let's not blind ourselves to the fact that he must carry the great part of the blame; Afrikaner Nationalist. Because I do think that when he came to power in 1948 then he really messed us up. Largely under the influence of Verwoerd, whose influence on the Afrikaner was incredible.

TYLER: In our terribly mixed up political scene, and with your extraordinarily long experience of it as an observer, as a teacher, as a politician yourself, you've met some striking and interesting people. Who comes to mind?

PATON: You mean, in South Africa?

TYLER: South Africans. Prominent South Africans, and what would distinguish them as being forceful and, what . . . creative?

PATON: Well, those white South Africans who attracted me most are the ones who knew there was something wrong with our

society and who more or less devoted their lives to improving it and I'm thinking of people like Edgar Brookes, JH Hofmeyr, Alfred Hoernle, Mrs Hoernle, the Rheynd Jones, all those people who founded the Institute of Race Relations in 1930. 1929, '30. And, then, in 1953, when we founded the Liberal Party, then many of my old friends looked very askance. But I made a whole lot of new ones. And the ones today again for whom I have the greatest respect were members of the Liberal Party. I would include one who wasn't and that would be Helen Suzman.

TYLER: What about Black South Africans?

PATON: Well, when the party was finally disbanded in 1968, we were about two-thirds black, and these, many of these people were just ordinary black people. They were usually people who had smallholdings, the what you call the black spots, and the Liberal Party came to their defence. And, er, we had very strong branches in Ladysmith, Bergville, all up the northern part of Natal.

TYLER: What about leaders like Chief Albert Lutuli?

PATON: Yes well I knew him very well, and he was the leader of the ANC when I was the president of the Liberal Party and we got on very well. But I mean we also had (pause) differences. For one thing, he was very closely allied to the Congress of Democrats, and the Liberal Party had a sort of a (sniff) natural aversion (chuckle) to the Congress of Democrats.

TYLER: What about leading South Africans today? Who would come to mind as people who are playing a creative role in our society?

PATON: (Pause). The people who are best placed to play the creative role are all members of the National Party. You can't get away from that. Helen Suzman has acknowledged this more than once. The real power in the country still lies there. But I can think of lots of people outside the National Party, like Beyers Naude, for example, um, Helen Suzman.

TYLER: What about people like Bishop Tutu?

PATON: (Pause; slight sniff). You're asking me a very difficult question. I'm not a whole-hearted admirer of Bishop Tutu because . . . I was, you know I wrote the life of Archbishop Clayton and he was a great archbishop, and I can't help comparing the others with him. And Tutu certainly isn't in the same class. He's very . . . He's charismatic. He's, I think he said once that white people thought he was the devil incarnate. Well, he's much more like an imp than he is like a devil, I think. He's got very impish qualities, and . . . But that's his, that's his temperament, that's his nature, that's the way he's made. And I wish him luck. He's my archbishop, anyhow.

TYLER: Christianity has always played a very important role in your life and it has many manifestations in this country, some of them not very Christian, apparently, in the result. But, how important is Christianity, is the fact that this country at least says it is a Christian country, how important is that to its finding an honourable solution?

PATON: I think it's very important and I think the awakening of the Afrikaner Christianity has been very much delayed, but at least in the past year or two the big NGK

(Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) has come out saying it had made a mistake in supporting apartheid and thinking that apartheid was the will of God for this country and all that sort of thing. And another thing you must remember, white South Africans can be . . . (can) go down on their knees and give thanks for the fact that there are so many black Christians. Jolly good ones, too, because I know many of them.

TYLER: What, on a different tack, writers you admire yourself? Is that an invidious question? If so, then don't answer it if you don't wish to.

PATON: Well the only thing is that you have to . . . If you give the names of those whom you admire, then obviously the names you don't give are the ones you don't admire. And as a rule, I avoid that question.

TYLER: The excitement of your writing career, um, you say that, you're, if not abandoning it, you're slowing up on your writing now. What is, what does the future hold for you? You're off to China on a trip next year . . .

PATON: This year.

TYLER: This year, of course.

PATON: I don't think I'll write another book. At the moment I can't see any chance of it.

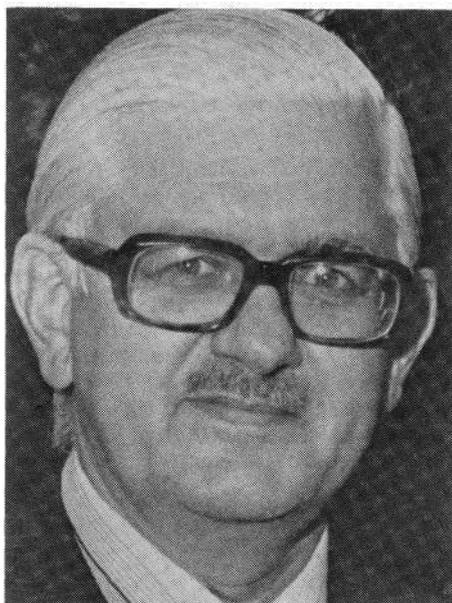
TYLER: You were in fact set on a trilogy?

PATON: Oh, I gave that up because I realised I couldn't complete the autobiography and complete the trilogy because they covered the same ground. And I thought much better to cover it, um, factually than fictionally.

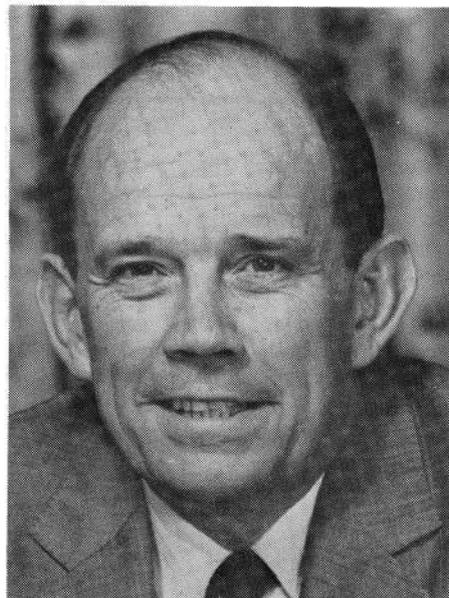
TYLER: You have close ties and friendship with Chief Buthelezi. The culture of our black people, how significant is this in our future? So many blacks seem to be hurrying



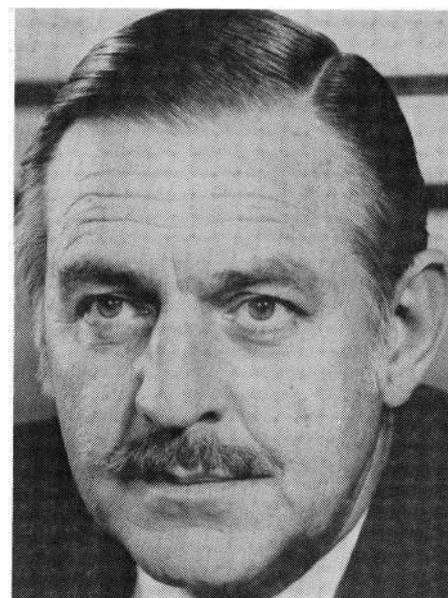
Fame came early for the Paton family: Alan, with



“Gerrit Viljoen? Too brainy! Too clever! The Afrikaners don’t choose learned men to rule them. It’s very interesting.”



