

INTRODUCTION

An Afrikaner's long walk to reconciliation

Leon Wessels has been through changes since he rode behind Verwoerd in 1964, writes Kevin Ritchie

A young man sits atop a white horse, looking resolutely into the camera. The caption tells us he's part of an honour guard during the erstwhile National Party's 50th anniversary celebrations in de Wildt, a small town in the old western Transvaal, in 1964.

The rider is waiting to escort the then prime minister of apartheid South Africa Hendrik Verwoerd.

The caption tells us that the rider would ultimately become the first NP cabinet minister to apologise publicly for apartheid to a democratic South Africa.

The rider is Leon Wessels, a co-author of South Africa's much-lauded Constitution and a two-term commissioner at South Africa's Human Rights Commission.

The picture was taken almost 43 years ago by David Goldblatt, today an internationally acclaimed photographer, then a Jewish South African shopkeeper from a mining village west of Johannesburg with what would become a burning passion for documentary photography.

The image, one of 100 photographs of a cross section of Afrikaners taken throughout the 1960's was first published in 1975 as a book entitled *Some Afrikaners Photographed*.

The book immediately became a *cause célèbre*, reviled by the Afrikaner establishment and gingerly treated by the English media with even *The Sunday Times* refusing to run a review of it, because it challenged the official Afrikaner view of racial superiority and divine ordination.

This week a new addition, *Some Afrikaners Revisited*, was released 32 years after the first one and 13 years into South Africa's democracy.

For Wessels, the picture not only shows how much has changed in the interim, but more importantly, just how important it is not to forget the past, but to acknowledge it, deal with it and move on.

In 1964, when the picture was taken he was an 18 year old instructor and member of the police's mounted unit based at the Pretoria Police College. If you look closely you will see that apart from the hats, coats and ties, all the people in the photograph are dressed the same, in riding breeches and white shirts, while the horses' tack is all

regulation, very different Wessels, admits, to what the commandos would have worn during the South African Anglo Boer War.

“We were merely hauled out [of the college] to do a parade.” Wessels remembers. It was a parade like all the others he did during his three years at the college, including the ceremonial opening of parliament every year.

Professor Neville Dubow, lecturer at the Michaelis School of Art in Cape Town, wrote on 26 October 1990 in the *Vrye Weekblad* under the heading “The man on the white horse and his hat – Neville Dubow discovers that men who wear hats have many faces”:

Some years ago I needed to find a single image that would constitute an icon of institutionalised power in South Africa. I chose a photograph made by David Goldblatt in 1964.

It’s a famous image. Many visually literate South Africans will be familiar with it. It shows a group of mounted men, National Party supporters, escorting the architect of Grand Apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd, to the celebration of the party’s 50th Anniversary. It’s a classical study; in many ways even its composition encapsulates the classical rubrics: frontal, symmetrical, its elements evenly disposed along parallel planes.

In the frontal plane, three white men, with hats jammed firmly on their heads, sit on three white horses. Behind them, positioned in the interstices, are another row, and behind them yet another. The extreme foreshortening of the foreground figures gives to the horses’ heads a near heraldic quality.

One is reminded, ludicrously, of a row of stuffed game trophies onto which the hunters have been glued. The faces of the riders reveal marginally more variation than those of the horses but it is a narrow margin. The rider in the middle has his eyes narrowed in a fierce concentration. If an image can be simultaneously subtle and blunt, this is it. It speaks of discipline and self-confidence, of unquestioning loyalty to established power. There are some grace notes which are easy to smile at: the way the prominent but elegant ears of the horses are echoed by the prominent (less elegant) ears of their riders. But no smile can erase the fact that the riders are seated firmly on their saddles.

Cut from the Sixties to the Nineties. Where are those riders now? It seems reasonable to believe that not all of them are still faithful members of the National Party. Some of them may well feel that their party has sold them down the ideological river. Have they joined the AWB, or any other of the groupings to the right of the far right? But, wherever they have now slung their saddles, it seemed to me likely that those horsemen are still

with us, galloping towards the new Apocalypse which, at times, seems to loom larger on the horizon than the new South Africa. But out of Africa always surprises.

I was recently told by David Goldblatt, the author of the image, that the centre rider had graduated from horseback. He was, he believed, now a junior minister given to uttering sentiments of such liberality that one might wonder if his hat still fitted.

Who was he? My informant could not come up with a name. Nor could I, but the thought stayed with me. Some weeks after, I switched on the box. There in the News was a report on the Oslo Conference on Hatred, convened by Eli Wiesel.

There were familiar faces, some clearly beloved, like Nadine Gordimer. But there was someone else, also a South African, of junior ministerial rank in the Department of Foreign Affairs. He was making a speech of great earnestness. But he was more than just earnest. Was it beginning to sound like a confession? Indeed, it was the closest to a collective *mea culpa* than we have yet heard from any one in Government.

Apartheid had been a terrible mistake he confessed, with a fervour and a sincerity all the more poignant in the heavy weather he was making of his delivery. His name, I was told, is Leon Wessels.

Where had I seen him before? Where did I know that sincere, stolid face now silvered, but impassioned above the diplomatic white collar and immaculate dark suit? Could it be the same young man who once sat so resolutely behatted on his white horse in the centre of the photograph? Was it the same grim-visaged stalwart escorting his leader, the begetter of Grand Apartheid, that now collapsed doctrine which that party anniversary in 1964 was still aggressively celebrating? Apparently it is.

Has the rider now unsaddled? Does the hat of the rider still exist?

Has he, finally, eaten it?

I met Dubow years later. We had a chuckle about his article. He then said: "I am so pleased that you have a sense of humour, because I have always wanted to say to you that I had no intention of hurting you."

In the Ritchie article I said: "In the photo I am riding behind Verwoerd. You see a group of unbending people, because we had all the answers. There were no questions, because we didn't have any questions; we were not allowed to have questions."

SETTING THE STAGE

CHAPTER 2 APARTHEID IS CHRISTIANED

The National Party took office in May 1948 and changed the course of history. That election turned the country on its head and became known as the “apartheid election”. Apartheid was the buzz-word. Afrikaners was introduced to this word by the church. The first printed record of the term ‘apartheid’ dates back to 1929. By ‘apartheid’ was meant that the Gospel had to be taught in a way that strengthened the African ‘character, nature and nationality.’ The Transvaal synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) accepted in 1944 that the policy of the church was grounded in the principle of “racial-apartheid and guardianship.”

PW Botha as a member of the propaganda committee of the National Party used the word as early as in 1942 as an alternative to “segregation” in *Die Kruithoring*, the NP newspaper. In the beginning of 1944, DF Malan, the NP leader, used it as part of the NP official language in parliament and confirmed that the church had given the lead in this regard. “It was not the state but the church who took the lead with apartheid.”

Die Burger was the first to use the term ‘apartheid’ in 1943.

In the vernacular the political language was simple and crude: *Koelie*, *hotnot* and *kaffer* was common. It was furthermore alleged that: “a vote for Jan Smuts, Leader of the United Party and the Prime Minister was a vote for Joe Stalin, leader of the USSR.” The idea to marshal the electorate against the “*rooi gevaar*” (red danger) and Russian imperialism and the “*swart gevaar*” (black danger) the numerical superiority of black people was a winning recipe. Smuts understood the rise of communism, but the Nats was not impressed. For them Smuts was in cahoots with Russia, because they were on the same side with Britain during World War Two. The NP was, of course, against South Africa’s participation in World War Two.

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was discussed, just a few months after the NP came into power, DF Malan, by then the Prime Minister expressed himself strongly against it. The idea of marriage across the colour line and freedom of movement for everyone was deplorable to him. Eric Louw – his minister of foreign affairs – couldn’t accept that someone’s human dignity would be impaired if that person was prohibited to live in certain areas. He told the United Nations: “Such a thesis would destroy the whole basis of the multi-racial structure of the Union of South Africa and would certainly not be in the interest of the less advantaged indigenous population.”

Parts of the country were not accessible for the white population, and they could not own land that was reserved for the exclusive use of the black population. Louw cautioned Malan that international human rights was now going to be the trend and “we will have to be on our guard not to be supporting the far reaching principles of the Declaration.”

When General Assembly voted on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the 10 December 1948, South Africa abstained. There was a feeling that nothing good could come from the United Nations, the organisation Jan Smut helped to establish.

When the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa), at Kempton Park got going in December 1991, there was no place to hide; it was no longer possible for the NP delegation to pretend that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights did not exist. Negotiators at Codesa now had to domesticate the Declaration. Many Codesa negotiators only knew their favourite rights: some focused on the language-, culture- and religious rights while others only had their eyes on equality, human dignity and socio-economic rights. Not one of these approaches got the upper hand because it was resolved that: “everyone shall be entitled to all universally accepted human rights”.

The National Party in 1948 inherited the British parliamentary system. South Africa functioned like the British colony that it was. In the British system a parliament is only bound by its own decisions. The majority makes the laws of the land without being accountable to anyone – one parliament cannot bind another, which means every parliament decides on matters as it sees fit without having regard to any decision made by a previous parliament. A court of law cannot intervene. That is majority rule. The NP was the majority of a minority group of the South African population. It used its parliamentary majority to entrench and mould apartheid in our statute books.

This system served the NP well. For years the argument was: “This is the will of the people; the majority of the electorate. We are not concerned that anyone – inside or outside of the country – feels aggrieved by our actions.”

One piece of legislation after the other was rushed through parliament to give effect to the election promises: the Registration Act, the Mixed Marriage Act (was extended), the Immorality Act, The Group areas Act, and the Bantu Education Act. Influx control legislation was sharpened, the Native Representative council disbanded, brown people removed from the common voters role and the Separate Amenities Act introduced. Security regulations that prohibited government officials from belonging to the *Stormtroepe*, the *Ossewa-Brandwag* and the *Broederbond* were repealed. War criminals such as Robey Leibrandt were pardoned.

The black people were not going to allow their aspirations be trampled by these measures. They would not accept it! Initially it was their objective to defend their rights but soon the time arrived to fight for these rights; initially peacefully but later on through an armed struggle.

On 21 January 1951, doctor James Moroka and Walter Sisulu (president and secretary general of the ANC) wrote a letter to DF Malan and demanded that certain legislation, including the pass laws, the Group areas Act and the Suppression of Communism Act be repealed before the end of February that year. If there was no reaction to their demands protests would be launched to coincide with festivities in 1952 to celebrate the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in South Africa 300 years earlier. If that had no effect the struggle would continue.

Malan answered them within one week. He rebuked them because Moroka and Sisulu addressed their letter to him and not to his minister of native affairs. The laws would not be repealed because he didn't believe they are oppressive but intended to be protective. Should they continue with their protest actions, the authorities would suppress it and also act against the organisers of these subversive activities.

Gradually the world turned against South Africa.

In 1973 the General Assembly of the United Nations accepted a convention declaring apartheid a crime against humanity. South Africa's domestic policies became the subject of international attention but this convention, declaring apartheid a crime against humanity was the strongest signal up to then that the world was not going to be on the sidelines any longer. This beautiful country with its diversity of languages and cultures, natural beauty and mineral wealth became the skunk of the world. In the 21st century people worldwide still use the word "apartheid" to describe certain government actions, associated with human rights violations – especially forced partitioning and forced removals by Israel in Palestine.

CHAPTER 3 SCHOOLED IN APARTHEID

I was two years old when the National Party came into office under the leadership of the 74 year-old DF Malan. I can't remember a single occasion when this historic moment was ever discussed in our house. I can't remember any visitor to our house – family or friends – ever discussing it with my parents. In our house my father always talked of the "*Natte*" (National Party) and the "*Sappe*" (United Party) as if we were not part of "them" – we were outsiders and not part of any politics.

The rowdy politics practiced after World War Two annoyed him. The police were often called in to restore peace and order when violence broke out at political meetings. The one moment they would be called out by the *Natte* to protect them against attacks by the *Sappe* and the following moment the tables were turned and they would be asked to protect the *Sappe* against the violence of the *Natte*. The police were always caught in the middle of these violent conflicts. When he spoke about these stories, one could feel his disdain for politics.

When I first entered the political fray, as member of the National Party, he asked: "Why do you want to go into politics? Are you unhappy in your profession? Politics is a dirty business. They are always fighting." He was not excited about my political plans. His attitude later changed and he became very supportive of my political career.

I was afraid of the black people of Johannesburg where we lived in the early fifties. The security guards in Johannesburg, with their large earrings and knobkieries were strange to me. There was no communication between us. During visits to the CBD of Johannesburg I was on my guard against these strange people. When my parents visited friends in the Melvillekoppies area, us children always were afraid of the darkness and also of the dark people who would stalk over the koppies to do us harm.

We often visited my uncle Boetie on his farm in the Free State. There I had fun: riding horses and played with Lukas, one of the farm labourers' children. We chased all the animals of the farm with little whips from dawn till dusk. When we returned home on a Sunday evening I fell asleep in the back of the car; dead tired but happy and content. I was never afraid of the black people on the farm.

One Sunday morning in church I nodded off on my mother's shoulder. The *dominee* was reading from the Bible – I could just hear his voice drumming on. Suddenly I heard him mention Luke (Lukas). I immediately sat up and very excited shouted at the top of my voice: "He is talking

about *Lukas*, ‘die *kaffertjie*’ op oom Boetie’s farm!” The congregation burst out laughing. I was called to order and given a stern warning to be quiet. Nobody made a fuss about me using the word “*kaffertjie*”. That was everyday language.

Just when I had found my feet in school, my father was transferred to Vryburg in the middle of 1952. Our family didn’t know Vryburg. My parents had told me that this was a rural area and that I would be able to own a donkey. Our house was on a big stand and we had chickens, pigeons, milking cows and initially, a donkey. I later sold the donkey and bought a horse with the name of Frank for twelve pounds. I loved horses. This love had started on oom Boetie’s farm.

I participated with Frank in show jumping competitions and chalked up a few victories. I started buying, training and selling horses.

For a short while we also lived on a farm. There I drove the tractor, collected cattle if the veldt on horseback, shot doves with my airgun and be dead tired by nightfall when I had to do my school work. It is fair to say that school interfered with my outdoor activities. Throughout my school years, I spent a lot of time outdoors. I went on hunting trips with my father and his colleagues in the Kalahari. We made big fires and slept underneath the starry nights.

This small town rural environment was a child’s paradise. I was forever playing, walking in the veldt, visiting friends in the evening and doing all kinds of childrens mischief. Vryburg primary school was a double medium school. The English speaking children were fluent in Afrikaans. I never thought of them as being English. I got to know some of these children very well; we spend hours riding horses together in the town camps were people grazed their milking cows. For me they were our people. The English from Britain my grandmother had told me such terrible stories about, were different people; they were not ‘our people’”.

In Vryburg one of the highlights was to go to the movies on a Saturday morning. Just before the end the kids would sneak out in the dark: we didn’t want to sing “God Save the Queen” – all the children, including our English speaking friends didn’t fancy the idea of this obligatory singing.

During our idle moments we would talk about the British and the South African wars. We didn’t like the British and wondered: How big is this British Empire if the sun never sets over it? This must be a mighty business with an enormous army.”

Politics was still not on the agenda during family meals when the 1953 election – DF Malan won with an absolute majority – came and went without much fuss. I don’t even know if my parents voted in that election. My family and I were so detached during that election that I didn’t know how to answer my friends when they asked if I was a *Nat* or a *Sap*. I quickly manoeuvred myself out of the discussion. This talk on the playground at school was of little significance to me that I didn’t even to speak to my parents about it.

There were, however, a few things that I felt certain about; nobody had to teach me that – it was just how it was: I was Afrikaans, a member of the Dutch Reformed church, and white. Because of that, most likely because of all three these features, I was a boss – everyone that wasn’t white after all called me *basie* or *kleinbaas*; this was a title I just accepted in my stride because my

father was a *baas* and my mother a *nooi* or a *missies*. My suster was 'n *kleinnooi* or *kleinmies*. There was nothing odd about it. That is how black people referred to whites. One day I saw how my father and oom Boetie gave a farm worker a beating – fists and feet were used excessively – because he had not taken proper care of a very expensive tractor. This violent behaviour of normally two very calm and friendly people shocked me. If there was any doubt about who was the boss, that incident settled it.

National Party politics was something that I learned later in life; but this race thing was just there.

Unlike in Johannesburg, I was not afraid of the black people of Vryburg. In spite of this paternalistic-racial thing we got on very well. I had long discussion with the Tswana people that worked for us. One of the workers was Hendrik Legakwe, a gardener and a groom of our horses. I spent hours in his company; learned to speak a little Tswana, could sing a few Tswana songs and learned to sing *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika*.