“Magnus Malan is a soldier. And I’m sure he believes 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 Nationalist hierarchy, myself . . .”

to abandon much of their cultural heritage and leaping on to some sort of Coca-Cola culture, or something convenient that passes by at the moment that lets them drive trucks, and abandoning something that is very valuable. How do you see, how important, how valuable is black culture in this country?

PATON: Oh I think it’s very important. But you must remember that the pressures to adapt yourself to an industrial society are enormous, and this must affect black culture. Well, in any case it’s affected Afrikaner culture. The Afrikaner never thought that he’d become a part of the industrial empire,



his wife, Dorrie, and sons, Jonathan and David.

①

Book I
I

There is a lovely road that runs from Lxopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered & rolling, & they are lovely beyond any saying of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Cambrooke; and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa. About you there is grass & bracken, & you may hear the freedom crying of the kikhoya, one of the kinds of the wild, before & beyond you. Below you is the valley of the Munginkulu, on its journey from the Drakensberg to the sea; & beyond & behind the river, great hill after great hill; & beyond & behind them, the mountains of the Inqoti & East Griqualand.

The grass is rich & matted, you cannot see the soil. It holds the rain & the mist, & they seep into the ground, feeding the streams in every kloof. It is well leaved, & not too many cattle feed upon it; and not too many fires burn it, laying bare the soil. Stand unshod upon it, for the ground is holy, being even as it came from the Creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it & man is destroyed.

When you stand the grass is rich and matted, you cannot see the soil. And the hills for they break down, they fall to the valley below, & abundantly, change their nature. The soil is not leaved, & too many cattle feed upon it, and the streams are dry in the kloof.

(Marginal notes in the original manuscript include: 'C' and 'L' in the left margin, and 'L' in the right margin. There are also some corrections and additions in the text, such as 'falling' and 'the grass'.)

The original, handwritten first page of Alan Paton’s “Cry, The Beloved Country”. The original manuscript will be sold at an auction in New York next month.

“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*.

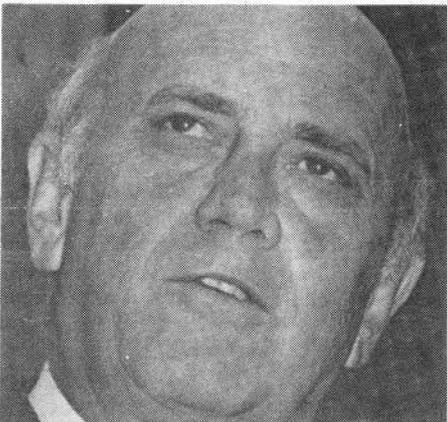
TRY this on. Any political system to retain white control in a professedly multi-racial state, however subtly contrived, and even if put forward as an intermediary step in the future, would diminish neither the attacks (from the international community) nor the pressure and uncertainty. Expediency would 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?

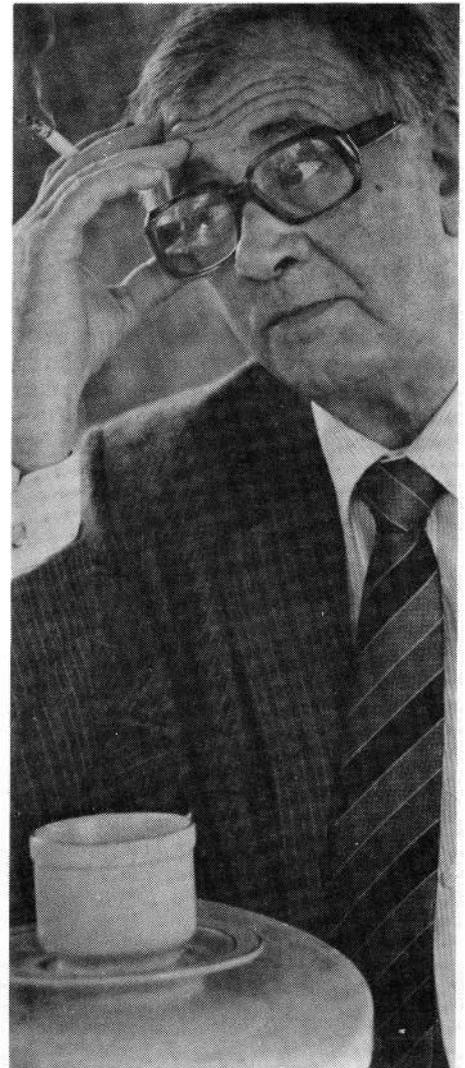
Later when light showered upon the National Party faithful, where was Willem? A step ahead of course, talking to the ANC and ministering to the birth of the Democratic Party. Now, thank goodness, the government has absorbed the DP programme. Welcome to the fold, lil' bro'. You've made it. Willem is pleased.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



'Satirical weapons used with macabre glee . . . and then a linear, rational approach to the tumultuous South African scene . . .'

From Page Thirteen

The first story, *The Prime Minister is Dead* begins as a straightforward recounting of an incident from the narrator's childhood: he is in the garden planting trees with his father; in the house his grandmother listens to the radio broadcast of the prime minister's funeral. The father and son abandon their gardening and run to catch a glimpse of the cortege which is passing near their house. As the procession passes them the truck towing the coffin breaks down, and at this point the expectations raised by the form of the story are thrown away.

In the general confusion which follows the breakdown, the narrator's father keeps his head. He loads the coffin on to his wheelbarrow (which he has on hand, luckily) and wheels it at gathering speed to the cemetery where, at the last moment, he checks himself on the lip of the grave and tips the coffin without ceremony into the hole, bringing the story to an abrupt, and similarly unceremonious, end.

A later story, *The Box*, is a satire on power and the media. The protagonist, Quentin, discovers one evening that he is able to pluck people out of his television screen "in a cloud of dirty electrons".

First, he grabs the prime minister whom he keeps like a hamster in a cage in the kitchen. Later, he takes the prime minister's wife and the Minister of Defence who resists and whom he swats and kills like a mosquito. Then, growing greedy, he takes a range of people from the captain of the Northern Transvaal squash team to a TV continuity announcer who particularly annoys him, priests, academics and spectators at sports events.

Quentin is set on establishing a Lilliputian republic in his spare room, with himself taking the role of God. His actions become increasingly brutal and his girlfriend, the embodiment of mercy and compassion in the story, leaves him. Quentin the deity becomes bored, and "for the hell of it" pulls a cubic metre of the Indian Ocean off the screen and takes it into the spare room, presumably to drown his victims with his own personal flood.

The Box, fantastic as it is, is at least written as a linear narrative; other stories in *Missing Persons* reject even that concession to realism.

*Flashback Hotel *TYYY* is a prose poem about a shadowy character moving about the halls of a recently bombed hotel. He has no single identity but is instead either a collage of different people or no-one at all, the Missing Person of the book's title. Vladislavic abandons linear conventions giving the story a dream-like vagueness. Images slide into each other in arbitrary clusters; black humour is dominant: after the bomb blast the narrator returns to the hotel to find a water filled crater in the foyer in which dead waiters are

floating. Patrons cross the lobby using the corpses as stepping stones.

In Vladislavic's work, South Africa is portrayed as a country of such turmoil and contradiction that the familiar realist methods of literary representation are rendered obsolete. This is not particularly surprising, given the context in which the stories were written. The State of Emergency was in place, the government was at the height of its repressive powers and the cynicism and hypocrisy of official statements and actions seemed set to surpass even the most savage and extreme satire.

Under these conditions literature becomes a part of the struggle, employed to ridicule and expose the ludicrous tyranny of the regime. Vladislavic's stories are political texts, written with this object. He uses his own satirical weapons to undermine the symbols of the ruling party — the prime minister, the Voortrekker Monument, sombre reports of bombs in crowded urban areas — and manipulates them with a macabre glee.

Ivan Vladislavic, Missing Persons (David Philip); and David Medalie, The Killing of the Christmas Cow (David Philip).

But powerful as this strain of writing may be, it is not all pervasive: for into this environment of the armed-and-ready-to-fire short story comes David Medalie with his first collection, *The Killing of the Christmas Cows*.

Medalie's stories could not be more different from those of Vladislavic. He is strictly faithful to the linear, rational form of narrative. His stories have a beginning, middle and end and concern real people in recognisable situations. He does not attempt to write the whole of South Africa into his book but is content with small stories of narrow ambit but wide illumination.

His themes are reminiscent of those favoured by Nadine Gordimer in her early collections of short stories. The events covered frequently take place in small towns on the highveld outside Johannesburg, and many of the stories are introspective, shot through with autobiographical fragments and images, gleaned in childhood, which finally emerge through the medium of fiction. Like Gordimer, Medalie writes stories of childhood innocence betrayed by adult worldliness, but which also contain the oblique wisdom of a child's view and interpretation of the adult world.

Both Gordimer and Medalie have a particular talent for description, for filling in the gaps in the full tapestry of the story. They convey the dustiness and claustrophobia of

small town interiors; the low ceilings of darkened rooms; the waning heat of a Transvaal late summer twilight.

One story in Medalie's book, in particular, entitled *The Bougainvillea Tryst* recalls one of Gordimer's earliest tales, *Ah, Woe is Me*, published in 1952 in her first collection of short stories, *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*. Both stories deal with the Servant-Madam dichotomy, the power relations which dictate their interaction, and with the failure of both parties to communicate with each other across the divide.

In Gordimer's story the maid, Sarah, becomes too ill to continue working and disappears into the void of the townships. She reappears in the form of her daughter who comes to tell the Madam that Sarah is dying and that the family is destitute. The Madam, the Narrator, is helpless in the face of this disaster: 'What could I do for her? What could I do?' she asks rhetorically. 'Here . . ., I said. Here — take this, and gave her my handkerchief.'

In *The Bougainvillea Tryst*, Medalie's Madam is revisited by an old black man, the gardener who worked for her some years before. He, too, brings a tale of woe, of a son killed by tsotsis, of sickness and unemployment. The Madam, incidentally a liberal dismayed by the rise of support for the Conservative Party invites him in for tea in the kitchen. They sit together stiffly, going through the farcical motions of a normal social visit, until the purpose of the old man's return is revealed. He asks for money which she gives him with relief, and with equal relief watches him leave.

The Madam and the gardener, we understand, have spent almost 30 years of their lives in close daily contact — she, in a relationship of benign patronage towards him — but they are nonetheless unable to sustain half an hour of conversation over a pot of tea.

The best story in *The Killing of the Christmas Cows* is called *In Search of Elegy*.

Eric Fraser, a city-wise litterateur travels to a small, and in his opinion insignificant, town in his attempt to trace the life of Deidre Hattingh, a famous dead writer who lived in the dorp for a number of years, and whose biography he is writing.

Fraser is unenthusiastic about the journey and about the town. He cannot imagine living there for a week let alone the 12 years of Hattingh's sojourn, and in a rare moment of self-knowledge he admits to himself that if he cannot gain some understanding of her commitment to staying, his biography will miss its mark.

Later he meets the Vermaaks, Hattingh's former neighbours. The sickly Mr Vermaak slopes off to bed in a mumble jumble of racist comments, but his wife is hospitable and



QUICK KILL?

But did the Gulf War attain its objectives? Was it, in fact, futile, asks JACK SPENCE, head of Leicester University's department of politics.

There is almost universal consensus in the West that the Gulf War was a good thing.

For many, the case is deemed to be self-evident:

- For the first time since 1945, one state (Iraq) occupied the *entire* territory of another (Kuwait) in clear violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. (Tibet's absorption by China in 1954 presumably doesn't count, as neither were members of the UN, and the Charter's provisions could not, therefore, apply).

- A nasty, grubby dictator had to be taught an exemplary lesson as failure to do so would simply encourage him in his bid to become the hegemonic power in the Middle East, and threaten the unimpeded supply of oil to Western consumers.

- Economic sanctions — the first line of defence of the United Nations against aggression — would not have worked against a regime ruthless enough to force its people to accept the resulting hardship. Military intervention was, therefore, entirely justified on both legal and political grounds.

- The end of the Cold War and the inability of the Soviet Union to support a former ally gave the West, and in particular the United States as the sole surviving superpower, an unparalleled opportunity to fashion a new international order combining Western values of freedom and justice, and one which would guarantee stability against threats of disruption by maverick states.

- And all this was to be done under the legal and moral rubric of the UN, the authority of which had at least been vindicated as its founders intended over four decades ago.