My positive feeling towards the Tswana people never deserted me. Years later some people called me a Motswana. My name Leon years later became ((Leeu (Leo), then Tau (Lion) and even later Tautuna (Big Lion)). Legakwe and I laughed a lot, talked a lot, and sang a lot. I was always aware of the age difference but it didn't bother me that he didn't refer to me as *baas* of. For him I was just Leeu (Leo).

This easy relationship with Legakwe was preceded by a very unpleasant incident with Mac Tswane, one of the farm labourers' sons. I was about eight or nine and Mac a few years older – and much stronger. Or egos came between us; the one always tried to get the upper hand over the other. But I was white and tried to act like a boss even if I was not even ten. One Saturday afternoon I wanted to shoot doves in the gum tree lane not far from our house. I didn't want to walk there but rather go on horseback. The horses were grazing far from our house and I didn't want to do this walk alone and battle to catch the horses. I asked Mac to accompany me. He wasn't keen to be a part of my Saturday afternoon outing. One word followed the other and finally I gave him an instruction like a real boss should. He just laughed it off. I realised I now had to stamp my authority on the situation and shot him in the leg with my airgun. I didn't aim carefully, just recklessly pointed my gun and shot him. I wanted to force him to obey my instructions.

The pain and the blood made Mac take flight. He yelled as he fled. Within minutes I had two very difficult fathers all over me. My father brought some calmness into this very emotional situation. He was firm: I had brought about this mess therefore I must sort it out. He distanced him from the situation. Should the police decided to act against me I would be on my own. Mac's farther was welcome to press charges against me, he explained. What was now of immediate importance, was that Mac should receive medical attention. That was my responsibility. I had to call our house doctor immediately and take Mac there. Any costs would be deducted from my pocket money.

My mother took us to the doctor's consulting rooms. He didn't mince his words when he told me how lucky I can regard myself because it was only a flesh wound; it was therefore not difficult to remove the pellet. Years later I was told that my father had called him and asked him to be very strict with me. On the face of it, Mac's father seemed happy with the outcome. I don't think in

the situation he had a choice – after all, he was the lesser in this employer-employee relationship. He said: “I think we must now forget about what happened here today. Hope the children learned something.” That was the end of the matter.

This was a very unpleasant experience, but I certainly did learn a lesson; you must take responsibility for your own problems. The transparent manner in which my father had handled the matter probably cleared the air between him and Mac’s father.

Between Mac and myself there was bad blood. Whenever we played after that day, he took advantage of his four to five years age seniority and superior strength – he bullied me. This irritated me. When he asked me to teach him how to write his name, I immediately saw an opportunity to take revenge. I had the upper hand because I could read and write and Mac was illiterate. My father was puzzled when he saw the writing *Hol Gat* (Arse Bum) on the walls and on the plants in the garden. He was furious when he learnt the full story. He didn’t spank me, but gave me a stern lecture. That was enough for me to understand how serious the matter was. My father immediately asked my cousin Nannie, who often visited us, to explain to Mac that I couldn’t spell properly and that she would teach him how to spell his name correctly. There was no love lost between Mac and me; we avoided each other from then on.

With Hendrik Legakwe it was different. There was no competition between us. I had respect for his skills and his wisdom. If we were not friends – because of our age- and race differences – we were on good speaking terms. I enjoyed his company and loved to listen to his stories. I always pulled my weight when we worked together. He reprimanded me when I didn’t do my work properly. I was not afraid of him but also didn’t play games with him because I knew he wasn’t my play mate. He was strict and always said my farther would be unhappy if we didn’t do our work well. We certainly were a team, always trying our best.

As far as our discussions went, there were no taboos between us. We talked about the facts of life and many home truths. We spoke about the Day of the Vow (16 December). He told me how afraid he was of that day. He said it was dangerous for a black man to be on the outskirts of Vryburg on that day: “A black man must on that day rather stay at home.”

“Why?”

“Because if the Boers find you on your own on the road that day, they *donner* you. On that day they don’t talk, they just *moer* you.”

I felt sceptical about this allegation because I had never witnessed anything like that. In the years that followed, whenever I attended 16 December celebrations I mulled over the Legakwe allegations: were there people among us who, after the fire and brimstone speeches, would go out and celebrate Blood River in their own way by attacking and assaulting good natured people like Legakwe – simply because they were black?

In Krugersdorp, years later I read in the newspapers about white people who assaulted black people after attending political meetings or who late at night, after a few drinks too many, assaulted black people because they were black.

Africa was getting restless at the time. One morning I heard over the radio of a Mau-Mau attack on white people in Kenya. I didn't know where Kenya was and what this was all about. The Mau-Mau were challenging British rule. This disturbed me. My mother put my mind at rest by saying that these attacks happened in another country in Africa and that it was far from Vryburg. After that I often wondered whether the violence was moving in our direction.

This unnatural relationship between black and white never made me suspicious. That was just the way it was and I accepted that it was the way it should be.

When the people who worked in our house wanted to visit friends in the evening my parents had to write them a letter explaining that they were working for us and what the reason was why they were out in the streets at night. There was a curfew and when the hooter was sounded, black people were not allowed to move around in white townships. If they were not in possession of a letter from their employer, they were arrested on the spot.

The police once had a search for compasses, illegal possession of dangerous weapons and illegal possession of liquor in the township. Policemen were marshalled from early morning to move from house to house. My father and some of his colleagues patrolled the outskirts of the township. My father was on horseback. This was my first encounter with these measures. Many litres of water would have to flow into the sea before I understood what was happening.

Late afternoon, after the day's activities, I sat and listened to the stories told by the policemen of the day's events: doors were kicked open, obstinate people were brought under control, earthly possessions thrown out of the house and groups of people herded like cattle and marched to the police station.

The ruling class (the whites) in those years suppressed black people violently with weapons and legal instruments (laws, policemen and the courts). This happened because we believed that God was on our side. As a child I often listened to adults – based on sermons they had listened to in the Dutch Reformed Church – saying that were the modern Israel – we were called to bring Christianity to Dark Africa. God will not fail us. I remember how my parents and friends had sung the praises of the dominee. In his sermon, he had drawn parallels between Biblical Israel and our situation in South Africa. Like Israel of yore, we would overcome. Apartheid could be justified on Biblical grounds.

I also believed God was on "our" side, not only because I was white, but also because I was Afrikaans and a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. During a show jumping competition I prayed seriously to do well. When I was beaten by an English speaking girl I was surprised; not that I was beaten by a girl – she was after all a very good rider – but because God allowed a member of the Roman Catholic Church to beat me. Was this just chance – her good luck – or on whose side was God? After this incident, I doubted whether members of the Dutch Reformed Church were God's chosen people.

On 30 November 1954 Hans Strijdom "the Lion of the North", became prime minister. Not a single word was raised about this event at school or in our home.

When I became a politician in the Transvaal people spoke with passion about him: he was a political fighter that at one stage had carried the National Party banner on his own in the province when all his parliamentary colleagues joined ranks with General Hertzog and General Smuts to form the United Party. He was a feisty republican. He also believed passionately that the white man must be boss in his own territory.

In October 1956 professor FR Tomlinson, a respected agricultural economist handed a report in parliament on the state of the national homelands. Tomlinson and his colleagues had worked for six years on this report and *inter alia* recommended that R2 000 million over the next ten years should be made available as development capital for the homelands and that additional land should be bought for the inhabitants. Tomlinson estimated that up to 50 000 job opportunities would be created through this farming and industrial activities. The government rejected the heart of Tomlinson's recommendations.

Black people immediately rejected the Tomlinson report. The Inter-Denominational African Minister's Federation under the leadership of Reverend Zaccheus Mahabane, former president of the ANC, Reverend James Calata and other wellknown church leaders called a conference to discuss the report. Four hundred representatives from social, cultural, economic, education and the political spheres, after a discussion, unanimously rejected the report. They also demanded that all the discriminatory laws be repealed.

NP leaders such as PW Botha and FW de Klerk later argued that this decision by the Strijdom cabinet not to give more land to the homelands and be more supportive about development capital were fatal flaws. This made the National Party a major contributor for the collapse of its own policies.

Transfers, transfers transfers. That is the lot of policemen. The transfer ghost stepped in once again and the Wessels household had to pack their bags and relocate to Durban.

Durban is not Vryburg. I was heartbroken because the laid back rural environment appealed to me: we could go to school bare feet. Horses, donkeys, cows and pigeons in the backyard was so much fun. The public transport, doubledecker buses and lots of fast moving cars were so different from the horse and donkey carts of Vryburg, where we rode our horses or donkeys to visit friends. Part of Vryburg moved with us to Durban: three young unschooled horses. Hendrik Legakwe, our gardener and groom. From day one he was unhappy in Durban: he didn't like the Zulu speakers or the lots of English that had to be spoken in Durban. I couldn't participate with my green horses in competitions so I joined Muriel Higgs's riding school and competed with great success on her horses Golden Lad and Sultan. I won the junior Grand Prix at the Royal Agriculture Show in Pietermaritzburg and the Junior Natal championship ((1958). Life was great. My father's always said: "As long as your schoolwork is on par and you help to attend to the horses I will support you." I made sure that I kept my side of the bargain.

Without much debate, one could just feel the tense relationship between Afrikaans and English speaking communities in Durban. The Afrikaans community wanted to make their presence felt and always competed for public offices. Local government elections were fiercely contested.

I didn't pay much attention to this English-Afrikaans thing. My life was horses and I was hardly aware that my team mates or opponents spoke English. My parents also were never involved in the English-Afrikaans conflicts. At home and at church we lived Afrikaans but were in conflict with nobody. As policeman my dad believed that you had to serve the public – the entire public. In our house there were never harsh words spoken against the English speakers, black people or members of the Indian community. Nobody was ever stereotyped.

My childhood years were privileged and protected; but politics was always looming in the background.

It doesn't matter who you are, where you are, or what you do – politics follow you. South Africa's racial issues stand in front of you. Afterwards you can wriggle and squirm like a snoek on a hook and claim: "I had not been aware of all of this!" but if you look carefully, you will have to acknowledge that the politics was always present.

Doctor HF Verwoerd became prime minister on 2 September 1958. I didn't pay much attention to it. My mother, the most loving and soft spoken person women you will ever meet, said in passing: "He talks too much." That was the only comment that was made about the Verwoerd election in my presence. Why she made that comment I don't know and didn't bother to ask.

Later, I read that Verwoerd indeed was long winded. Piet Meiring, well known government official and civil servant who had worked with Verwoerd writes how Verwoerd called him to a meeting and then addressed him for four hours! When I made my maiden speech in parliament, the parliamentary whips advised us to be brief: "Remember, you don't have to save the nation in your first speech. The only thing people want to know is; can you formulate your ideas and put that across."

Given those standards Verwoerd's maiden speech of 100 minutes was long. Somebody told me that he was present when Verwoerd made a short speech. He spoke for 90 minutes on that occasion.

People who had attended political meetings in those years tell stories about meetings addressed by Verwoerd. He could captivate his audience. He mesmerised them; for one, two hours people would sit and listen to him. His cold logic and the manner in which he put his case made his political opponents in parliament and in the National Party run for cover.

After school I went to the police station where my father worked and did my homework there. When he left the office we would go to the stables and attend to the horses.

There was lot of excitement about the visit of some big shot to the police station. Every day they practised for a parade where this VIP would present service medals to people. I just loved to watch them practice: the military marching music by the police band and the precision of the parade movements gave me goose bumps. That awakened something of the militarist in me.

After one of these practice sessions I listened to a discussion – later years, when I tried to give meaning to it – I understood my father and South Africa of the late fifties much better. My father had expressed his irritation why the white police officials when they received their medals were congratulated with a handshake, while the black officials did not receive a handshake. The intrinsic value of the medals were the same. Why was the conduct towards the recipients not the same? I believe he carried sensitivity in him that was not shared by everyone.

After one year at Durban, it was time to pack up our belongings again and relocate to Krugersdorp. The teachers at Port-Natal primary school were excited because I would go to Hoërskool Monument – one of the first Afrikaans schools in the Transvaal. All that mattered to me was that my own horses – Sieraad and Breker – were now ready to take on the competition in the Transvaal. Legakwe was excited to put the Durban experience behind him. Together we dreamed of a new life in the Transvaal.

Krugersdorp was different from Durban. I could cycle to any place – school, church and horses. The stables were next to the living quarters of the single policemen. While Legakwe and I attended to the horses, we always enjoyed the company of three young constables; Sexton Motsamai, Petrus Setumu and Johnson Mphati. I loved to watch how they washed their clothes, “pressed” their uniforms and polished their boots. The patience with which they “boned” their boots was something to experience. Years later when I was in the police college, I tried to emulate them.

The friendship between the three constables and Legakwe and I lasted for years. Motsamai and I – the only survivor – are still good friends. The three followed my career with interest and our paths often crossed in Krugersdorp. Legakwe after two years, thanks to the inspiration of the three, joined the police as a labourer in the police force when the transfer creature visited the Wessels family again.

At Hoërskool Monument, next to the Paardekraal monument, I quickly learned the history of the Paardekraal monument and what it meant to be a “Monumentaar”. On one of the walls, very prominently, one of President Paul Kruger’s famous statements are engraved: *So seker as die son skyn, so seker sal Afrika vry wees* (sure as the sun shines, Africa will be free). The Africa Kruger refers to, is the Afrikaner’s Africa – free from the yoke of the British Empire.

Years later in a different context Bram Fischer – the Afrikaner revolutionary, born from a Boer-Afrikaner aristocracy in the Free State, who had made the struggle of the black people in South Africa his own – used the words in *his* struggle for freedom and democracy. In the 1990’s I used the same words in debates when I had to explain the negotiations for a democratic dispensation.

In Krugersdorp I kept my side of the bargain with my father: “As long as you help to attend to the horses and your schoolwork is on par, you can continue with your horse riding activities.” There was no limit to my parents’ support. My father bought a bakkie to transport the horses to competitions. My mother would often – very nervously – get behind the steering wheel and help to transport the horses when my father could no assist.

Life was sweet; early morning and late at night it was school work and in the afternoons and at weekends it was horses. My schoolwork was on par. The headmaster never hesitated to give me permission to be absent from school to participate in competitions, even in other provinces.

There were times when I had to travel without my parents. Paul Bothma, wellknown police rider, then had to keep an eye on me. That was the beginning of a long relationship with him and the police mounted section. After two years of success – I had “jumped” my way into the Transvaal team that won the national championship competition – there was speculation in the newspapers that I was a candidate to be included in a junior Springbok show jumping team. This was not to

be – my father was transferred to Vryheid in Natal. This was going to be a huge disruption: I would have to go to boarding school and the horses sold. It would not be possible to keep the horses without my parents' support.

After I was given the news about the transfer and that the horses would have to be sold, I immediately went to the stables and sobbed for hours – hugging the horses, feeling their soft pelts against my cheeks. It was difficult to part ways with Sieraad en Breker. Big dreams lay shattered. My world fell apart.

In boarding school there was no direction in my life. My schoolwork deteriorated. Very quickly a poor relationship with the school set in. On Saturday afternoons, instead of being on horseback, I sat in the back of the movies, smoking the strongest possible filterless cigarettes. I was no longer an example of discipline and a healthy lifestyle.

Enough happened in my immediate vicinity to have opened my eyes for the injustices. My eyes were however, closed.

I often watched rugby at Ellis Park. I was there when the Springboks played against the All Blacks in 1960 and played against the British Lions in 1962. The black people, fenced in behind the goal posts, were all rooting for the visiting teams. I wondered about their loyalty to this country.

Years later I read of the silent protest in 1960 at Eden Park in Wellington because there were only white players in that All Black team – Maoris' were not welcome in South Africa.

On my way to the stables I saw my police friends were arresting people for not being in possession of a *dompas* – every black person must be in possession of a *dompas*, issued by the authorities and indicating that he or she was permitted to live and work in that area. That was the law of the land enforcing influx control. The purpose was to keep the South African cities white. But not so white that it would suffer from the lack of labour.

Very naively and without understanding my words I said to Motsemai: "I thought you guys were young and strong policemen." They were between 25 and 30 and I was barely a teenager. I thought you were catching murderers and robbers, now I see that you are arresting people for the *dompas*. Why don't you catch real criminals?"

A deadly silence fell over us. Finally Motsemai said: "Leeu, (he now calls me "Leeutjie") when you are an adult and you still speak like this, I will say you are a man." There was no further debate. It was clear that I didn't know what I was talking about.

The shame of the *dompas* system would still be a reality for years to come.

When I read Elsa Joubert's book *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*, in the 1980s. I was touched by Poppie's experiences. I then realised that I was also responsible for her suffering. I couldn't say: "We'll, it wasn't me or my generation who concocted this draconian system." I then realised that because of me

and my generation these laws were still on the statute book. I just couldn't continue to blame my forbearers and the generations that went before me. I couldn't pretend that I didn't know or that I couldn't fully understand the suffering of Poppie. The heartless world she lived in; her flights and plights before the police deeply disturbed me. How could I just sit back and accept it? There was a Poppie in just about every household I knew.