At first sight this case is impressive. Indeed, for those critics who invoke the double standard, claiming it was hypocritical to defend the sovereignty of Kuwait and ignore, for example, Soviet intervention in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), or Israeli subversion of the West Bank of the Jordan and the Lebanon, there appears to be a legitimate retort: Western inaction on these occasions (for sound reasons of *real-politik*) does not mean that we should refrain from acting positively in defence of legal and moral principle when circumstances permit.



As Paddy Ashdown, leader of the Liberal Democrats, put it: "Because we can't do everything, it doesn't mean we should do nothing."

But surely, in this context — critics argued — it was worth giving UN-sponsored sanctions a decent chance to exert their long-term impact on the Iraqi economy and, by implication, the viability of Hussein's regime? It was clear, however, that the Bush administration in doubling up its military presence in Saudi Arabia in November, three months after the crisis erupted, had no faith in the willingness of the American public to sustain the long haul implied by sole reliance on a sanctions strategy. Yet this was precisely the

policy followed by the West in relation to the Soviet Union for over forty years: containment by a combination of nuclear deterrence and firm political will, even if this meant the sacrifice of justice for a Soviet oppressed Eastern Europe for the sake of pan-European order via the mutual recognition of spheres of interest.

And, of course, this strategy did ultimately ensure the collapse of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe and rapid decline in Moscow's capacity to play a dynamic superpower role. Sadly in the Gulf case, this option was dismissed long before sanctions had any



Dilemmas of young writers

From Page Fourteen

conversational. She offers Fraser coffee and koeksusters and observes that his proposed book is unlikely to be very interesting because Hattingh "led a very quiet and uneventful life".

In a rage, Fraser storms out. He cannot tolerate having this platteland unsophisticate pronouncing on the value of his work. Earlier he wondered whether he could climb into his subject's skin sufficiently to capture her thoughts and motivations; after his childish outburst the reader knows his biography is bound to fail.

The strength of this story relies chiefly on the care with which Medalie portrays his

characters, and here another difference between Medalie and Vladislavic is apparent. For Medalie, character is all important. It is the vehicle through which all events are mediated.

For Vladislavic, by contrast, character is entirely peripheral, often to the point of non-existence. The people who do find their way into his stories are incidental — they are there as human pegs across which the canvas of the narrative is stretched. His characters, such as they are, with one or two exceptions, are themselves all Missing Persons.

Vladislavic's brand of satire, forged in crude and farcical times does not lose its legitimacy and impact as the political power relations shift in this country. If anything, in

the present confusion of a society rife with ironies, inconsistencies, uncertainties and incompetencies, this kind of writing remains as forceful and necessary as ever. But it remains, too, a responsive literature, shackled to time and place, and it faces the danger that as the initial impulse behind each story recedes into the past, so the stories will lose their power.

Medalie's work is less bound by specific events. Microcosm by microcosm and character by character he seeks the inner mechanisms, the cogs which turn and propel people through each day. He is listening out for a few authentic trans-historical South African voices, and if this collection is anything to go by, his hearing is remarkably acute.

A speedy defeat – then no control

From Page Fifteen

prospect of biting: Western governments and their publics clearly no longer had the stomach to pursue a patient, consistent policy. The appetite for the 'quick kill' was overwhelming.

A more profound objection to the arguments advanced by Western leaders in support of the war was the dangerous and ultimately self-defeating confusion of interest and principle implicit in their presentation. Thus, the case for military intervention in the Gulf was a potent example of what George Kennan (a leading exponent of "realist" international theory) once described as the "legalistic-moralistic tradition" of US foreign policy: the belief that America is the sole custodian of justice and freedom in the international community — and its government, therefore, morally and legally entitled to impose its vision of global order on distant lands and peoples, however remote and different their value systems.

In other words, the protection of national interest — whether political or economic — always has to be justified by appeal to high principle, and in the particular case of the Gulf crisis this was the protection of state sovereignty at all costs.

The real question is whether the objective of the enterprise was well defined, properly limited and with sufficient thought given to the political consequences of military action in pursuit of vital interest.

By contrast, the 'realist' critique of this idealistic tradition of thought and behaviour emphasises the need to be prudent in the calculation of interest and what is required to defend it. Thus, going to war in the Gulf for the sake of a principle — however sacred — was bound to be self-defeating; a high risk venture because it led to the perception of Saddam Hussein as the personification of evil, raising expectations at home and abroad that nothing less than his destruction would be sufficient — an open-ended and ideologically defined objective. Far better, so the realist might argue, to be blunt and specific about what was really at stake, namely the uninterrupted flow of a commodity (oil) vital to the Coalition partners for their industrial and commercial survival.

After all, if Kuwait had been the world's largest broccoli producer, would the West have intervened so massively in defence of its economic interests in the Gulf area?

Whether Western governments have done enough to conserve energy or find alternative sources to oil is a separate issue; faced with an immediate threat to supply the West, and the US in particular, was bound to react firmly.

And here there are grounds for an indictment of Coalition policy in the Gulf crisis. President Bush, for one, was inconsistent and muddled in his definition of the Coalition goals. On the one hand, he stressed the limited objective of expelling Iraq from Kuwait; on the other hand, he more than hinted at the desirability of destroying Iraq's

military capability, actively encouraged Saddam Hussein's opponents to topple their oppressor and appeared to support the creation of a war crimes tribunal to try the erring Iraqi leadership.

The first was a sensibly limited and specific objective suggesting that the Coalition's quarrel with Hussein would cease once Kuwait was liberated. This strategy had the merit of neatly combining moral principle with national interest. It was based on a widely supported series of UN Security Council resolutions designed to avoid the fragmentation of Iraq with all that might have involved for an unstable post-war balance of power in the Middle East as Iran, Syria and Israel jockeyed dangerously to fill the vacuum. A model of sophisticated realism in the making of foreign policy, you might say!

Yet by simultaneously calling for internal revolt and, by definition, the destruction of Saddam's regime, the President and his allies have lost control of events following the initial and speedy defeat of Iraq's armed forces. It is true that in terms of Security Council resolution 678 the UN had a mandate to take measures to promote peace and security in the area"; what Bush *et al* had in mind, no doubt, was the replacement of Saddam by an Iraqi military oligarchy willing to come to terms with the Coalition and committed to maintaining the integrity of the Iraqi state. Instead Bush and his supporters got a Kurdish and Shiite uprising fuelled by false expectations of American assistance and which Saddam has put down with terrifying ferocity.

True, Iraq's territorial integrity will probably remain intact, but under the leadership of the man Bush repeatedly compared to Hitler, and was sworn to depose.