While Poppie had to mount the lorries for the umpteenth time to be subjected to another forced removal they sang in Afrikaans: "O God van Jakob, deur u hand, word gans u volk gevoed . . ." This singing upset me because I had once read that the Boer women – mounting their ox wagons when the British came to remove them forcefully to the concentration camps from their farms and then set their homesteads alight, had sung "O God van Jakob".

The Afrikaner women sang this song as a prayer and as inspiration against their oppressors. Years later the Afrikaners were the oppressors and the very same song was sung as a prayer and inspiration against the oppressors. We had gone full circle: from being the oppressed to being the oppressors.

I now saw the heartlessness of the system clearly; the dilemma of the individual against a hateful, unstoppable, all-powerful government legal machine supported by the strong arm of the police.

I was reading Poppie Nongena while travelling in a plane to Cape Town after visiting my constituency. I was so miserable that I cried softly. I was embarrassed that that my crying would draw attention, but I couldn't stop the tears running down my face. As the plane was landing I wiped the tears from my cheeks and I knew: I would never be the same again.

CHAPTER 4

TICK FEVER

I had tick fever: I wanted to be a tick – that was what members of the mounted section in the South African Police College were called. I have not had enough of horses. My association with horses was interrupted with my father's transfer from Krugersdorp to Vryheid. I promised myself that after school I would be on horseback again after school. I joined the police force in January 1964.

A few days after my arrival at the college those interested in joining the mounted section were asked to report at the stables to be inspected and tested before they could become members of this troop. The candidates stood in a long line, waiting to be asked a few questions about their riding experience and participate in a test ride. A group of well-fed and groomed horses were saddled and waited. Sergeant Harold Tulleken and Major Louis Snyman were responsible for the selection. Tulleken walked down the line to disqualify the tall and overweight candidates. Men who were not overweight or too tall could ride the average police horse. The officers were riding big horses. All the riders would have to fit into this pattern. Tulleken gave me one look and chased me away – too tall. No questions, no discussion – just one look and I was out. I wanted to protest but he would not listen and chased me away unceremoniously in strong military language.

I was very disappointed. My world collapsed around me. I jogged off but came back and joined the line at the other end that Tulleken still had to interview and inspect. I was preparing a speech should he again have something to say about my length. I was hoping for a miracle. My heart was beating profusely as he came closer.

The first group that had past the “Tulleken test” was asked to mount the horses and demonstrate their skills to Snyman. This was not a great success because the horses were fresh – they had not had any exercise since everyone had been on holiday in December. The chaos irritated Snyman. He barked at the top of his voice in the direction of the candidates still standing in this long line: “Is there a Wessels out there?” I immediately jumped to attention and shouted: “Yes, major!” My reputation with Bothma had presumably gone before me. Still irritated, Snyman commanded: “Get on that horse in front and lead this group. First walk, then trot and then canter around the paddock.”

I moved like lightning before Tulleken could intervene. I hopped on the horse and did as Snyman had asked. Everything went smoothly. When I wanted to dismount Snyman thundered again. “Stay on that horse and stay there till we are done”. That sealed the deal and Tulleken was not given an opportunity to veto my lanky frame.

This was the beginning of an adventure that shaped my life. I was troop leader and won the prize for the being the best student in the troop. As member of the mounted group we travelled through the country and shared many experiences. I met old friends and made new ones. I enjoyed every minute but knew it wouldn’t last forever. I wanted to study and travel abroad. It took three years before that would happen.

LEARNING TO QUESTION

CHAPTER 5

POLITICAL AWAKENING

6 September 1966

It is late afternoon in Amsterdam. The name of the city is derived from *Amstelledam*, indicative of the city's origin: a dam in the river Amstel. It was settled as a small fishing village in the late 12th century. The Amsterdam canal system is the result of conscious city planning. The considerations of the layout were purely practical and defensive rather than ornamental.

The wet early evening wind cuts through the open spaces into my bones. I am not dressed for this weather. Toon van der Merwe and I are in a hurry after a day of site seeing. I have to get to the house Toon shares with Piet Meiring. The two of them are doing research in theology for their doctoral degrees. In am backpacking through Europe. I have now been on the road for three months. After many hitchhiking and youth hostel “hardships” I enjoyed my few days lull with fellow South Africans.

We hear a newspaper vendor yell: “*Verwoerd vermoord! Verwoerd vermoord!*” We are baffled. Blood drains from my head. My jaw drops. I buy the newspaper and read frantically.

Verwoerd was assassinated in Cape Town, shortly after entering the House of Assembly. A uniformed parliamentary messenger named Dimitri Tsafendas stabbed Verwoerd in the neck and chest four times before being subdued by other members of the Assembly. Members who were also trained as medical practitioners rushed to the aid of Verwoerd and started administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Verwoerd was rushed to Groote Schuur Hospital, but was declared dead upon arrival.

I am stunned.

Toon and I dash to their flat: winding our way through the streets and over the canals. On arrival we discover that Piet is just as confused as we are. We all bark simultaneously: “Do you know what happened?” We answer simultaneously “No”.

I don’t have time to dawdle because I have to catch a train to Rotterdam to get onto a ferry to England tonight. I grab my rucksack and say goodbye. We promise to keep in touch.

Once in the train I look at nothing in particular and just stare through the window. A friendly American takes his seat opposite me. He introduces himself and respectfully rises to sympathize when I tell him that I am from South Africa: “I am sorry about the tragic news. He was the boss wasn’t he?” “He sure was the boss”, I reply.

I feel forlorn. Is there a revolution in the country? Must I not rather go home? Here I am, enjoying myself abroad whilst there is a crisis in the country.

It doesn’t take long before my travel companion asks the usual thorny questions about the state of politics in South Africa. “I don’t understand how you are going to convince the people to give up their South African citizenship to form their own national states, with separate citizenships for every ethnic group, on a few patches of land.”

“That is the only solution to avoid conflict.”

He realises that I am not in a talkative mood and ends the discussion: “I don’t know what you are going to do; but good luck anyway.”

We continue the journey in silence.

Years later I read about all the things that had happened under my nose during that time. I was amazed at my political naivety. In the treason trial against ANC members – which lasted for some years after 156 people had been arrested on 5 December 1956 – all of them were acquitted. On 23 January 1960 nine policemen were brutally murdered by a mob in Cato Manor. On 21 March 1960 in Sharpeville people protested peacefully against the pass laws – 69 of the protestors were killed when the police opened fire. The armed wing of the ANC, uMkhonto weSizwe (“Spear of the Nation”) was formed on 16 December

1961. Their acts of sabotage included the so-called Harris bomb at the Johannesburg station. The white church leader Beyers Naudé (leading minister in the Dutch Reformed Church) protested against the Dutch Reformed Church. Their attitude towards apartheid and their weak reaction about the Sharpeville tragedy disappointed him. Naudé then formed the Christian Institute in 1963. For his political activism he was placed under house arrest. After the Rivonia trial in 1964 (the trial ended on 12 June 1964), Nelson Mandela and his comrades were sentenced for life for acts of sabotage and preparing a guerrilla war. Bram Fischer, wellknown advocate and Afrikaner revolutionary and member of the South African Communist Party was arrested (September 1964) and prosecuted.

At the time I believed these events to be insignificant irritations that we would handle with ease and didn't pay much attention to it. In the circles I moved in, there was never any serious political discussion about these events: not in the house, not in the church, not in the classroom or on the playing field.

In our house the referendum of 5 October 1960, when South Africans had to vote for a republic was a momentous occasion. Our family and immediate friends were filled with excitement when the republicans won the referendum – South Africa would be a republic.

When Verwoerd returned to South Africa after he had led SA out of the Commonwealth my sister Rita then a student in Bloemfontein – had travelled with other students to Jan Smuts airport where 50, 000 supporters welcomed him back. Verwoerd was bullish: We had triumphed, not over another country but to liberate ourselves from the pressure of the Afro-Asiatic nations that were in the process of taking over the Commonwealth. We were not prepared to accept them dictating to us. Now we were moving forward. We want to build white unity: for Afrikaners a republic outside the Commonwealth and for English speaker's we want to maintain good relations with Britain. Dangerous times awaited us: a struggle between whites and non-whites (sic) were looming.

Sunday 11 September 1966

I read in the newspapers about Dr Verwoerd's funeral the previous day: 250, 000 people attended the proceedings at the Amphi theatre at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. This was a state funeral and the air was filled with emotion. The funeral was also attended by dignatories from the Bantu, Coloured and Indian communities. The seating arrangements for them didn't go unnoticed – they sat separately.

I mourned and wondered what is going to happen now. Verwoerd was my man and apartheid was my credo.

I felt forsaken and decided to continue doing the tourist thing in London.

I visited Hyde Park, one of the largest parks in central London, famous for its Speakers' Corner. This is an area where open-air public speaking, debate and discussion are allowed. Speakers may speak on any subject, as long as the police consider their speeches lawful. The police tend to be tolerant and therefore intervene only when they receive a complaint or if they hear profanity.

South Africa's apartheid policies were contentious and a hot topic of discussion. On arrival, I moved swiftly through the different "soap boxes" – a small podium from where anyone can start a debate – to find the SA "soap box." I had hardly started my search when I heard someone speak out with fervour: "South Africa is a racist state. Apartheid is evil. Don't play with apartheid. Don't do sport with them. Don't buy their fruit. Stop trading with them". I had never

before experienced such blunt attacks on SA. The argument was driven home with conviction. I was fuming. I interjected; “Have you ever been there? What do you know?” This seasoned debater stared at me with cold eyes. He retorted: “No! I have also never been to Communist Russia but I know that they oppress their people. Are you stupid?”

I was crushed. I left the scene feeling sorry for myself. I was just not up to this razor sharp debating skills. The hostility knocks me over – to be compared with Russia and with its evil atheist policies was too much for me. How dared he mention apartheid and communism in the same breath?

13 September 1966

Advocate Balthazar John Vorster was elected unanimously in Cape Town as Leader of the National Party by the 164 members of the National Party. He was now SA’s Prime Minister. He pledged to walk further along the road set by Hendrik Verwoerd.

He made it clear that he believed in the policy of separate development as a philosophy but also as the only practical solution to eliminate friction. To him the policy of separate development was not a denial of the human dignity of anyone because it gave the opportunity to every individual within his own sphere to advance without restriction.

When I read this in the newspapers, I echoed his sentiments.

His past as a Nazi sympathiser during World War II, when he was a general in the Ossewa Brandwag (Ox-wagon Sentinel), still haunted him. His earlier OB activities had led to his detention at Koffiefontein in 1942. He was released from this detention camp in 1944. When he became a member of parliament (1953) he answered his critics by saying that he had now come to believe in the parliamentary system.

The British newspapers were uncomplimentary about Vorster’s election: “... he was imprisoned by his own government for underground pro-Nazi activities during World War II ... the hardest man in the party ... right wing ... tough ... hard-boiled...extremist.”

I was not impressed by these negative reports because his OB past happened a long time ago. Vorster now deserved my support because the future looked bleak.

After my return to South Africa (November 1966) I enjoyed being there talking to family and old friends. It was such a pleasure to talk in Afrikaans – I didn’t have to rake my brains to speak in English. I read the South African newspapers with new eyes and followed the political scene with interest. This feeling of uncertainty created by the hostile media abroad and the critical discussions were soon forgotten. The niggling questions that I was peppered with during my travels still stood.

Somebody had said to me: “I am really trying to understand you. That you want to divide the country so that each ethnic group may have its own piece of land makes sense. But I lose the argument when you want to justify your stance of racial purity on Biblical grounds.” The more I

tried to explain the more I stumbled. “How can you and the Afrikaans churches be so certain that the Bible forbids racial integration, when there are many churches worldwide, also Protestant churches, that don’t forbid it?” I didn’t have the answer.

A Canadian student bombarded me in a youth hostel in Madrid. He said he was with a white South Africa student in a restaurant. She told him how uncomfortable she felt to be served by a white waitress; someone who was her equal. She explained that in SA she was served by black waitresses. That was acceptable, because they were not her equals. This experience didn’t leave him with a nice feeling about South Africans.

This Canadian and I argued for hours. I told him that we aspired to something better and that we hope to solve this white superiority thing through geographical separation. When we parted he said: “OK then; let’s wait and see what will happen in South Africa. I accept that you want to change and move away from this mess you find yourself in at the moment. Good luck.”

Grand apartheid (geographical-racial-ethnic separation) was one thing, you could make a case for that; but *petty apartheid* (where people are humiliated simply because they are not white) was a different matter altogether, and for foreigners totally unacceptable.

I also began to grapple with a pragmatic question: who was going to do all the work if there were more white people in South Africa than black people? I told Tersia – we started dating in 1962 and got married in 1970 – on my return that I didn’t believe the Nationalists understood the implications of the policy. White people would never be able to get on without black people. I couldn’t see the tide turning – black people starting to move from the cities to the homelands, as Verwoerd had predicted that it would happen in 1978.

With all these questions weighing heavily on my mind I went along with Tinus Cilliers (my travelling partner for one month on my hitch-hiking experience) and his father oom Louis – a staunch NP supporter – to a public meeting in the town hall of Pretoria. This meeting would be addressed by John Vorster. This was my first political meeting.

I was excited and took pleasure singing with “my people” the wellknown Afrikaner songs before the meeting started. I said to myself: “I needed this after all the bullying of the foreigners and their newspapers.”

The hall was packed to capacity. People were sitting in the passages and gathered outside the building. Big flags of the NP and the SA flag were beautifully draped against the walls. Vorster talked slowly; every now and again there was thunderous applause. “We are ready for the terrorists. They come to make war and kill ... the Organisation for African Unity plan to send terrorists to South Africa, but they are sending them to their death and that will rest on their conscience.”

He repeated his policy positions as he had stated them in parliament during the Prime Minister’s Budget vote in on 21 September: “History has determined which land belongs to us. Surely we did not steal it; surely we did not acquire it unlawfully? The basis of my political philosophy is this: You (the Black man) can get political rights, but you can only get them in your own

territory and over your own people, as it is fitting, but over my people and in my territory I am not prepared to share them with you. The people working in the Republic; if you work in a country it doesn't give you the right to have a seat in the parliament of that country. They can exercise their political rights in their own territories. If they want to work here, they are welcome to do so. We need them. They work for us and we need their labour but they need us much more than we need them. If we did not create avenues of employment for those people, what would happen to them?"

This powerful speech by Vorster lifted me. We will take "them" head-on; the communists, the liberals and all our enemies. We had no choice; we would have to fight!

My political awakening started during my overseas travels. My niggling questions were not answered that night by Vorster. That didn't bother me too much. It was not my business to find the answers; the politicians had to do that. I now wanted to go to university.

CHAPTER 6

UNIVERSITY OF LIFE

"Do you play rugby?" oom Joggie Hattingh, student advisor, asked when he welcomed me to the University of Potchefstroom in January 1967.

I answered "No".

"You are tall and will make a good lock. Rugby players, everyone that does sport, pass their exams, because they learn discipline on the sports field and know how to use their time effectively" he told me. "I strongly advise that you do sport."

I said to myself: "Not for me; it's time to study. I have to prove the sceptics wrong."

The words of Fires van Vuuren – senior instructor at the SAP College – when I shared a farewell drink with friends at the SAP College, still are in my ears: "I give you one year and you will be back. Books are not for you. You will miss us and the outdoor lifestyle here at the College." His voice was not alone.

I wanted to study at Potchefstroom because the idea of a university away from a city appealed to me and also to be near Tersia.

Politically speaking, I was boring. I didn't belong to a political party and I didn't hold strong political views. I didn't plan to participate in politics on campus or to participate in organised student life. Because of my overseas hitchhiking experiences, I realised that South Africa faced many challenges but I didn't have the answers. I had not come to university to find answers for those questions but to receive a law degree that would enable me to be an advocate.

I was fascinated by the lecturers, the lectures and the law books. This well of knowledge boggled my mind. I told myself that this was where I belong.

Contrary to my initial objective – to be a serious student – I became hooked on student life. I attended student meetings and was impressed by the senior students – their skills to conduct meetings, the oratory, the never-ending discussions and points of order during student meetings enthralled me.

It didn't take long before my studies were on the back burner – a three year bachelor's degree took four to complete – I was part and parcel of the social life: pub crawling, the sing-songs, the banter and the unending philosophical debates about life. Hitchhiking experiences through the country and cycling adventures – Kal Landsberg I cycled on a tandem bicycle from Walvisbaai to Maputo during one of our holidays – spiced up my student life.