Interest and moral principle were, therefore, pulling in opposite directions. The failure to combine them into meaningful and consistent policy represented the worst of all worlds for the Coalition. The resulting damage to US standing is self-evident, caused by failure to spell out clearly and concisely what American war aims were at the beginning of the conflict, and thereafter to hold to them consistently.

Failure in this context might, it is true, be reversed by arming the Kurds and the Shias and resuming the war to end Saddam's reign of terror. The argument that this breaks the UN Charter provisions on domestic jurisdiction does not stand up; genocide is forbidden by a UN Covenant of 1948, and the Security Council has the right to take forceful measures against those who practise it.

The outlook, therefore, remains bleak: imminent withdrawal of US forces from the Gulf rules out any resumption of military action against Iraq. Yet whatever short-term domestic gains accrue to the Bush administration from its success in avoiding large-scale casualties in the war, and a repetition of the Vietnam syndrome, the allies, in liberating

Kuwait, have created new intractable problems for themselves.

Consider the rage expressed throughout the Arab world at what appears to be blatant US-led imperialism. (Whose oil is it anyway?)

For those immersed in the "politics of despair", the West remains guilty of applying appalling double standards with respect to for example, Israeli occupation of the West Bank. For those initially convinced of the case for tough action against Iraq, there is the horrifying spectacle of mass murder and dispossession of an entire people. There is, too, the impotence, the failure of the United States and its allies to punish those responsible, let alone prevent any of it happening in the first place.

None of this bodes well for Mr Bush's new international order. Certainly, intelligence forecasting of crises that might threaten that order will have to improve, not to mention the capacity to signal intentions of likely reaction to threats of aggression.

The ambiguous response (to put the kindest interpretation on what occurred) of Ambassador April Glaspie to Hussein's probing about US policy in the event of attack on Kuwait, recalls the encouragement given by Dean Acheson (UN Secretary of State) to North Korea in 1950. South Korea, he declared, was outside the strategic perimeter of Western commitment. The result was three years of war ended by return to the *status quo ante*.

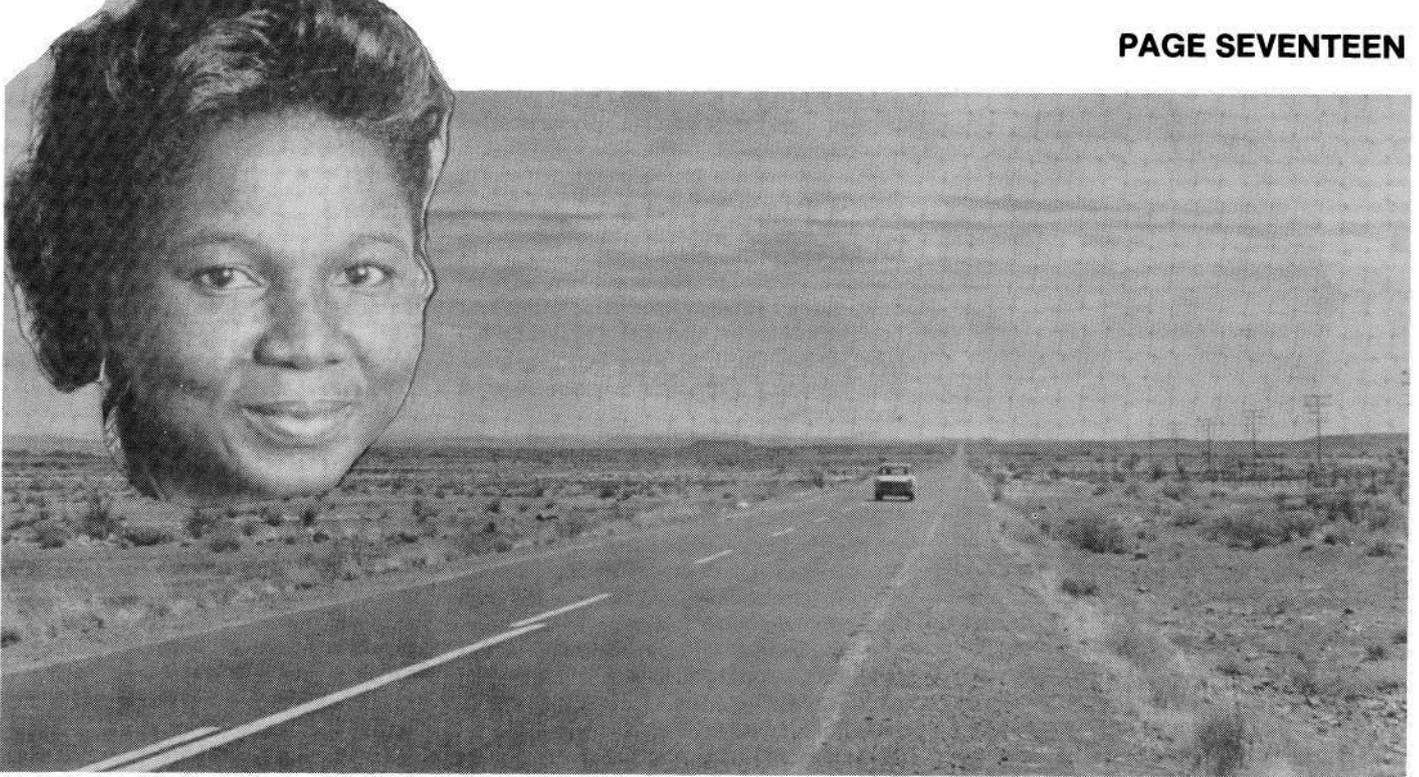
Optimistic talk of a new security system involving, for example, an effective arms control regime limiting arms sales to the Middle East underestimates the sheer difficulty involved in devising a protective alliance umbrella in which all the states in the region will feel secure.

Nor can such a structure provide for Israel, so long as the Palestinian problem remains unsolved.

Nor will the creation of regional order in the Middle East be easy while so many governments resist mounting popular pressure for democratisation (one important consequence of the war).

Their states bear little resemblance to those which in Western Europe were able, in 1949, to create in NATO a viable and lasting alliance structure based on common interests, an identifiable external enemy, a deeply rooted historical experience as viable states, and a commitment to similar economic and political values. This is hardly the case with the countries in the Middle East, many of whose peoples will bitterly resent any attempt to impose an alliance system on the region, however much their rulers may desire it for their own self-protection from *internal* revolt. In other words, intervention of this kind in the vain moralistic hope of combining order with justice for the region may well, paradoxically, provoke popular discontent, and weaken, in the process, the very governments which a new security system is supposed to protect.

'None of this bodes well for Mr Bush's new international order'



BBC goes to BLOEMFONTEIN

Nigerian-born Elizabeth Ohene visited the Zoology Department of the University of the Orange Free State recently to interview for the BBC an interesting sub-species: young Afrikaners caught up in change. She was flabbergasted sometimes by what she found, and so were the students.