I attended public lectures on campus with a political tone and I was attracted by academics who pronounced on National issues such as Willem de Klerk, Hennie Coetzee Johan van der Vyver.

Before I can blink, I am part of organised student life: I became chairman of the Students Representative Council (SRC), national President of the Afrikaanse Studentebond (ASB). I was exposed to national politics and national issues.

Afrikaans speaking students are often criticised for not being on the forefront of change and political debate. There is a general approach amongst Afrikaans students that they are not politicians, that they study politics but are not activists in any way.

This approach didn't find favour amongst political commentators and the verligte editors of Afrikaans newspapers. Otto Krause the editor of News Check took issue with Afrikaans students because they were not making contact with other students across the language and colour divides.

The newly formed National Federation of South African Students (Nafsas) was launched in 1970, but did not find favour among Afrikaans speaking students because non-white students could be members of this organisation. When Nafsas was discussed at a public students' meeting I strongly spoke out against Nafsas because it was a multi-racial organisation that would lead to integration and that ultimately would lead to the downfall of the Afrikaner nation. I argued that contact was a delicate matter, and conceded that there was a need to develop mutual understanding but the way to do that was to have contact on an *ad hoc* basis where mutual student affairs are discussed and not politics.

On the Wits campus the students protest against people being detained without trial. These meetings were addressed by prominent South Africans such as Helen Suzman and John Dugard. Afrikaans speaking students didn't take an interest in these matters because we believed the Executive must have had very good reason for these detentions and that we, were not going to make their lives difficult about something we knew nothing about.

Dawie Swanepoel, senior student wrote in die Wapad, the Potchefstroom student paper: “It is all good and well to criticise the people that criticise the detentions without trial, but we will have to work harder to solve our racial issues.” A leading article of the Wapad stated that Afrikaans students approach issues too academically and they were also academically lazy.

In spite of this non-critical, non activist approach of Afrikaans students there was a debate taking place in their ranks – not revolutionary or earth shattering – but the boundaries were being tested. It was clear that the future would not be more of the past. Slowly a new political picture took shape: White SA would never be white. There would always be black people in our midst.

Lourens du Plessis advances the idea that we must understand the world of the Bantu so that we can have a better understanding and knowledge of their political aspirations. Johan Snyman finds the notion of white baasskap despicable. Dawie Swanepoel poses the question whether enough was being done to implement the policy of separate development. Were the burning issues relating to the lack of economic development, consolidation of the homelands, the flow of “white capital” to the homelands to speed up development, the future of blacks in urban areas, job reservation and the lack of labour in white urban areas debated enough?

When I told my father that we don’t have the answers to these questions and that I am not so sure that the NP ministers had the answers, he rebuked me: “You are disrespectful. I am not so sure that they are as stupid as you think.”

To see is to believe: the ASB wanted to see what the policy looked like in reality. Visits were organised to some of the homelands and to Soweto.

The visit to the homelands was an eye-opener; the lack of infrastructure and development surprised me. The concentration of people and the leadership in the homelands made them part of the SA reality. To believe that that was the end all of SA’s political challenges was a fallacy.

The visit to Soweto exposed the fallacy further. To believe that the inhabitants of the Soweto’s in South Africa would return to the homelands or wanted to be accommodated there politically was a pipedream. Professor Marinus Wiechers, professor in Constitutional Law, asked during the ASB congress that followed on this visit: “What will happen if the millions of black people living in so-called white urban areas refuse to give up their SA citizenship in favour of their so-called homeland citizenship, based on their ethnicity? What will happen if they demand to exercise their political rights in SA?”

This was the kind of question the NP didn’t want to wrestle with. They believed that a black person would never be a SA citizen because in terms of SA citizenship laws and policy, when all the homelands are independent national states blacks will not have to be SA citizens to exercise their political rights.

Wiechers drew our attention to the physical reality of black people in our midst. One could read between the lines that their political future was going to be discussed *with* them and that we were not going to decide *for* them. At that stage (early seventies) nobody took Verwoerd’s earlier

pronouncement that by 1978 blacks would be returning to their homelands seriously because there would be attractive job opportunities and development in the homelands.

My cultural and political home was the Afrikaner and National party community. I was still not a signed-up member of the NP, albeit that was the party I voted for. To my mind, the solutions for the country had to come from those quarters.

The other political parties; the United Party and the Progressive Party, never made an impact on my circle of friends. Their leaders and policies didn't appeal to me. The NP would have to be the party for renewal.

It was different with the parties that broke away from the National Party. They tickled the curiosity of the students for a while. Albert Hertzog's Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP) – with its strong Afrikaner sentiments – did initially draw the attention of the students but soon fell out of favour. That was mainly because Doctor Andries Treurnicht did not join them. He was a very popular speaker at student functions and as editor of *Hoofstad* always pleaded the case of the Afrikaanse Studentebond.

The mudslinging between the NP and the HNP and the crude racism of the HNP didn't appeal to the students.

Theo Gerdener (former NP cabinet minister) started his own Democratic Party and tuned in on all the inadequacies of the NP. Gerdener's line of attack was so different to that of Hertzog – he was looking towards the future while Hertzog wanted to return to the past. He focussed on burning issues: the constitutional future of the coloured and Indian communities as well as the reality of the urban blacks in our towns and cities. His party never really got off the ground, but the students certainly had a good look at him and his Democratic Party.

Towards the end of 1971 a group of students from Malawi visited South Africa as guests of the department of foreign affairs. That was part of John Vorster's initiative to have a more relaxed relationship with Africa. A small group of the ASB members accompanied them to the University of the North (previously Turfloop and now the University of Limpopo). When the group arrived it was immediately clear that everything wasn't happening as planned. The South African Students Organisation (Saso) controlled student council didn't want to meet with the Malawi students. President Hastings Kamuzu Banda from Malawi and his people were regarded as "sell-outs" because he was collaborating with the South African government. Saso had also, shortly before this visit, decided not to have any contact with white students. Black consciousness thinking ruled the campus with the Biko-slogan: "Black man, you are on your own."

It was a huge embarrassment when the news that the SRC would not meet with us, was conveyed to the visitors. We wandered aimlessly on the campus, looking at the buildings hoping for a miracle – that someone would run to us and say that there was misunderstanding.

Suddenly someone was standing before me with a big smile: “I saw the face of an old friend and came to say hallo.” A few months before this visit, students from Potchefstroom and Turfloop had met at Turfloop for discussions. During this meeting there was a good understanding between myself and Abram Onkgopotse Tiro, then chairman of the student council. I was happy to see him again and immediately told him what the purpose of our visit was and about the cancellation of our meeting. I also asked him if he could help us overcome the problem. This was a shot in the dark because none of us were leaders of our student councils anymore.

Tiro made it clear that he didn’t want to intervene. He respected the SRC decision and apologised that it wasn’t communicated to us in good time – that at least would have saved us the trouble of travelling to Turfloop. We exchanged a few words but he didn’t want to be part of an alternative meeting with us and soon departed.

That day I experienced the radicalising effect of Saso politics. The discussion a few months earlier between students from our two SRC’s – albeit only about student issues and no contentious matters – had been very pleasant. My contact with Turfloop and Tiro had a profound effect on my political thinking. His words: “Let us sit around a table and find solutions for national problems. These discussions will eventually happen,” resonated in my mind for a very long time.

Professor Gerrit Viljoen – then vice-chancellor of the Rand Afrikaans University and someone with whom I in later years had the privilege of serving in the cabinet – encouraged me to take note of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). He had great respect for them and was encouraged by their philosophy that you had to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and that you must set yourself free from any inferior complex that you might harbour.

With hindsight, I am very sorry that we didn’t take the Saso and BCM leadership, people like Barney Pityana, Steve Bantu Biko, Mamphela Ramphela en Abram Tiro seriously. That was a big mistake, because they were intellectual giants.

When I read about Tiro’s tragic death (1974) I was stunned. He was murdered by a letter bomb that he received while in exile in Botswana. I was heartbreaking that somebody for whom I had so much respect died like this.

I asked Barney Pityana – founder member of SASO who after years in exile became the chairman of the Human Rights Commission and later Vice chancellor of Unisa – during one of our early morning coffee-drinking sessions (this two-man gatherings he called the ‘the meeting of the early members club’): “Did things turn out the way you had expected?” He smiled: “Not at all; what about you?” “Definitely not,” I answered. Barney added: “It doesn’t really matter, because we were not idle, we tried to do something about an unsatisfactory situation. We struggled for change.”

Whilst studying, I didn’t have heroes in politics. My heroes were academics: Johan van der Vyver, Hennie Coetzee, Gerrit Viljoen, Marinus Wiechers and Wimpie de Klerk.

Gerrit Viljoen once told a group of students during an informal conversation: “We can’t afford to have a party other than the NP in government but at the very least we must now and again have a

proper cabinet shuffle. Little did we know then, that we would serve together in a cabinet under FW de Klerk.

In my final year as an LLB-student (1972) FW de Klerk and Dawie de Villiers were National Party candidates in by-elections for the house of assembly. They defeated the candidates for the HNP, UP and PP convincingly. Together with my student friend Tonie van Tonder – his father was a member of parliament – I worked at one of the polling stations in Dawie's constituency. Together with other friends we waited late into the night when the election result was announced.

De Klerk and De Villiers were young and their approach to politics was sparkingly new. They excited me and gave me hope for the future. It was not difficult to foresee great political roles for them.

What I didn't foresee was that years later Dawie de Villiers and I would be invited by FW de Klerk – as head of state – to serve in his cabinet or that he would lead the NP out of its apartheid dead ends. Nobody during those by-elections would have dared to predict that a negotiated revolution was what the future had in store for SA.

That was my first experience of an election from an organisational point of view. I enjoyed the fun and the political chitchat. Seeing the NP in action, it dawned on me that they were a family. That probably is true for any political party. In spite of this enjoyable experience I didn't run to the nearest NP organiser and asked to join the NP or what it would require to become a politician. I had other things on my mind: I wanted to practice and study law. I wanted to be an advocate.

I left Potchefstroom with two law degrees and also a degree from the University of Life. When I joined the Johannesburg bar, Potchefstroom had shaped me; not only my love for the law, but also my political views.

SHIFTING GEARS

CHAPTER 7

POLITICAL ROUGH AND TUMBLE

I wanted to practice law at the Johannesburg bar and to continue studying. I was fascinated by the profession and all the giant legal eagles I saw in action: Arthur Chaskalson, Ismail Mahomed, George Bizos and Wim Trengove. All of them made their mark as human rights (public interest lawyers). Piet Schabert, my mentor, with Mahomed, became the presiding officers when Codesa met in December 1991 at Kempton Park.

My views on the death penalty were formed when I was doing *pro deo* work. In a murder trial before Judge Van Wyk de Vries my client was found guilty. The anxiety to place extenuating circumstances (mitigating circumstances) before the court was nerve racking. The clerks of the

court could see how I tense I was and was showing with their hands that my client was going to get the death sentence. (Showing how the rope was going to be put around his neck and how he would be kicking with his feet). The angst left me immediately when Judge Van Wyk de Vries indicated that he was not considering the death penalty. In another trial with Frank Bashall before Judge Kowie Marais I became finally convinced that the death penalty was not an appropriate sentence. The tension to hold another person's life in your hands was just too much for me.

10 October 1973

I was busy finding my feet at the bar when I was badly interrupted by politics.

Dominee Samuel Blom – Dutch Reformed dominee of Krugersdorp – visited at home.

“We need a new member of parliament for Krugersdorp. We are not happy with the incumbent, Adv Fred Nel. I believe that you will be a suitable candidate”.

I laughed and asked: “Why do you believe I will be interested in a political career?” “You remember that day in April at the hospital, when your father was operated after he had broken his leg when the horse bolted? I listened how easy it was for you to talk politics. That was the day I decided that you should go into politics.”

“I am not so sure about this because I still want to study – I am looking for opportunities to study abroad – I am still finding my feet as an advocate. I am still fascinated with the profession.” I told him that I would have to think about it.

Blom moved like lightning and didn't await my response. He was in my corner: he met political leaders in the constituency and also talked to Dr Connie Mulder, leader of the National Party in the Transvaal. He told Mulder that “they” wanted me to be the next Member of Parliament for Krugersdorp.

Blom had no mandate from anybody and had embarked on a solo flight.

Senior dominees of the Dutch Reformed church were furious, the ringleaders of the local NP were up in arms – who was he to get involved in their affairs? The Broederbond leaders had their own ideas and Blom had not played ball with them by breaking ranks. Nic van Rensburg, Attie Visser, and Piet Kruger were also in my corner. I was a willing party but not completely convinced that my future was in politics.

Before I could blink I was involved in the local political battles. I didn't fully understand what was happening around me. Seasoned politicians will not be bullied by a novice.

My father didn't understand my interest in politics: “Don't you enjoy your work? Are you unhappy in your profession? Politics is a dirty business!”

In spite of my father's initial reservations he arranged for me to meet Connie Mulder in his Randfontein constituency. He wanted me to talk to Mulder about politics before I made up my mind about a political career.

We met at the house of one of Mulder's loyal supporters. Mulder took me outside – it was clear that he didn't want other ears to listen to this conversation.

“I know about the battles in Krugersdorp; Samuel Blom came to see me and Attie Visser – he is married to my brother Manie's daughter – also told me about developments there. So, are you interested in politics?”

“I am not sure. I want to do post graduate studies, I have not practiced law enough. I still have to think about it.”

“Let me give you sound advice. There is political interest in you right now. You may feel that you still want to do other things before entering politics. There may not be another opportunity. The people supporting you now, will find another candidate and there may never be another opportunity because your supporters will not wait for you”.

I realised that I couldn't ignore Mulder's advice but was still undecided.

Soon after this meeting with Mulder, I met FW de Klerk – young up-and-coming MP from Vereeniging – at a social event. He inquired about the political battles in Krugersdorp. Krugersdorp after all, was where his father, oom Jan lived. FW had attended the same High School (Hoërskool Monument) as I did. FW asked me point blank: “Are you going to enter politics?” I gave my neither here nor there answer: “I am not so sure; I want to continue my studies and I have not practised for long enough.”

He then responded in a very sympathetic manner: “We need young people with fresh ideas in politics. You must join us in parliament.”

The discussions with Mulder and De Klerk helped me to make up my mind: I was going to enter politics. The law still remained my first love but politics had become a very attractive mistress. If it doesn't work out in the political arena, I could always return to law.

I then joined the fray to become the NP candidate for the House of Assembly. That was the beginning of heated battles. There was, however a major problem: I was not a signed-up member of the NP! It made no impression on my political opponents that I had voted for the NP in the past – they went town: “Leon Wessels wants to be the NP MP for Krugersdorp, but he isn't even a signed-up member of the NP. This man cannot be trusted with the future of the NP.”

I was fortunate to have streetwise veterans in my corner. They convened a special meeting of the NP branch where I lived. Oom CC van der Merwe is the chairman of the branch. “I have called this special meeting to consider the application for membership of adv Leon Wessels. He is one

of us, went to school at Monument Hoërskool, his parents has lived amongst us. I want him to be our next MP. Because he was out of our midst for a number of years: SAP College, travelling overseas and studying at Potchefstroom University, he has not had time to participate in NP activities. I strongly recommend that we approve his membership application so that we can brush aside those that are making mischief of his political aspirations.”

My application is unanimously approved. Oom CC further nominates me to serve on the committee of the branch. I also nominated to be a delegate to the annual meeting of the Divisional Council of the Krugersdorp constituency.

I relax and think this is as easy game. Politics is plain sailing.

At the annual meeting oom CC nominates me for various positions: Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Secretary, Deputy Secretary and as additional member of the Executive committee. Alas, I lost all the elections hands down. I am brought down to mother earth with a thump. My ego was bruised and my political ambitions smashed. Why did I allow myself to be pushed into this hornets’ nest?

A moment before the meeting adjourns, Piet Kruger, loyal servant of the NP, moved that the Divisional Council establish a branch of the Nasionale Jeugbond (National Party Youth League. Everyone agrees – who can be against this innocent idea? Once the motion is carried, Piet strikes: “I move that Adv Leon Wessels be tasked to form this branch.” When my opponents realise what they have agreed to it is too late. Piet had just provided my political career with a safety belt.

Nic van Rensburg and Attie Visser helped me to launch this branch within days. I was elected chairperson of this branch. This created the opportunity for me to serve on the Divisional Council of the constituency. My political were aspirations back on track.

After many battles and squabbles Doctor Johan Vilonel was nominated as NP candidate for the House of Assembly and I became the candidate for the Provincial Council. A number of my supporters were disappointed and regarded this as second prize. I looked at it differently; I believed it was an opportunity to take my first step in representative politics. It would also give me an opportunity to understand how the NP functioned.

My family and friends were on cloud nine. Amidst all the excitement, my farther called me aside. “Listen. I am happy for you but you must remember: some people have expressed confidence in you but that means nothing; you will now have to prove that you are worthy of their trust. You are facing a further challenge. You have to win the confidence of those people who didn’t support you. I wish you good luck!”

Those words meant a lot to me; he had made peace with my political career.

A conference of all the candidates for the upcoming election on the 22 April 1974 was called at Prime Minister John Vorster's residence, Libertas, in Pretoria. I stared at all the people I had only read about in the newspapers. I listen with pricked up ears to all the formal and informal discussions. Vorster made a plea to everyone to fight the election with the whole election manifesto and not only one's favourite sections in the manifesto. "No one must under any circumstances shy away from the unpopular sections if the manifesto, such as diplomatic ties with other states in Africa, mixed sport teams and any pragmatic sections about easing discriminatory practices."

All the candidates were called together for the official photograph. I was standing on the sidelines and giving way to all the veterans to settle down for the picture before I moved to find a place in the back row. That is where I usually end up because I am so tall. Tall and hefty oom Pagel Bekker from Stilfontein shouted at me: "Boet, should you not also be in this picture?"

"Ja, oom," I answered. "Then you have to get a move on. Come and stand next to me."

Carefully I found my way to the back row of this make-shift stand.

My role during this election was a very modest one. Vilonel did all the thinking and talking during the campaign. I helped to put up posters and did do door-to-door canvassing. Now and again I addressed house meetings.

I soon realised that there is no crash course on "how to become a politician. You learn by getting your hands dirty and, doing the trivial tasks.

PW Botha, the rugged NP servant, leader of the NP in the Cape Province and minister of defence, had been assigned by the NP head office to address a public meeting in Krugersdorp. I was filled with fear: What would I say at the meeting? I knew nothing about the rough and tumble of politics. I was not schooled in slogan politics.

To get my ducks in a row, I decided to attend a meeting to be addressed by Dr Connie Mulder in support of Barend du Plessis in Florida in one of the nearby constituencies.

Years later Du Plessis was a successful Minister of Finance. In 1989 he was the unsuccessful contender for the leadership of the NP, losing against FW de Klerk by six votes.

I sat in the back of the hall because I didn't want to be recognised by anyone. I had just come to look and to listen.

Somebody in the audience was not impressed with the NP's homeland policy. He argued that it couldn't work and that hostile nations would use them as launching pads from to attack South Africa at close range. From a security perspective, that made SA extremely vulnerable.

I was baffled by Mulder's response: "If there is a strong fence between my neighbour's farm and mine, I don't care if there is an untamed bull on my neighbour's farm. The bull can huff and puff as much as he likes because I will be safe on my side of the fence. I prefer the bull to be on the other side to being in the same camp with the bull."

This answer met with thunderous applause. The questioner was not satisfied and made an attempt to ask a follow-up question. He is shouted down by die hard NP supporters; they had had enough of him.

I suddenly missed the calm reasoning of the academic and legal boffins that was part of my life. I am clearly not prepared for this hit-and-run type of politics at public meetings.

I realised that I had to tread carefully not to get involved in political battles that I couldn't handle. The rough and tumble of party politics was something I knew nothing about. I had to keep my mouth shut and learn as quickly as I could digest all about practical politics: the policy and the practical mobilisation of voters.

My years on the back benches in the provincial council were calm and relaxed. Provincial councillors joked with themselves because their roles were regarded as being less important than those of their colleagues in parliament. They were, however, in the frontline of the political trenches because they were the first ones to be confronted with critical political questions; it simply was easier to make contact with your MPC than with your MP who had to attend parliamentary sessions in Cape Town.

I realised that the provincial council at times was a debating society because we were debating issues that fell outside our jurisdiction. Issues relating to local government, nature conservation and horse racing are important matters but certainly not as interesting as the issues the House of Assembly had to deal with. The MPs were dealing with Vorster's detente policy in Africa, the conflict in Africa, the elimination of discriminatory measures and the sharing of public facilities by the different race groups. These matters were always on the front pages of the newspapers.

Oom Dawid van der Merwe Brink, leader of the NP in the provincial council, asked me to respond to a motion proposed by the opposition. As was expected of a backbencher I got stuck into the opposition and told them how their policies would lead to disaster should they ever come to power. They were the enemies of the '*volk*' and they were guilty of a deadly sin – there policies would ultimately lead to black majority rule.

My colleagues enjoyed the robust debate and spurred me on with their interjections.

I recently read this speech and laughed. I am so pleased that I changed. Ray Swart – leading member of the Progressive Party – said at the founding of the party that they would never govern the country but that they would witness how others would implement their policies. Prophetic words, indeed!

I was elected as leader of the NJB for Transvaal and became an *ex officio* member of the Executive of the NP of Transvaal. Adv John Vorster, as Prime Minister and leader of the NP with other senior cabinet ministers, also served on the Executive. This was a different world, far away from the peace and calm of the Provincial council of the Transvaal.

Fanie Botha, the reform-minded minister of Manpower, represented the NP executive in the NJB. He always made time for discussions with young people.

I soon discovered that young people were not interested in political propaganda and the sterile debates between the NP and the UP.

My student buddies were still thinking outside the party political parameters and gave me a hard time whenever we met. We were not on the same wavelength anymore – they were not impressed whenever I tried to sell NP leaders and NP policies to them. Most of them still voted for the NP but they were not interested in being hoodwinked by the NP.

I soon discovered that the only way to get their attention was when party leaders had a heart to heart discussion with them about the future. During these sessions backbenchers such as Hennie van der Walt, FW de Klerk, Dawie de Villiers, Barend du Plessis en Sam de Beer impressed them.

The *verkrampte* section made no impression.

Theuns Eloff, live wire student leader and future rector of our old alma mater, Potchefstroom, made a comment that the Mixed Marriages Act and Immorality Act were indefensible. There was speculation that some party leaders wanted to expel him from the NP. I realised that young people would be alienated from the NP if the party leadership acted against him.

I called Mulder and asked that he intervened to ensure that no steps were taken against Eloff. Much to my surprise he answered: “Relax; I won’t act against Eloff, because if I do that, I will also have to act against two cabinet colleagues, Pik Botha and Hendrik Schoeman, who have made similar statements.”

This was typical of the NP at the time – different speeches for different audiences. The NP would stand astride for another decade – one foot in the *verkrampte* wing of the party and the other in the *verligte* wing – before these offensive statutes would be repealed.

Eloff and I had a wonderful experience when he was a student leader and I the leader of the NJB in Transvaal. We travelled with a group of young people to Umtata (nowadays Mthatha) to celebrate the independence of the Transkei. We were excited, sitting amongst the people of the Transkei when the SA flag was lowered and the Transkei flag hoisted.

Late into the night, amidst the celebrations I excitedly congratulated a young man with the independence. He however was very reserved.

What is wrong I asked?

“We should have talked more about this. There are too many people in prison.” He then disappeared into the night.

I was not going to allow this bitter young man to spoil all this excitement – we would deal with the unresolved issues on another occasion. It took a very long time before this young man’s concerns was properly understood by me.

About 20 young leaders from the NJB visited parliament. We had the privilege to meet Prime Minister Vorster in his impressive parliamentary office. Vorster was a master storyteller. He was in top form. Everyone was fascinated with his stories about his travels into Africa and his discussions with African leaders. I was hypnotised by his charm. I began to think about the speech I was about to give; thanking him for his efforts to bring about peace and create a safe future of our generation.

When Vorster’s private secretary, Johan Weilbach, entered and indicated that our time had expired, one of our group slipped in a final question: “What is the future NP policy regarding urban blacks because the current policy – they can’t have any political rights in white SA because they are only here on a temporary basis and must exercise their political rights in the homelands – is a farce.”

I was blown away by this candour. Does this young man not realise that you don’t talk like this to the prime minister? To Vorster’s credit he didn’t lose his cool but answered politely: “It is a pity that time has run out because you ask a very important question. Black people are all ethnically connected with their homelands even if they live here in our cities. They can exercise their political rights on the local government level where they live, but they will have to exercise their national aspirations in the homelands. It can’t be done in any other way because they will swamp us.”

That was the end of the discussion. I hardly had time to say a word of thanks. I knew that Vorster had not impressed anybody with his last comment. He had alienated these young people from him and the NP. He had not even left the door a little open to hold out hope that the policy might develop further in the future.

This was so unlike the pragmatic Vorster that gave so much hope. He was rigid when it came to internal policies but adventurous when it came to foreign policy matters.

The story is told how Vorster went to Ian Smith (prime minister of Rhodesia) that he had concluded a deal with President Kaunda (Zambia) and other states that sanctions would be lifted against that he would get white government for another 15 years. His advice was that Smith

should take it. Smith however wanted white government for another 30 years. And so Vorster told him the fable of the Sultan's horse. A sultan had sentenced two men to death. Just as they were being dragged away, he remarked, that he will commute the sentence of the man that could teach his horse to talk. The next day one of the men was being dragged to the executioner to be beheaded. He saw the other man standing there free! He shouted: "What did you tell the Sultan?" I said to the Sultan: "I can teach a horse to talk, but I need a year." The other man protested: "But you know it will not happen." "I know, but a lot can happen in a year – the horse can die or the Sultan can die."

Smith was not persuaded.

I have often wondered what would have happened if Vorster himself had followed the advice he gave to Smith; namely to take 15 years of white rule – without sanctions, international or internal conflict and prepare the country for an unbridled democracy? How would Vorster have responded if somebody in that meeting had predicted that his favourite backbencher, FW de Klerk, would release Nelson Mandela, unban the ANC and openly negotiate with them the end of the policies he himself was clinging to?

PARLIAMENT

My election to parliament in 1977 was over before I could blink: a seriously fought nomination contest against the incumbent Dr Johan Vilonel and then an unopposed election – the opposition parties didn't want to do battle with the NP in Krugersdorp. I now was on the payroll of parliament and forever in the red at the bank. I never inquired how much members of parliament were paid – it didn't matter. I wanted to go to parliament and that was all that mattered.

Because I am elected unopposed there was no campaign in Krugersdorp; no public meetings, no debates, no struggle, no postal votes. Nothing! I was elected in a void.

I arrived in Cape Town and make a courtesy call to parliament to get my feet in the water. I bumped into John Vorster, in the lobby. He was in a very relaxed mood after the election.

"Good day young man and what are you doing here?" he asked.

"I am now a member of parliament sir". He says "Oh?" and frowned. He nonetheless says "Welcome" as he walked away. And then added: "And you didn't even have to fight".

As he walked away I said to myself: "Hope that next time I have to fight the opposition and not a nomination against my own people – that is too vicious."

Vorster and the NP had thumped the opposition. There was great emotion against the American President, Jimmy Carter and his confidant Andrew Young, who vehemently opposed SA's apartheid policies.

Vorster had appealed to his supporters, to unite against foreign interference in SA's domestic affairs and this had the necessary result – he won the election handsomely.

Even before my induction as a member of parliament it had been evident that there were irreconcilable factions within the ranks of the NP.

AC van Wyk, veteran politician from van Maraisburg tackled me at a social event: “I hear you are super *verlig*.” That was the first time he ever said a word to me: that in spite of the fact that for three and a half years that I had been a member of the Provincial Council, I had attended many meetings and congresses with him. I didn't know what to say and struggled for words. He saw that I was uncertain and followed his opening words up with a quick jab, hoping to land a knockout punch: “Do you stand by Vorster?”

“What kind of a question is that?” I wondered. I sit with John Vorster on the executive of the NP in the Transvaal. Vorster and I had known each other since my student days, my views regarding reform and discriminatory practices I had stated in front of Connie Mulder.

When I had my breath back, I responded politely but determinedly. “Of course I stand by Vorster, because I heard him say when he addressed an ASB congress that he doesn't have all the answers and that the students must prepare themselves for the leadership role they will one day have to play.”

Van Wyk didn't look to happy with this answer and grudgingly walked away. That was the first and last discussion he ever had with me.

This type of discussion repeated itself on a number of occasions even before I could settle down as a backbencher.

Tom Langley, MP for Waterkloof, was a favourite amongst students. Although I had never met him personally, I knew that he was liked by his student supporters. It therefore didn't come as a surprise when he invited me for coffee in his office. I had hardly taken my seat when he made his intentions clear: “Welcome in parliament. You must be on your guard, because there are a few upstarts in our ranks who want to hi-jack the party. You must not associate with Dawie de Villiers, Barend du Plessis en Sam de Beer.”

There was after this encounter never an open discussion with him although we served together on many working committees in the NP. Whenever there was a conflict in the party, we were on opposing sides.

Very early in the first session of parliament I met Cas Uys, MP for Barberton; he warned me against the liberals in the NP.

Sheepishly I asked: “Who do you have in mind?” He retorted: “Piet Koornhof and Pik Botha.”

Before the opening of the parliamentary session in 1978 the Chamber of Industries, together the NP study group for Trade and Industry, organised an information session for the NP caucus members. Members of the Postgraduate Business School from the University of Stellenbosch made presentations.

The death of Steve Biko in October 1977 and the banning of a number of organisations had had major repercussions abroad. This had a negative impact on our trade relations with important trading partners. The business sector didn't mince its words. The lack of political leadership and the fear to tackle the major political issues irritated them. They warned that the political temperature inside and outside the country was rising.

It was clear from the onset that the parliamentarians were divided on these issues. On the one hand, some were opposed to the "naive, liberal views" advanced by the business people. They believed that business people could advocate these liberal views because they didn't carry any political responsibility. If they put their arguments to the public, the electorate would reject them. Others were happy that outsiders shared their views with caucus colleagues. I was delighted that the business leaders had expressed their views – something I (not even inaugurated as a member of parliament yet) could never have done.

It was a difficult time. To enter parliament as a newcomer was difficult enough. To find your feet in the midst of all the internal tension and squabbles requires deft footwork. Journalists were always on the prowl, looking for cracks and divisions in the NP caucus, wanting to know: Who is your crown prince? Where do you stand on this matter or that pronouncement, made by somebody?"?

It was unpleasant to say the least! The innocent election of a parliamentary whip or to fill any vacancies in the ranks of the NP study groups became a contest and was filled with tension. Colleagues were labelled and discredited on the basis of the political views they held.

The story is told of the member of parliament who was visited by people from his constituency. The visitors noticed, much to their surprise, that the MP was very friendly with the enemy (the members of the opposition, sitting on the other side of the aisle). When he met them after the day's debates, they confronted him: "How can you be so friendly with the enemy?" His response blew them out of the water: "They are not the enemy, they are my opponents. The enemy and I sit on the same side."

I bumped into FW de Klerk (newly appointed to the cabinet) in the lobby "Are you finding you feet?

"More or less" I responded.

“Keep a low profile, don’t get involved with cliques and internal squabbles, and concentrate on your constituency work: look after your constituents, swiftly attend to complaints from them. This is what I do and this approach has served me well.”

During my first session I had to address a meeting of *Peil* (Arrow) 99. This was a group of young professional men and women in Johannesburg. Gerrie de Villiers, later CEO of M-Net invited me to a discussion with Dr Willem de Klerk where the topic was: “Does the open debate have any effect on practical politics in SA?”

It was clear that these young people were not happy with the performance of the NP. They were competent people who tried to influence the speed and direction of developments in SA without supporting any political party.

To prepare for this meeting I consulted with a number of senior members of parliament to find out what they were thinking on this topic. It was as clear as daylight that there were two strong currents in the cabinet and that the personalities were irreconcilable. Fanie Botha was more subtle and flexible in his approach and welcomed constructive criticism; Connie Mulder, although very pragmatic at times, dismissed criticism by outsiders – he mocked the academics that I held in high esteem. When I mentioned to Mulder that I was sharing this platform with Willem de Klerk, he was not impressed.

I took a position of which I wasn’t very proud but I didn’t want to rock the NP parliamentary caucus boat I had just climbed into. I said at the meeting: “Politicians are aware of the different arguments, but they have to carry the responsibility for their decisions and have to explain them to their constituents. Therefore, they don’t accept all the advice they receive from outsiders. It is important for them to weigh all the advice they receive and to judge who offers the advice. Then they have to convince their constituents of their arguments or they would fall out of favour. Indeed, a very difficult balancing act.”

I attended the NP Study group meetings on a regular basis. The meetings of Pik Botha, Chris Heunis en Connie Mulder always were interesting and lively. Mulder’s meetings on plural development and information always were full of surprises. He believed that the function of the Department of Information was to package and properly present separate development. He opted for the name of plural relations instead of the former Bantu Affairs. Almost like a magical act: you could change the name and the image for the better without changing the substance of the policy.

Regardless of this point of view, I was impressed with his unconventional style of making contact with black leaders. His first meeting with Dr Nthato Motlana, community leader of Soweto, grasped my imagination. Mulder’s dream to make Soweto the most beautiful city in Africa and his statement that discrimination was as outdated as slavery impressed me.