ABOUT a third of the way on the main N1 freeway that links Johannesburg with Cape Town is Bloemfontein. Bloemfontein is the judicial capital of South Africa, with the reputation of being a bit of a dump, a back-water town. Most people make jokes about it all the time. A bit unfair, I think, because it's a pretty little town with lots of historical and emotional significance, especially for the Afrikaners.

It's also the capital of the Orange Free State, one of the two original Boer Republics, and home of the University of the Orange Free State. This is where, I was told, true Afrikaners send their children to be educated.

If change is indeed to come to South Africa, and the relationship between whites and blacks were ever to become amicable, then much of that change will have to be on the part of people like the students of this university.

So I went to the campus to talk with the students, to try to get some insight into their thinking. I spoke with a group of students in the zoology department about how they saw their country and the changes, fears and hopes and how they saw the rest of Africa.

There was Agnes Snyman: "I've no problems with blacks."

There was Alvin Hugo: "The problem was, we were isolated as whites, isolated from the blacks. The blacks were isolated from the whites."

Then there was Lisl Sinne: "What do Africa know about South Africa?"

And Jaco van Wyk: "I would like to travel to Zimbabwe, Kenya; let the rest of Africa, let the rest of the world realise that we are hungry to go to their places, and we are hungry for them to come to us . . ."

We chatted in a small tutorial office over cups of coffee . . . What should the way forward be for them in their country. Jaco van Wyk started the conversation.

VAN WYK: I say let's negotiate with the black people, I would love to see this country in peace because I want to give my grandchildren a safe place to live in and I don't want to take them to Australia, America or Britain or any place. I want them to be South Africans.

OHENE: You know, to the outside world, much of black Africa, the Afrikaner comes across as racist, as closed mind. Is that how you see yourselves?

MALE STUDENT: Racist is a funny term. Say if the black man was governing, right, and wouldn't give anything, right, so what would it make of the black man? A racist!

The word racist has been thrown in our faces for so long . . . look at Australia. I mean the aborigine . . . gee whizz.

I've heard about somebody who talked about their blacks as "boongs". Now, is that racist or what? I mean, we use the word kaffir, okay. All right, we used it, all right now it's a very big swear word, okay.

But look at Australia, "boongs", that's racist.

I say it again, we were all brought up in a time where you thought about black people as the lesser man and you didn't give to him. He worked for you, on a very low salary, and maybe boarding, especially on the farms now.

I can see a lot of white South Africans integrating with the blacks. But then you get the black, say 10 percent of the black people, that doesn't want to have any whites in this country, and then you get say the 10 percent white people that doesn't want to see a black man in the street . . . and that situation should stop, and it can stop with the progress, the changes that has been made. It can be worked out.

But then you will have to, the people will have to, negotiate. When I say the people, I mean, uh, the ANC with their Freedom Charter and everything. If you look at the Freedom Charter you see, "The people will govern; the people shall own the land".

Now, I don't know maybe if you will differ from me and a lot of people will, but I see that the people, I don't see them as . . .

OHENE: You don't think "the people" includes the whites . . .





Elizabeth Ohene . . . incredulous.

MALE STUDENT: I don't think "the people" includes all the blacks, "the people" includes the top part that's going to govern the land like a long time in Russia.

OHENE: We're talking theory. On a personal basis: Do you have any black friends?

FEMALE STUDENT: No. Not my friends who I am visiting now. No.

OHENE: Well, why not?

FEMALE STUDENT: Well, why not? It's got a lot to do at school since I didn't know anyone. The first one who sits next to me is when I come to university.

OHENE: How did you find him?

FEMALE STUDENT: I don't have any problems with blacks. Blacks can live together with me, next to me, but then you must pay the same price I pay. I have no problem.

OHENE: But if you do not have any black friends, on a person to person basis, then we will keep on talking about ANC, government, organisations . . . We have to deal on a person to person basis.

So how, as a country, are you going to get rid of a racist basis . . . it's all theory. Unless you have one person, or two that you know, individuals that you deal with but you all don't seem to have anybody like that.

FEMALE STUDENT: How many blacks really have a white friend and really knows what's going on with whites? You can say the same.

MALE STUDENT: The problem was in our upbringing. The problem was that we were isolated as whites, we were isolated from the blacks, the blacks were isolated from the whites. There was never . . .

OHENE: But you are young people! And it's up to you to make friends. Why are you depending on your parents?

FEMALE STUDENT: Where do we make friends? Then where do you go with your black friends. There's no place you can go with your black friends.

OHENE: To a cafe, to have a cup of coffee . . . Or the cinema?

MALE STUDENT: I must disagree. In the Free State you can't go into a restaurant with a black. Take Joburg for instance . . . I'll go any place any time with black friends. It's not going to happen overnight.

But I work in a restaurant and I can see already that a lot of people that goes black and white people, much more than say five years back . . . We mustn't think it's going to happen overnight.

MALE STUDENT: We don't want pressure on that. Then I say again: we've been isolated so long.

You say we are young people, true; I'm already 26.

True, I don't have any contact with any blacks, except the blacks that's with me in classes . . . I say I maybe won't have a friend now, but my younger brother he's first year now, he's doing architecture. I'm sure he will have, in say the next three years, a black family visiting him. He's relating better. I don't know.

The architects are like the art students, they are a bit weird . . . Not that I say that having a black friend is weird, that's not what I'm trying to say. I know a lot of older people, maybe my dad's age, that do have personally black friends. That's in the Free State as well, that's in Bethlehem — that's even worse than Bloemfontein — so I say give us a chance, give us a chance with the governing of this land. And I would like to see that happening with the black leaders as well, they should change a bit, become a bit less, what you call it, radical, try to say, don't worry, things are going to get better. Let's go and sit and draw a plan to make it better.

OHENE: What do you know about the rest of Africa?

FEMALE STUDENT: We don't see it on television. The only thing we see on television is like when there's a coup or there's a war. But I think it's the media must change. The media must bring the rest of Africa to us. The common people want to know about Africa because we're from Africa. We actually don't know what's going on in the other lands in Africa. I think the media must start doing something. The people want to listen about the rest of Africa but they don't have the chance.

FEMALE STUDENT: Can I ask you a question?

OHENE: Yes. Ask me a question.

FEMALE STUDENT: What do Africa know about South Africa? The ordinary people, not high up, the man on the street. What do they know about South Africa?

OHENE: Surprisingly, much more than you know about the rest of Africa. It may also very well be it's also not as detailed, is not very as it is. It's more in terms of apartheid.

MALE STUDENT: I say they are keeping us out. Like the rest of the world is keeping us out of their countries.

OHENE: Do you mind? Do you mind that you are kept out?

MALE STUDENT: I would like to travel. I would like to travel to Zimbabwe, to Botswana. Okay, Botswana isn't bad. To Kenya. Mozambique is right across our border, next to us. You can't go there because of the war, the Renamo, Frelimo, and there, the people there aren't accepting us South Africans because they say, no, the white South Africans are racists. And that's not true.

OHENE (Incredulous): But that is true! It is true that there is discrimination here?

MALE STUDENT: I'm not saying there's no discrimination here. I will even go so far as to say there are a, er, 10 percent of whites who, maybe a bit more, who are very racist. But I'm not part of them and I don't see them as part of South Africa. They're not governing me. Can't influence me. I'm taking my own decisions. And that's why I say let the rest of Africa, let the rest of the world, realise that we are hungry to go to their places and we are hungry for them to come to us.

OHENE: Are you hungry for the rest of Africa to come and see South Africa?

MALE STUDENT: For sure. So they can see what is going on. And so they can open their gates to us and they can see it's not that bad . . .

OHENE: How do you people entertain yourselves? What do you do when you are not at lectures?

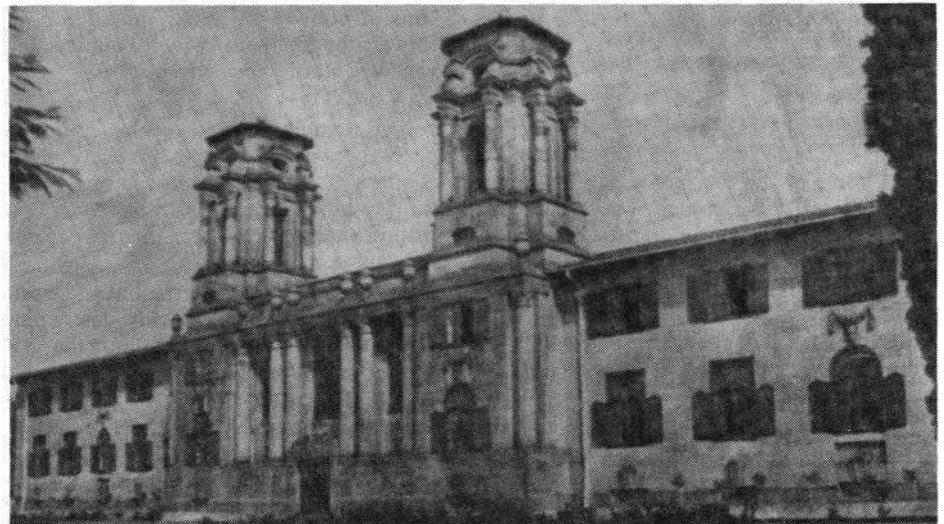
FEMALE STUDENT: Well. Go to the movies. Well, braaivleis, parties, listen to music, read books.

OHENE: In the Free State here — this is the heart of the Afrikanerdom — what is the sport?

MALE STUDENT: Rugby. Cricket is getting big attention now. Love to go to cricket games, Friday nights, because then you can take your beers (laughter) . . .

OHENE: You don't look big. My image of the Afrikaner, really huge, big neck . . .

MALE STUDENT: You mustn't look at us here now. You must go into the hostels and look at all the guys there. Rugby players. Huge. Big boys. But then the perception that the outside world has on South Africans are maybe this big Boer . . . rifles across their shoulders. I believe, if you think about the people in London, Paris, I think I put too much of a country on them.



Bloemfontein City Hall . . . not really such a dump.

*“The future is far away.
There won’t be a
new future tomorrow . . . ”*



From Page Eighteen

OHENE: How would you like to be seen? You’ve told me that the image that the outside world has of the Free State is not correct. What do you think is the reality of the Free State? How would you want the outside world to see you? What do you think the reality is?

MALE STUDENT: The reality is there is no such thing as Boers, uhm, going about on their horses and, where, that’s where I actually, there are a lot of intellectual minded people in the Free State, lot of open-minded people, in general we are not the gun-slingers.

OHENE: Do you ever see the time will come — would you like to put a time frame on it — when you might have a black family living next to you?

FEMALE STUDENT: I think it will happen in the future. Actually, I live on a farm and there are many blacks. We have two farms. On the one the blacks, I won’t mind; the blacks, they could live with us. But the other farm, they actually get the same salary and so on, they have the same, but every weekend they are drunk and so on. But on our farm, they go to church then each weekend, and they are very . . . and they have gardens. Um, actually in their homes . . . we went there. They made food and so . . . They even sell to other people . . .

OHENE: You went to their homes? Did you eat their food?

FEMALE STUDENT: Yes, they made like, vetkoeks, I don’t know what you call it. They make it very nice. We enjoyed it, but they are more like our people are.

But the others. They are also blacks. But they don’t care about their babies, like we took one to hospital because they didn’t clean him enough and so on. They drink every weekend. They cut his head open with an axe and so on. They’re not the same standard, like I say, in South Africa there are blacks could mix with us, but there are others that I don’t know.

OHENE: You personally, would you have a black family living next to you?

FEMALE STUDENT: I think when they’re on the same standard I wouldn’t mind.

OHENE: How are you going to judge? Who’s going to judge if they are the same standard?

MALE STUDENT: First of all you have to realise that a lot of farmers, their closest neighbour are the blacks that are working on the farm. And I say the same, they can come and live next door to me any time but then I would like them to take me into consideration.

OHENE: I imagine if whites were living next to you you would expect them to take you into consideration.

MALE STUDENT: But then I say there’s a lot of white people I wouldn’t want to live next door to. If I say a black family can come and live next door to me, first of all I would like them that — I don’t want to say the same standard — but I want them to take me into consideration. And, if I can’t mix with them, I don’t want them to think I’m a racist because I’m not mixing with them.

OHENE: Would you have your children play with their children?

MALE STUDENT: I grew up on a farm and my friends were the black people that were living on the farm. But when you are in a soft bed you’re not going to start questioning, ask who’s lying hard on the ground. And that’s the way it happened. I think that’s a very nice explanation.

OHENE: I think I rather like that explanation. If you’re on the soft bed, you’re not going to ask who’s lying on the hard one.

FEMALE STUDENT: Ja. Probably.

MALE STUDENT: Now I think that’s changing because we are realising that our beds can’t stay soft for much longer . . . because there’s a lot of growth . . . I think in the year 2040 they have to cope with 80 million people in South Africa. There’s not even enough water for 80 million people . . .