The question which still to be answered was whether Mulder was daring enough to live with the ramifications of his rhetoric.

To everyone's surprise, John Vorster suddenly announced his retirement from politics. I wormed my way into the media conference where he made this announcement.

The first journalist I met asked the question: "And who is your man?"

I realised the innocence of the backbenches was now gone forever. I would have to make my position clear. The vote of a front bencher carries as much weight as that of a backbencher. I would have to think quickly because the days of not being part of a faction was gone.

28 September 2011

Pen Kotze, chief whip of the NP, stood on the steps of the Senate building while the majestic pillars of that impressive building kept watch; he announced that PW Botha Minister of Defence, has been elected as the leader of the NP, he would be the next Prime Minister of SA.

Botha, in a short, well prepared speech laid the foundation for the years to follow. He would strive for open and honest administration; effective government and a positive policy between the racial groups in SA.

Botha's thinking put the right-wingers on the spot. The most enjoyable part of it all was that the backbenchers didn't have to argue with the "groot ooms" in the lobby anymore – Botha was the bearer of his own policy initiatives.

The right wingers were not impressed with the recommendations of the Wiehahn and Riekert commissions to recognize trade unions and relax influx control measures. Both commissions were appointed by Vorster. Botha looked the economic realities – that already had given Vorster headaches – squarely in the face. The acceptance of the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions recommendations had far reaching consequences.

The right wingers were up in arms. Tom Langley, MP for Waterkloof and later Soutpansberg stated: "We must turn the economic tide to fit in with our policies where we will have independent states for nations and a state where whites are in the majority. Economic realities should not determine our future."

This was typical of the thinking in right wing circles: "Don't give me the facts, because they only confuse me."

I loved it when Botha drove the *verkrampes* from their foxholes. Their arrogance had not been forgotten. It was time to drive them out of their shelters and to take a stand in public.

It was time for arm wrestling within the NP. Different factions were testing their strength all of the time. You could not let your guard down for a single moment. Every debate, every election

was a test. Who says what, who wins what election for the most insignificant position in the NP structures. The *verligtes* and the *verkrampes* were always mobilising against each other. This was a party at war with itself.

The *verligtes* – shielding behind Botha – stood their ground. We were so much at war with ourselves that we could hardly pay any attention to the bigger challenges the country had to face.

It was a very unpleasant period in politics. There were people lumped together in the party who simply did not belong together.

A party caucus is driven by strong rules and by the parliamentary agenda. Time is always of the essence. Because there is a lack of space, caucus members sit close to one another. There is nothing to distract anybody's attention; there are no interjections and no games to play like politicians do in the house of the assembly with the opposition. You have to choose your words carefully because everybody is listening – this is a rare trait for a politician. The atmosphere is intimidating.

If you took a position against Botha, you had to be at your very best because he enjoyed a political brawl.

One of the big guns in the ranks of the conservatives, Jan van Zyl from Sunnyside – always very arrogant and full of confidence in the lobby – told the caucus how he couldn't convince his constituents about the course Botha had taken with his policies to move away from discriminatory measures. That set the cat amongst the pigeons. It was as if the old Sotho wisdom had come alive before my eyes: "I am not hitting you because you are stepping on my corn, but I am now hitting you for all the times when I didn't hit you."

Botha launched a full frontal attack: "I have no respect for a member of parliament who is afraid of his constituents. If you were part of a decision in the caucus, I expect you to defend it. You must close the doors and speak openly and frankly with your people. You must give them the facts and not what they want to hear. If you don't see your way clear to do that, you must take your bags and leave."

It was an embarrassment to see a veteran frontbencher falling from his crest. All his arrogant lobby-speak disappeared like mist before the sun.

This of course was only a kite, because the right wingers wanted to see in which direction the wind was blowing. They wanted to see how Botha would respond.

It was now clear; there could be no misunderstanding. Botha was not to be intimidated. The right-wingers returned to their shelters to prepare for another attack.

For 15 years, between 1974 and 1989, I followed PW Botha closely, read books about him, and at times thought I understood him. After a telephone discussion in 1995 – when he gave me an undeserved clip on the ear – I realised that I had never understood him.

Botha changed the face the NP and chartered a new course for the country. For this he doesn't get enough credit. Long before De Klerk took charge of the NP, Botha had already revolutionised the NP of Malan, Strijdom, Verwoerd and Vorster.

De Klerk inherited in 1989 the NP-name and the leftovers of the disgraced policies. Botha had at that stage already demolished the main pillars of apartheid: mixed marriages, forced removals, separate citizenships for the different ethnic groups. Contrary to its predecessors, Botha's NP had one undivided country in mind.

The diehard supporters of apartheid and separate development had all voted against Botha in 1983 during the referendum of the tricameral parliament and in 1987 during the elections for the white house of assembly.

The De Klerk supporters – in 1989 during the general elections for the House of Assembly and the dramatic announcement in 1990 – were not on the same page as the supporters who had voted the NP into power in 1948 or had kept them in power after that. This can be ascribed to the initiatives taken by Botha. In the face of rightwing critics De Klerk has always said that the NP under his leadership was just continuing with the work that Botha started.

Botha's warning about a total onslaught and his response with a total strategy was criticised by many as alarmist. The truth is that there were plans to seek the NP government's downfall through violent revolutionary means.

Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma and others tell with bravado of how they were trained in Russia. From the neighbouring states umKhonto weSizwe infiltrated the country. The ANC had made common cause with Cuba and Angola. From Western capitals they campaigned for sport-, cultural and trade boycotts against SA. South African passports did not provide access to many countries. The slogans *Isolate Botha in his lager* and, during the days of uprising and revolt *Make this country ungovernable*, were being heard more and more. Chris Hani, MK soldier and SACP leader, stated during the conflict: "We are not afraid to inherit a wasteland."

Fortunately things turned out differently. In SA there was no racial war that resulted in genocide like elsewhere in Africa and in Germany.

When the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), a group of respected leaders, visited SA in 1985 at the request of the Commonwealth, they didn't find anybody who wanted to make this conflict a fight to the bitter end.

Conflict is fertile ground for further conflict and the Botha-era is renowned for its violence on different fronts. One of the questions that had to be resolved was how does one break this cycle of violence to ensure that SA would not become a wasteland. Botha made no secret about it that he was committed to move the politics forward as quickly as possible. Even Botha's harshest critics later acknowledged that he was a reformer.

He was not afraid to tackle the bull by the horns. That smashed the foundations of the NP irrevocably.

Botha conducted himself like a statesman when he considered the results of the Wiehahn and Riekert commissions. Unlike Verwoerd and Vorster who balked at it when the Tomlinson commission report propagated greater consolidation of the homelands and more development support in those areas and when the Theron Commission report propagated greater sympathy and a new constitutional dispensation for the coloured community Botha did not shy away from the hard facts of the Wiehahn and Riekert Reports.

Kader Asmal and other ANC-ringleaders in 2008 in the TV program *Behind the Rainbow* still crowed about how economic sanctions in the late 1980's had driven the NP to the negotiating table. They conveniently have disregard for the role played by the Botha-government who squared up to the economic realities and understood that the old apartheid models had collapsed.

MOVING TOWARD CHANGE

CHAPTER 8 CONFRONTED BY STARK REALITIES

In 1980 I was invited to visit America. Tersia travelled with me. The Americans made a tour guide available to make matters easier. When we met him on our arrival he made it clear that he had two objectives for the visit: he wanted to jog every day. We were very pleased with this because we were regular joggers. He wanted to save money; this we also welcomed because we didn't have a lot of money to spend. A warm friendship developed between Oliver McClory from San Francisco and us.

We jogged every morning. In Washington, past Capitol Hill and the towpaths next to the Potomac River, Rock Creek Park, die National Mall and all the other tourist attractions. In New York we jogged in Central Park and all the well-known jogging routes in Boston.

One early morning when we came out for our jog, McClory was visibly upset. He immediately told us what was bothering him. "Is it true that if I lived in SA I would not have been able to marry my Chinese wife, Serine?" He had gone out for dinner the previous evening when a friend told him that the South Africans he was so friendly with would not accept his marriage in SA. He was of the view that we had misled him and betrayed him. I was embarrassed and went on to the attack. "But Oliver, don't you understand? This is what I have been telling you Americans – we are involved in a struggle to change SA. The statute that irks you so much will be one of the first to go."

McClory was visibly relieved about my words and pleased that Tersia and I would not have frowned on his marriage. The fact that I was committed to work towards the repealing of this hateful act saved our friendship.

With our friendship once again intact we continued with our early morning jogs. In New Orleans we participated in a timed trial organised by one of the local running clubs. After the race everyone just hung around to talk and chat – about running. McClory began to ask from the participants if anyone could give us a ride back to the hotel.

He approached someone who was preparing to run the famous Boston marathon. The man had no problem until he discovered that we were white South Africans. He refused to allow us into his car. McClory was welcome to drive in his car, but not white South Africans.

When McClory explained that I am an agent for change in SA he reluctantly changed his mind. However, there had to be a clear understanding: he would give us a ride but he didn't want to socialise with us.

When McClory introduced me to the man, I was oblivious of his feelings and the discussion that he has just had with McClory. I dived into the discussion and talk about running, training programs eating habits – about all the things runners talk about. The man quietly whispered to McClory that he could relax: he would give us the ride and have coffee and donuts with us.

We had bottomless cups of coffee and couldn't stop talking about politics - in particular race issues – in SA and the USA. He told me that when he had grappled with these issues he had often wondered whether the solution would not be for the Afro-Americans to return to Africa and for the white South Africans to return to Europe. He had, however, come to the conclusion that this was not a solution for America's problems. After the discussion that he had had with us he realised that it also was not the solution for South Africa. Inasmuch as he had become an American and was not an African who could return to Africa, white South Africans were not Europeans anymore and couldn't return to Europe.

During this visit, I paid a courtesy call to Donald Sole, our Ambassador in Washington. He took trouble to inform me about the Carter Administration. Jimmy Carter, with his demand for respect for human rights was not loved in SA. Sole complained that the changes taking place in SA was only of a cosmetic nature. It was impossible in an open, democratic, human rights driven society to explain to anyone how the detention without trial of Helen Joseph – an 80-year-old woman and staunch supporter of the ANC – could be a threat to state security. Is the security situation in our country now so brittle that frail women could undermine it?

I simply did not have the answer for this piercing question. This question haunted me for a long time.

At the end of the visit young SA diplomats – Deon Nel, Carel Wessels, Leo Conradie en Shaun Cleary – organised a farewell dinner for me. They asked thorny questions: what was the state of reform politics in SA: what had happened to the 22 MP's who supported Pik Botha during that bitter campaign in 1978, when he was overpowered by PW Botha: what are their views about reform nowadays?

They told me: "We can identify with those kinds of nationalists." It was my impression that they had been brow beaten by the Carter Administration and really looked forward to any positive news regarding political developments in SA to ease their task abroad.

In South Africa we were referred to as a bunch of over-*verligte* backbenchers who were too big for our boots. I decided that I was not going to be distracted by the labels stuck on me anymore; there was support for our views and to backtrack would undermine our credibility.

The more I grappled with these issues, the clearer it became that certain policies just couldn't stand the test of time.

Those young diplomats and other friends helped my confidence a great deal. That influence was so strong whenever I hesitated on a step forward, I decided to take the step that would be true to our quiet confidential discussions and not undermine our friendship. These steps had to be consistent with our discussions in private and the way we moved the politics forward in public.

In January 1982 I was invited on a two-week tour to Germany. It was a very cold winter. Snow had gathered meters high next to the road. In the midst of this fairytale paradise I had heated discussions with interesting people. It was remarkable to see how the German attitude towards SA had hardened since my previous visit in 1979. They had become impatient with our inability to move in the direction of a political settlement. During the farewell lunch for me, hosted by Doctor Hans-Joachim Vergau and attended by senior officials from the department of foreign affairs, I was bombarded with questions and comments: "You are stuck with your reforms. Why are the South Africans not talking to one another? Look at the outdated racism on your statute books. We can't help you if you don't break the political deadlock!"

This felt like an orchestrated stand off as if they wanted to shake me into reality. There razor sharp arguments were of course all couched in fine old-world diplomatic words whilst we were eating the finest German cuisine. Each statement was a direct hit.

This change in attitude made such an impression on me that I proposed a motion for discussion in the caucus. I wanted to discuss the relationship between international pressure and the development of internal politics. It was important to inform the caucus that the ANC was successfully making inroads into our traditional support base. ANC propaganda and personal interaction with students and schoolchildren had influenced them negatively. During discussions with the children, I was surprised by their hostility and how informed they were about the situation in SA.

The ambassador of Denmark in SA, Peter Bruckner, told me that his mother, shortly after World War II had encouraged him to follow events in SA closely because the world could not afford a second tragedy as the one they just had experienced under Nazi-Germany. In the 1950s in Denmark the schoolchildren were asked to write essays about the atrocities of apartheid. In 1980 the children were still writing essays – with greater venom and finesse – about apartheid.

My argument before the caucus was that we should not allow outside pressure to convince us to do the necessary policy adjustments. On the contrary, we should take the initiative with drastic and meaningful changes.

After the discussion, SP Barnard, MP for Langlaagte said that he could see in my eyes that I had been afraid and did not open my hart completely. He was correct of course: the caucus was a stuffy place where you had to choose your words carefully. I had to dread carefully and had to

choose my words carefully. I pleaded for change but not with a specific end product in mind. The argument was simply to make the point that we shouldn't allow the reform vehicle to get stuck and thereby make it impossible for our friends abroad to defend us.

In March 1982 I again had an opportunity to travel to Germany. This time with Jan Grobler, MP for Brits and the NP chief information officer, Peter Gastrow, MP for Durban Central, Ron Miller, MP for Pinetown and Kobus Meiring, MP for Paarl, we had been to inform influential people about developments in SA. This was a relaxed tour without any *verkrampptes*. There was positive interaction amongst the members of the touring party who didn't play political games with each other but only had one thing in mind – to promote SA's interests and explain to the best of everyone's ability how we saw future developments in SA. The reaction was much more positive than had been the case two months earlier because they were convinced that we were serious about change.

Doctor Vergau was not present during the discussions; his horse had slipped on ice and he fell and broke a leg. I felt so attracted to him that I went to visit him at home. Our discussion, like the previous one was lively.

One year after my visit to Germany in 1982 I was forced to revisit some of my preconceived ideas again. "The problem with you South Africans is that you believe all Russians are six feet tall. You forget that they are human beings and also make mistakes, they are not invincible. The Russians are not the source of all your troubles; your racial prejudice and racial policies are at the heart of your problems." This is how a British interlocutor attacked me when I visited Britain in 1983 as a guest of the British government. Of course, I then still believed that communist Soviet Union was the state of the devil here on earth and that all SA's problems originated behind the iron curtain. It took a while before I would broaden my simplistic perspective.

During this 1983-visit I had the opportunity to attend a concert of a visiting Russian choir and orchestra. On my own I would never have done that but when my host in Liverpool invited me I could not refuse. This was the first time I got to see Russians in real life. While I was listening to the song and music my thoughts drifted: these people were white just like me; how is it possible that they can bring forth this beautiful music and yet they are also capable of devising this offensive political system.

At the end of the evening the audience gave the choir and the orchestra a standing ovation. That was for me – an Afrikaner from Krugersdorp – a tall order. A standing ovation for the people who were plotting our downfall was unthinkable! That was too much for me: I had to rise but rubbed my nose, fiddled with my hands and did all kinds of things with them but I could not put them together for "these hated Russians". That was my protest against them.

Long after the concert I was still thinking about this experience. I realised how silly and cosmetic the walls between people were. How do I know what the musicians were thinking? Why was I so prejudiced against them? Why did I not just relax and enjoy the beautiful music they were making without dragging politics into it? Was that not exactly what the world was practicing against SA with its sport boycotts? They didn't care about the women and men who only wanted to do sport – they had political objectives in mind.

Something then struck me like a lightning bolt: the lily-white communists and I are just as far apart as the rightwing Afrikaners in Krugersdorp and I. They are also lily-white, but their racial, Nazi-type politics I loathed. It dawned on me that I was closer to some people of colour than the white communists or Nazis. Skin pigmentation is not the determining factor when one makes political judgements. What matters is whether people subscribe to the same values.

It would be possible for members of that orchestra – on the basis of their skin colour – to perform in the town hall of Krugersdorp but my black friends from Kagiso en Munsieville would not be allowed to attend such a performance. They were good enough to clean the Town Hall but could not sit on the chairs and enjoy a concert there.

I asked my British interlocutors why they were so hostile towards us, in spite of the policy initiatives by PW Botha, while the Russian artists, in contrast were received with open arms in their country.