I think the people are realising that the only way out is all the people to reach a level where they can sustain themselves . . . I mean that the people can reach out, get what they want in life, have the money to have a good housing, have a good schooling for their children . . . I would like to say that the changes that are taking place in South Africa right now isn’t because of pressure by the outside world or by the black community, it’s because the people are realising, black and white, there must be some, some force that will make everybody equal.

I think that the people are starting to realise that a good schooling is the basis for good economic wealth in the future.

FEMALE STUDENT: How do the standard of the lives, the black especially, compare with the standards in the rest of Africa? We heard in the rest of Africa where there’s no food sometimes, and all these things, we actually just hear the bad things. I just want to know how do the blacks compare with those blacks. Are it actually as bad? Or what is it like?

OHENE: It varies. It varies. There are countries where the level of poverty is much lower than it is among blacks here.

I’ll tell you what somebody told me in Soweto. She said she went to Swaziland the

other day, and it is the way they were walking, it was the way they were walking how I knew they were free. She said it wasn’t the clothes they were wearing or the cars they were driving, but they just looked free. I don’t know if you . . . if that makes sense?

FEMALE STUDENT: In the hostel, I had to be in at 10 o’clock, and I didn’t feel free . . . Living on my own, I could go in the evenings, but still I didn’t go out. I felt free. I think it’s the thing. But with food and such, the black people are not in such a bad position in South Africa. I think it’s that feeling for freedom they are looking for.

MALE STUDENT: Do you think that the black people are that much oppressed? I believe there are problems. But I don’t think that they really are that oppressed to turn radical.

OHENE: Are you optimistic?

MALE STUDENT: Optimistic in the sense that we can work together. But now there are some negative factors like, for instance, I want to come back to Mr Mandela . . . I’m not optimistic about him. He’s got the same fixed ideas as old uh, uh, PW Botha had, and Verwoerd, and if . . . the same fixed ideas. He doesn’t want to move.

OHENE: Is there any black leader about whom you feel optimistic?

MALE STUDENT: Buthelezi is the only option, visible option, at this stage. Not because he’s doing the white man a favour or he’s trying to (what you call it) give more of the black people to the whites. He’s not going to sell his people short. He’s going to negotiate for everything that are reasonable. But he will trade off.

OHENE (to another student): Do you feel positive about the future?

FEMALE STUDENT: Yes, positive. But it’s a very far future. It won’t be tomorrow, a new future.

OHENE (to another woman student): What about you?

FEMALE STUDENT: Before you can give cake to people, you must have a cake. Before you can give money and do things, you must have money.

First our economy is the most important thing.

Before, the rest of the world don’t help us and these sanctions and all these things . . . if they go on like this, I think South Africa don’t have a future because you can’t do anything without money. You must first get the economy right and then, if the economy’s right, then I think there would be a future in South Africa, but that isn’t going to change. I don’t know. We aren’t sure about the future.

VIVA! VIVA!

by DAVID BASCKIN

SOUTH AFRICANS, said novelist Damon Galgut on the BBC Africa service recently, need to develop a new consciousness.

This is unarguably true, given the terrible state of the old unconsciousness. But consciousness, by its very nature, needs something material to hang its hat on. Something kind of symbolic, filled with meaning, screaming with immediacy.

Now, given the identity crisis currently rampant in the nation's creative world — in which limp-wristed artists get brutally ignored by horny handed cultural workers — the necessary combination of cool intelligence and hot passion might just take a little too long to come on stream.

And that's where the overnight collapse of the Evil Empire comes in on the act. Because, littering the scrapyards of the entire Eastern Block, are any number of potent national and ideological symbols, just dying to get back onto their pedestals.

Rumour has it that in Minsk you can get a very nice bronze Lenin for as little as the scrap value of the metal. Our person in Georgia tells us that a variety of statues of the late Joe Stalin are available, ranging in size from dinky little keyring decorations to a forty metre ferroconcrete colossus dating from 1942 holding Roosevelt in one hand and Hitler in the other.

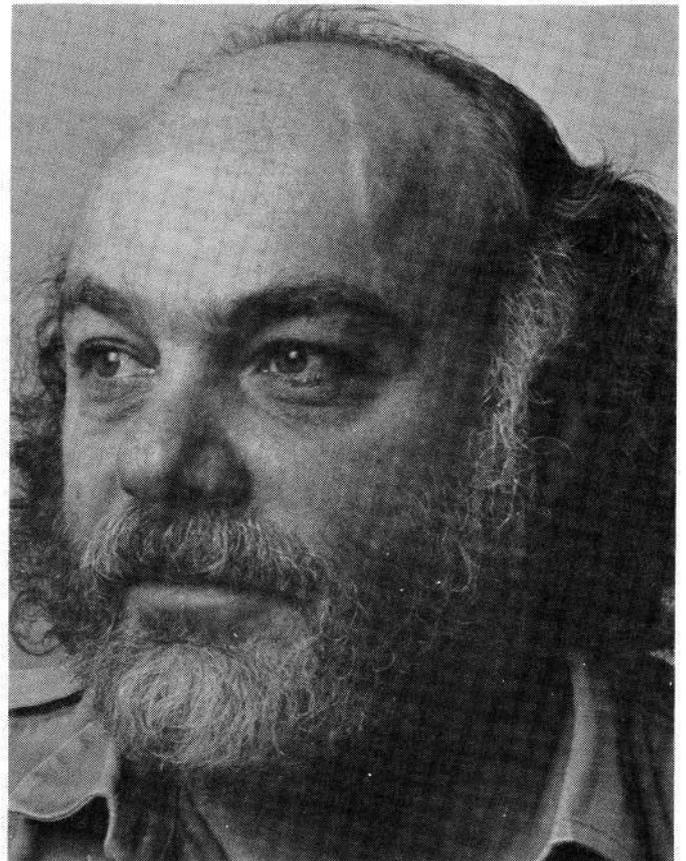
Meanwhile, the recent downfall of the Albanian regime has led to all kinds of state secrets coming to light. Not least of these is the revelation that during the early days of the Revolution, the cash-strapped Reds were forced to adapt a statue of ex-King Zog of Albania to depict the new ruler, Enver Hexha. This was done by the simple expedient of changing the name on the pedestal.

With this kind of example it is only a matter of time before the many South African statues of General Smuts, Cecil Rhodes and Queen Victoria will all get new names. No prize for guessing who will replace Queen Victoria.

A RECENT television interview with Barend was full of subtlety, mystery and economic intrigue. The secret to the whole thing is that VAT means higher prices, but lower costs.

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been a tax on tax situation which escalated costs. But with VAT the tax is paid only once. Unfortunately it is paid on the entire amount which is why the price goes up.

And say you were to buy a second hand car, continued Barend before anybody could interrupt him. In the past, GST would have been paid every time you sold the thing.

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