The answer shattered my long-established views: “You still do not accommodate black people in your constitutional set-up. Racism and the potential for racial conflict is part of our daily lives in Britain. When we dispel racism in SA, we also take a stand against racism in our own country. Contrary to this, the Russian system is far removed from our daily existence.”

My travels abroad helped to prepare me for what was to follow. However, I still hadn't the faintest idea what it would take to finally bring about a political settlement in SA.

Looking back it is difficult to comprehend how NP members of parliament could have operated in such a vacuum. FW de Klerk had accused Andries Treurnicht, after he broke away from the NP, that he had fed his supporters a hunger diet about the facts of SA. Broadly speaking all South Africans were fed a hunger diet because we didn't know what was happening in SA. Because of the ban on publications even members of parliament didn't know what Luthuli en Mandela was thinking. We were not curious enough to find out what was happening. We were only speaking with people who were thinking like us. Those who were not thinking like us we dismissed as liberals, communists and agitators.

CHAPTER 9 STRIFE AND BLOOD LETTING

On 24 February 1982, an outburst of activities disturbed the dignity of the parliamentary corridors. This shook the foundations of the National Party.

Koos van der Merwe, Member of Parliament for Jeppe – and since 1994, member of the Inkatha Freedom Party – stormed out of the NP caucus and shouted: “I am finished with this Prog PW Botha!”

Andries Treurnicht, Minister in Botha's cabinet led a group of his *verkrampste* supporters out of the caucus. Members of the caucus, stunned by this development, mingled in the corridors.

The strife between the warring factions about the future political dispensation, land distribution and economic policy boiled over. The National Party split! The divisions between us were greater than the common ground.

In my tiny office, next to the caucus room, a small group chattered and couldn't stop laughing. Barend du Plessis, Sam de Beer, Gert van der Linde, Wynand Malan, Awie Wright and I ordered a bottle of cold white wine and sandwiches to celebrate the occasion festively. The door stood open and likeminded colleagues joined in the festivities. Others frowned as they moved passed my office – a split in the NP was not a laughing matter. This was dismemberment and the dissolution of a bond between former blood brothers who had fought many a political battle together.

For us, the split was reason to rejoice! To hold the NP together with band aid was cosmetic. The never-ending gossip, conniving and back stabbing was simply getting too much. People who didn't have the same vision for the country simply didn't belong in the same party.

At the heart of this jolliness was also relief. For a very long time many of us had been concerned that the Treurnicht faction would drive us out of the caucus – now they were outside and we were inside. Botha's reform initiatives simply had to break out of the suffocating circumstances and develop further.

Nobody on that turbulent day in February 1982 would have predicted the calm election day of 27 April 1994 when SA became a democracy. The only thing that was certain on that day was that our politics had to move forward.

Treurnicht's obstinacy over one government in one country was a fundamental issue that reform minded caucus members no longer could compromise on.

Jan Grobler, MP for Brits and the NP's chief information officer had written a letter to Treurnicht making it clear that there could not possibly be an exclusively white sovereign parliament in SA. There could only be one authority on a specific piece of land. Treurnicht made heavy weather of the fact that brown and Indian ministers would have a say in how white people would be governed.

There was no more time to be wasted. The pace of change could not be determined by the *verkrampte* elements in the NP circles.

Everybody supporting this ideal simply knew that the central question of SA politics was still not being addressed: how will black South Africans be accommodated?

I believed that by establishing the tri-cameral parliament reform politics would be given the necessary momentum and that this was a better option than to continue the bickering about the flaws of the plan.

With the benefit of hindsight I must concede that I had been mistaken. The country had to pay a price for the half-hearted measures whereby limited power was given to the coloured and Indian

communities with representation in the House of Representatives (brown people) and the House of Delegates (Indians). Black people were excluded from this limited reform process.

In spite of my own criticism of the tri-cameral parliament, it contributed tremendously to my own political development. The members of the brown and Indian communities forced me to face the hurt of the apartheid legislation head on.

The split in the NP was a defining moment. The leaders on both sides of the divide had to clash because they did not belong in the same party anymore. This split prepared the road for meaningful negotiations at Codesa and the constitutional settlement after 1994.

It demanded courage from both sides to go through with the split because the ramifications would vibrate far and long after that caucus meeting.

It had been a struggle to bring the NP thinking to this point. Three years before the split various role-players from the media, academics and politicians met at Franskraal in the Overberg to grapple with this issue.

Politicians Sam de Beer, Keppies Niemann, Chris Heunis, oom Japie de Villiers, oom Hein Basson and I were present. Louis Louw van *Die Burger* was there, also academics from Stellenbosch; Sampie Terreblanche, Christof Hanekom, Johan Burger en Merwe Scholtz.

Everyone was concerned about the pace of reforms.

There were millions of black people living in our urban areas for which the NP had no answer; we went on to prioritise the so-called brown politics. Others and I were of the view that we had to get ahead with the black politics and then brown politics would fall into place.

These discussions didn't always hum along sweetly. Deep in the night there was a fiery debate between me and Minister Chris Heunis. The following day Johan Burger said he didn't know that we were so convinced about our views that we would remain upstanding during debates with someone like Heunis. What he clearly hadn't appreciated was that we had been moulded by the battles we had fought in the Transvaal. The rough and tumble election battle for the leadership of the national party had prepared us for this.

In the years that followed similar discussions took place beneath the milkwood trees of Alf Ries, seasoned political journalist of *Die Burger*, at his beach house. Ries loved to receive people there and talk politics with them.

Heunis was always a source of inspiration for the reform-minded NP members and often made time to speak with them.

It is still a puzzle why, after the dramatic events since 2 February 1990 there has not been ample recognition for the role he had played.

The limited reforms sparked fierce opposition and ignited the flames of revolution. It resulted in the forming of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983.

The NP had completely misread the situation. Today many – even those who opposed the UDF from the NP circles – express their disappointment that the UDF was not allowed to continue to play a greater role within the ANC circles. Former UDF members – like Allan Boesak and others – are frustrated with the ANC and the direction it followed and how the ANC has sidelined them.

During those days Anne-Marie Mischke and Dries van Heerden – respectively from *Die Transvaler en Die Vaderland* – organised a breakfast in the *Townhouse* in Cape Town. During this breakfast Dr Allan Boesak, then moderator van die NG Sendingkerk, and I would exchange ideas. This was a great experience because I had never met Boesak before. Later on we often referred to that first meeting.

Boesak told us how he had grown up in the Northern Cape. He told us how the children were then cheated by white people when they played marbles. That was symbolic of how the white people had grabbed the land but unlike the game of marbles, black people would now take back the land.

Boesak and I didn't make any headway with one another. He took a hard-line position: "You are making the water muddy. The people can't see the political issues clearly. We want all our rights now."

I was surprised that he wasn't more sympathetic towards the split in NP circles and our new approach towards political rights for coloured community. On the contrary, he pleaded for deeper polarisation in SA politics because the NP was clouding the issues. This confused people "There is only one way forward: we have to radicalise politics."

At the end of the meeting I told him that I was going to Krugersdorp where many people were up in arms against the Botha initiatives; the day will arrive that he, Boesak, will need me as much as I will need him to demonstrate and tell the people that he is not the demon they believe he is or that I am not the demon his people believe one to be.

We also spoke about the membership of the NG Kerk. Boesak gave me a wry smile and said: "We will be in politics together; long before we are in the same church."

I recently met Boesak again and we reminisced about that meeting. We agreed that the politics had moved on – just as he had predicted – but that the church still is grappling with the old issues.

CHAPTER 10 NECKLACE

The 1980s were tough: there was polarisation just as Boesak had hoped for; there was uprising and revolt in the air. The UDF was living their slogan: *Isolating Botha in his laager* – doing their level best to make the country ungovernable.

The CP played a spoilers' role – they were a nuisance. There was not time to think strategically about things because they were everywhere, ready to bother. Whilst the CP was sapping our energy, the ANC – in gaol or in exile – was busy preparing themselves for what everyone knew had to happen: eye-to-eye negotiations. Everyone was waiting for the day – that looked like judgment day – to dawn.

Vincent Crapanzano writes in his book *The Whites of South Africa* (1985) that in the middle 1980s there was only one theme amongst Afrikaners – with bated breath they were waiting to see what is going to happen. Everyone knew that the present circumstances were indefensible and couldn't be sustained. Something had to happen – for better or for worse.

When a stranger in 2007, very friendly said in a shopping mall: “So mister Wessels, then we wait just a little longer.” I didn't have the faintest idea what he was talking about.

“I don't understand”

“We wait a little longer before we decide whether we must trek.”

When I met with this stranger, I had not read Crapanzano's book.

When my friend Jaco Hoffman and I during a study visit to St John's College in Oxford in 2009 were having a pint at the Lamb and Flag, he suggested that I read Crapanzano's book. Only then did I realise what the man in the shopping centre had been talking about.

We are waiting again: young people wondered if they should trek; *oupas* and *oumas* are nowadays also waiting; considering whether they should follow their children and their grandchildren – who have now settled abroad – and trek. Those who don't trek, also wait: they wonder if there will be chaos, they wonder if government structures will collapse and if all the horrible predictions will be proven wrong. In the meantime, they are waiting...

When South Africa stopped waiting and South Africans started talking with one another at the Codesa negotiations in December 1991, the Conservative Party was the only parliamentary party that was absent. When their supporters later pushed them to negotiate, they kicked and screamed but didn't stay the full course and walked away again.

Constand Viljoen and the Mulder brothers then had to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. Former CP members write critical letters in the newspapers about the negotiating process but conveniently forget about the unconvincing role they played when negotiations got going.

To do arm wrestling with the conservatives in the eighties was boring and energy sapping. There was not much energy left after those battles to break new ground.

In Krugersdorp the tension was building.

“Wessels, you are brave. Do you want a necklace?” someone shouted under applause when I arrived to put forward my point of view at a protest meeting organised by the right wingers in my constituency. They were protesting because they wanted the inhabitants of Munsieville forcefully removed to Kagiso. They had a lot to say, but refused to grant me an opportunity to address them from the podium.

Necklacing is the practice of summary execution and torture carried out by forcing a rubber tyre, filled with petrol, around a victim’s chest and arms, and setting it on fire.

When I left after the meeting a *tannie* tackled me. “You are in cahoots with the anti-Christ, you are doomed.”

I answered her very calmly: “I am so happy that you will not be the judge in this matter.” A few bullies appear from nowhere and wanted to cause trouble. A few friends – but also supporters of the forced removal – walked up to me and whispered in my ear. “We have to get you out of here Leon; these blokes want to *donner* you.”

I was not brave enough to take them on and swiftly sneaked away because politics in Krugersdorp was rough; I didn’t want to make news headlines for the wrong reasons. One of my predecessors, Martiens van der Berg, had the nickname of *Bobbejaan* (Baboon) van der Berg because troublemakers – who didn’t approve of his politics – had chased him into a tree. The police also had to rescue him from the tree.

The story is also told of a woman who during a public meeting walked up to the speaker and wanted to assault him with her umbrella: the speaker referred to her group – who had peppered him with interjections and comments – as a bunch of sherry drinkers. Hands on hips, curlers in the hair, waving her umbrella, she shouted: “Who do you think we are? We are fucken ladies!”

There is the issue of Munsieville that in the middle-1980s stirred emotions in Krugersdorp. White Krugersdorp wanted Munsieville to be removed; it bordered on three white areas. The unrest and violence this township often threatened to boil over into the white suburbs.

Winnie Mandela made her famous speech Munsieville: “Together, hand in hand with our match boxes we will liberate this country.” This statement further whipped up emotions. The white community began to arm themselves with guns, hunting rifles, revolvers, pistols – anything that could fire a bullet.

For 80 years the 10000 inhabitants of Munsieville had been a thorn in the flesh for white Krugersdorp. The inhabitants had to move few times, always away from white Krugersdorp, whenever there was need to extend the boundaries of the white suburbs.

Munsieville never had to be removed so far away that the inhabitants were too far from their workplaces with the whites, but they also had not to be close-by. The Munsieville citizens didn’t from part of the constitutional dispensation of the white people.

For decades the area had not been upgraded or developed because it was the belief that the inhabitants were only there on a temporary basis. They had to live under the cloud of a forced removal.

Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, as a young man who lived there and once told me how for ten years they had watched how Dan Pienaarville was established and developed: with water, sewerage, electricity and storm water draining. During this time there was no development in Munsieville. The Munsieville inhabitants accepted it good-natured. It was this kind of attitude that had made the children protest, blaming their parents for their timid stance.

In the beginning of my parliamentary career I had pleaded for the removal of Munsieville. I believed that a peaceful removal to better living conditions in Kagiso – about ten kilometres away - was possible. Like my predecessors in parliament I had made presentations to the authorities on the basis that Munsieville blocked the development of affordable housing for the lower income group of the white community.

Over the years I had led many delegations to four ministers and two deputy ministers. Every year we returned with new promises: “In next year’s budget money will be made available.” That is how it continued year in and year out: the removal was important but not important enough to make money available so that the people of Munsieville could be moved to better living conditions. Then: forced removals were no longer the policy of the NP government – it was not politically attainable.

The morality of force removals was never seriously debated in NP circles. It was the affordability and political unattainability that made the policy collapse. PW Botha had intervened and directed that Munsieville should not be removed. This was another nail in the apartheid coffin and a feather in his cap.

Botha took this decision in spite of a petition of 12 000 inhabitants from Krugersdorp and a unanimous decision of the white town council of Krugersdorp asking him for the removal of Munsieville to Krugersdorp. In that decision they also called for my resignation because I no longer believed in the removal of Munsieville. When Botha took that decision, Daan Prinsloo (an official in his office) and I were in his office. He was calm; we debated the issue and concluded that moving the people of Munsieville was not on. Botha then remarked: “Now we must help you to sell this decision. The only way to do that, it to stabilise the area and that can only be achieved if we develop it.” Activists often give me the credit for the non-removal of Munsieville but Botha never gets the credit he deserves for this decision.

I immediately realised the magnitude of this decision. In my mind’s eye saw the images of forced removals: policemen, trucks, sjamboks, broken furniture, protestors, and unfavourable media reports here and abroad. This was now the end of that. It had been a long journey for me. I was proud that I had been a part of the decision not to move Munsieville. I was inspired by Botha. I was ready to do battle with the right wingers and the 12000 people who had signed that petition.

That was the beginning of a long acrimonious political battle. It was the only issue that mattered during the general election of 6 May 1987. My election platform was a simple one: “The non-removal of Munsieville was a reality – it was not going to change. A properly established and developed Munsieville was in the best interests of Krugersdorp.”

The two areas – Dan Pienaarville and Munsieville – represented two worlds. The one represented the privilege of the past; the other wanted to forget the past. The one was afraid of the future; the other for the first time had a future.

When parliament adjourned for the 1987 election, everyone came to say goodbye: friends with sympathy and foes with malicious pleasure – all believed that this was the end of my political career. They were convinced that the NP did not have a snowball's hope to beat the CP. The CP controlled town council's hostile attitude towards me further fuelled the fires.

An American friend, John Dellenback, after a long time in politics lost an election and often used to joke with himself: “I retired from politics with the consent of the voters.” I found Dellenback's positive attitude attractive: I had the desire to practice as an advocate again before I hung up my working boots. Little did I know that the 1987-election – more than any other political event that went before – would define me.

In every election there is a small section of the electorate that are undecided about who they want to support in the election. The CP supporters could not be persuaded; a debate with them would be a waste of time. The NP strategy was simple: find the NP supporters and don't waste time on the CP members. The NP message was: The CP idea of Afrikaner self-determination in a white country; the forced removal of Munsieville are nightmares that belong to an old era where unworkable political dreams ruled over reality. We believed that forced removals had yielded nothing and had led to naught. We had to work with all citizens to bring about new plans for the future.

Members of the CP were loud and aggressive – they were everywhere. I realised that I could only win the election with the aid of a good organisation. The NP team worked smartly: canvassed our supporters, found the voters that had moved from their registered addresses and made sure that they would vote. There was a large band of volunteers who toiled and slogged relentlessly. They gave their time and skills in abundance. Never in the NP office did we dilly dally. There wasn't time for big-mouthed political talkers. Those supporters who came to visit and to talk were soon enough given something to do. Workshy babblers quickly left us and sought other pastures where to sow their political wisdom.

Far beyond our constituency and even outside the province of Transvaal there was interest and even financial support. The industrialist Albert Wessels one day invited me to visit him. He wanted to make a personal contribution and support a few NP candidates. It didn't appeal to him to donate money to the deep pockets of the NP party organisation. “Help me to draw up a list of five candidates. There are only two requirements that they must meet: They must be reformers and winners.” We debated and drafted the list. He immediately pulled out his personal check book and made a donation for the campaigns of each of his preferred candidates.

Without warning, the Progressive Federal Party decided that they would not put up candidates in three NP seats in the Transvaal. The seats were: Innesdal (Albert Nothnagel), Geduld (Sam de Beer) and Krugersdorp (my constituency). For the Nats in Krugersdorp that was great news. The Progs didn't have a chance to win the seat and they would just have played a spoiling role in favour of the CP.

In the ten years that I had served in parliament – since that election in 1977 when I was elected unopposed to the house of assembly – the profile of the NP support basis had changed dramatically. The kernel of the support base was still Afrikaans speaking and could still be found in Afrikaans churches on Sunday but this group thought differently about Afrikanerdom and the future of the country. In many ways they were poles apart from the supporters that had send oom Martiens van der Berg to parliament in 1948 when the NP won that dramatic election that had grafted apartheid into our statute books.

That oppressive thinking about apartheid and separate development was now to be found in CP circles.

Afrikanerdom had split from top to bottom. The NP-split in 1982 was profound and had opened the door for further reforms, which had prepared the way for the democratic election of 1994.

In great numbers people came out in 1987 to support the NP for the very first time. English speakers, member from the Jewish community, Lebanese and Portuguese communities, all enthusiastically supported the NP campaign in Krugersdorp. Their support was indispensable.

A pastor from the Baptist church called. He wanted to talk about the election. We agreed that I would meet him at his church. To my shame I got caught up in meetings and discussions and only realised one hour after the agreed time that I had forgotten about the meeting. I rushed to the church and tended my apologies. "I am so sorry but I got caught up with other duties. I didn't want to phone because I wanted to apologise face-to-face."

After a long discussion, about the election and my views on a number of political issues he said: "When you didn't arrive for the meeting I wrote you off. I am very pleased that you came to apologise. The country is on a knife's edge and this is a turning point. My congregation have followed you for a long time but still don't know what to do. I am going to recommend to the leaders in the church that they support you."

This set the pattern for other leaders from other denominations to follow with similar support.

The Afrikaans churches and ministers from those churches – who had helped to coin the word apartheid and had played a significant role to put the NP into power in 1948 – with a few exceptions were absent this time. The Afrikaans speaking churches were divided. The very same members who so piously glared at me on Sundays from the pews of the church council were the same ones who during public meetings in the town hall yelled at me and shouted: "Stel jou beleid, jou kafferboetie." (State your case you kafferlover!)

This left a very bitter taste in my mouth. That was the final parting of the ways between me and the rightwing Afrikaners. This helped me to see the issues clearly. My people were not Afrikaners anymore; they were people who shared my values. Race and colour was no longer the determining factor. I was still at cross purposes with the ANC because they were involved in an armed struggle with the regime and wanted to grab power through the barrel of a gun and not at the ballot box.

CP members challenged me every day to a public debate with Clive Derby Lewis, the CP candidate. I gave them a slippery answer: "A public debate would serve no purpose, because if I persuaded Clive Derby-Lewis to vote for me, he would not be able to do so because he was not a registered voter in Krugersdorp. During this campaign I focus on registered voters. The fact that he is not such, means he is not one of us. He doesn't live in Krugersdorp. He is a mercenary." This message I spread on his bread whenever I had the opportunity. What I did realise was that I would have to hold a public meeting where the CP, could shout and scream and ask questions.

However, there was an obstacle. We believed that the NP of Transvaal had treated us poorly. From government circles there was little support to communicate the decision to not move Munsieville, sparking a highly emotional reaction. The NP head office in the Transvaal then decided to send Kobus Meiring, deputy minister from the Cape, to address a public meeting to boost our campaign.

I protested: "The man is soft spoken and doesn't even know what an AWB looks like. Will he stand up against their aggressive tactics?" A squabble ensued between me and the NP head office. I resisted. If they can't send a senior minister to support my campaign – like they had done when they sent PW Botha to Krugersdorp when I was first elected as an MPC in 1974, don't send anyone. I would fight this election on my own.

When Minister Pietie du Plessis – seasoned politician and experienced member in PW Botha's cabinet – heard of this clashing of heads he immediately offered to hold a public meeting in Krugersdorp. I welcomed his kind support – he at least knew what an AWB looked like and had some run-ins with them in his own constituency in Lydenburg. He would not run for cover when they started their antics.

The meeting on the 3 April 1987 was wild. It was our custom to open the meeting with prayer. The agitators did not participate in this part of the proceedings; they waited outside and first had to get some courage from their liquor bottles before they come into the hall. They waved their AWB flags and yelled: "Stel jou beleid, jou *kafferboetie!*"

Thinus Prinsloo from *Beeld* wrote the following about the meeting:

When the meeting started at 7.30, the rowdy AWB supporters tried to shout Minister Pietie du Plessis down. There were moments when it seemed fights would erupt. Adv Wessels then made an inspiring speech. He was loudly supported and after twenty minutes got a standing ovation from the majority in the audience. The hall was packed to capacity. Adv Wessels started his speech by saying to the AWB's: "You can shout me down, but you will not be able to shout down that what I stand for." What the NP

demands for itself, it also grants every black person, Indian and Coloured. When the AWB's had a rally at the Paardekraal-Monument, I saw how black people attended to their horses. If black people are good enough to do that, they are good enough to have political rights.

Adv Wessels received boisterous support when he challenged every CP and AWB supporter to live their policies: Dismiss all your black workers. Do your work yourself. Let the CP supporters put up posters in front of their shops saying that only whites are allowed to enter buy from them.

This meeting was the turning point in the NP campaign. Many people came to me after this meeting and said to me: "Now we are prepared to work for you."

News about the meeting travelled far. It was shown on French TV. The expat Breyten Breytenbach saw the broadcast. During our first meeting in Paris told me: "I agreed to this meeting with you because you stood your ground when the right wingers tried to shout you down."

On 6 May (Election Day) we knew that we were in for a very busy day and that we would only carry the day if we worked meticulously. Every supporter would have to vote. Clive Derby-Lewis was walking around bragging, winning was just a formality and he couldn't wait to walk away with the prize.

About an hour before the voting stations closed two stray voters from Pretoria arrived at a voting station in Pretoria Central. They were not on the voters roll; they had previously lived in Krugersdorp. The father of the candidate, Gert Oosthuizen, called the NP office in Krugersdorp and established that they were still registered there. He pleaded with them: "The people in Krugersdorp need your vote. I will organise a car and a driver to take you there and bring you back."

That was the commitment we received from people across the country. The day before the election Keppies Niemen, smart politician from Kimberley called: "I have a handful of postal votes for you; are you interested?" I said "Of course! We will need every vote." "Are you coming to collect it, because, it won't reach you in time if I post it."

I told Nic van Ransburg about it; he asked businessman Tommy Marsden to help us. Tommy asked someone in Kimberley to collect the votes from the NP office and then courier it to him. When Bill Greyvenstein, Nic and I at the end of the day walked towards the hall where the votes were to be counted I heard Tommy shout: "Wait a second, I have a present for you. Here are four votes from Kimberley."

This gave us a lift. Nic very determinedly said to the supporters who were witnessing this: "Don't expect a result soon because we are going to fight for every vote; we will need every vote."

When the voting process started, our group – who had to observe the counting of the ballots – was focussed and very determined. We were not going to allow the opposition to bully us. The Conservatives were full of bravado and not willing to make small talk with us.

Outside the CP supporters were setting up the braaivleis fires and beginning their victory celebrations. The NP supporters were tense. They were listening to the radio announcing the early election results. With regular intervals it was being announced how the neighbouring constituencies were falling into the hands of the CP. They kept their hopes high but were beginning to steel their nerves for an NP defeat.

Late that night, after every vote had been counted with great precision, magistrate Eksteen was able to announce a National Party victory of 55 votes. He and his team had done their work so thoroughly that there was no challenge from the CP and the result was accepted without a second count.

When Eksteen led the candidates outside, the body language of the two teams revealed the outcome. NP supporters jumped for joy. I saw tears in the eyes of friends and family.

Within a flash, the Conservatives packed their bags and left with their tails between their legs to go and lick their wounds somewhere else. Now and again one of them growled: “We will get you next time.”

The Nats were not gloating; they knew there would soon be another day, another contest. We returned to our election office to celebrate – and started thinking about the next election. During the celebrations we decided not to close the office election office but to keep it open and continue to serve the public and prepare for the next election.

My student friend, Tonie van Tonder of Vanderbijlpark, came to work with us the whole day. When the election result wasn't forthcoming he thought the Conservatives were thrashing us and went home. While driving home and almost on his doorstep, he heard over the radio that we had won the election. Without hesitation he turned his car around to be with us. When he arrived with us, he smiled: “I worked with you guys the whole day but just couldn't resist the opportunity to celebrate the victory with you.”

Early the next morning, just before daybreak, somebody asked: “Whose Kombi is standing outside? Who is the owner?”

Somebody then told us the story of the Kombi. The owner had come to the office early on Election Day and said: “I don't have the time to help you. Take my Kombi and use it. I will come and fetch it later.”

A student from Johannesburg who was listening to the conversation said: “I want to help you. I will drive the Kombi.” One of the organisers asked him to go to certain old age homes and just make sure we get all the NP supporters to the voting station. He had great success with this “mopping up operation.”

When he returned the Kombi he told people at the office with great pride of his adventures. When he had arrived at one of the old age homes he found a group of elderly women neatly dressed but very impatient: “Where were you the whole morning? We have been waiting for hours.” There were too many for one journey. They refused for him to depart and make more than one journey. They hopped into the Kombi and sat on each other’s laps and one of them even sat on the carpet of the Kombi. They were jolly and said how they were going to vote for Wessels.

In 1998 the Commissioner of Police, General Johan van der Merwe, said: “No policeman will ever vote for the National Party again.” He made this statement after the NP had made its position clear before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) – it wasn’t supporting the idea of a general amnesty for unauthorised human rights violations committed during the time of conflict in SA.

But in 1987 we in Krugersdorp had already experienced the dismissive voting patterns of the police. Although I always had an easy relationship with the police officers in Krugersdorp, we never discussed party politics and I never interpreted their cordiality as support for me or my party.

NP canvassers reported to me that there was a clear pattern: police officials made no secret of the fact that they were going to support the CP. On election-day some of them – as if they were on parade – walked in their uniform, via the CP tables before going into the voting station to cast their votes. I totally accepted this behaviour. This was politics and police officials could support who-ever they wanted to as long as it did not influence their service to the public.

When I was informed later that a police reservist – who was on duty in one of the voting stations – were canvassing for the CP, I was beside myself. I would not put up with this.

I reported the matter to the election officer who was in agreement with me. This man was bundled out unceremoniously.

There was little time to hang around after the election because the newly elected members had to be sworn in. I returned to parliament with a much lighter heart than when I had left before the elections. There was a caucus meeting before the official proceedings began. When I arrived at the caucus room I stopped – I wanted to savour this moment. I remembered that not many had given me a chance to return to the fold after the elections. Some of them had become the victims of their own doom and gloom. I jumped over the threshold with a smile and a “hooray!” The first to welcome me was Gerrit Viljoen – highly respected minister and academic – with a sincere smile: “Congratulations, Leon. That was great performance!” I appreciated this compliment because he wasn’t someone who dished out compliments lightly. As a serious academic he often complained about the habit of politicians of dishing out compliments too easily. We are too quick with our compliments and too scarce with constructive criticism.

At the first social function after the induction of the new members Pik Botha, minister of foreign affairs walks to me and Tersia. “Congratulations you two; I am proud of you.” I was very happy

that Tersia was present when this accolade was offered because her role was immeasurable. She was much more than a partner and a friend: she was the heart and soul of the campaign.

When veteran politician Japie Basson congratulated me on the victory he thought I was being too modest. “You mustn’t be so modest because you won by such a small margin; imagine how sad the poor chap is that he lost by such a small margin. He would love to swop places with you.”

That pep talk was just what I needed because the CP had nominated Derby-Lewis as an indirectly elected member of parliament. They had nationally received enough votes to appoint such a member – who then would not represent a constituency – to fill their ranks. Derby-Lewis paraded in parliament as if he was the cat’s whiskers. I used the Basson medicine at each and every parliamentary debate to good effect reminding him and the CP that they had lost the election and did not represent the wishes of the majority of the Krugersdorp electorate. He was sitting in parliament because as his CP colleagues believed he was worthy of a consolation prize.

I hated this system of indirectly elected members of parliament: it was unacceptable. You work your guts out to win an election and represent people just to find the loser on the other side of the aisle.

I was now a frontbencher and in the eyes of the whips that position carried a special status. Often you were called upon to be a battering ram during debates. I loved this frontbench experience. I had made peace with the fact that this was the beginning of the end of my political career. I would face the CP once more in Krugersdorp and regardless of the outcome that would most likely be my final curtain. If I left politics before the next election I would undo the 1987 victory and would forever be mocked that I was afraid to square up for another fight with them.

BETWEEN QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 11 BEGINNING OF THE END

In July 1985 a group of parliamentarians was sent to America to observe the build-up of the disinvestment campaign. For three weeks we had meetings with opinion formers, business people, church leaders and politicians – trying to persuade them that disinvestment was not in the interest of South Africa. Disinvestment would lead to unemployment and suffering.

Our challenge was to explain to Americans that we were not busy with half-baked reforms, but that we were serious to bring about a dispensation that would be fair to everyone. We tried to project this as a democratic process.

I had no idea how demanding that would be. The idea for disinvestment had taken root across the country, across the generations and across the political divides. Even our friends, who were not advocating disinvestment, were disgruntled with our inability to get ourselves out of the political quagmire we found ourselves in.

One of our friendly discussants threw his hands in the air and said: “Why can’t you just get ahead of the caravan? Be proactive! Show some leadership!”

This visit had a profound impact on my thinking.

On a daily basis we saw the frightening violence in South Africa on the TV screens. Anyone seeing these signs of violence: the fires, the protesting crowds, surely had to conclude that the country was on the brink of collapse.

The scenes of violence made me very concerned – I had the impression that the security forces were not able to force the masses into submission. I also formed the impression that our political initiatives were not imaginative enough to stop this revolution. I was later to become very downhearted about the situation in South Africa, so tired of being bombarded with all the accusations of not providing leadership; most importantly: not having plausible counter arguments. I was sick and tired of this and just wanted to go home.

I then decided to begin discussions with black South Africans – whoever wanted to speak with me – and committed myself to speak with more black South Africans than Americans I had spoken with on this tour. I wanted to understand black politics and get to the bottom of this turmoil.

I also opened up discussion with the security forces: South African police force as well as the South African defence force officers. I tried to befriend them and to understand their response to the violence they were confronted with. In one such discussion an officer from the defence force told me how he had had to demarcate the boundaries of the areas that had to be included in the partial state of emergency that was to be announced by PW Botha in 1985. After the a state of emergency had been declared it dawned on him that he had made a mistake and had not included Krugersdorp and the townships of Kagiso and Munsieville (my constituency). This officer then reported this mistake to his seniors and offered to explain to Botha and ask him to correct this mistake by extending the areas to be included in the state of emergency.

He was not allowed to do that. His commanding officer was of the view that such a correction would create the impression that violence was on the increase. This had far-reaching consequences. Because Krugersdorp fell outside the reach of the emergency regulations it provided safe haven for those with revolutionary objectives. That is presumably the reason why Winnie Mandela made her infamous statement in Munsieville that the country would be liberated with match boxes and necklaces.

That statement set the cat amongst the pigeons: blacks were mobilising on a big scale and the white community started to arm themselves with all kinds of weapons.

During one of the regular meetings with the local defence and police force officers one of them remarked: “If I was charged to start a race war in South Africa today, I would start in Krugersdorp. Just ignite the fires between Munsieville and Dan Pienaarville were the whites are now building up an arsenal.”

Early in January 1986, Professor John Barratt, former director of the South African Institute for International Politics at Wits, organised a conference to discuss the state of politics in South Africa. People representing different views across party lines would be participating.

Nthato Motlana, medical doctor and respected community leader, and I quickly got stuck into each other. I don't believe the debate was successful because he was too emotional. He was also too derogatory towards black people who were in the system and who wanted change the system peacefully from the inside. To refer to them as government "stooges" was too harsh to my liking. My experience with somebody like Eddie Moeketsi – the mayor of Kagiso – is that he was as opposed to apartheid as anybody I had had discussions with since my return from America. He was opposed to the moving of Munsieville, influx control and detention without trial; but he was also opposed to the inhumane intimidation of the revolutionary activists, consumer boycotts, bundu courts and the practice of necklacing. He certainly was nobody's lackey of the apartheid government.

During the debates Motlana didn't take kindly to it when I ruffled his feathers but informally he was very pleasant. During the tea-breaks Motlana said to me: "Wessels, you mustn't fight so much with me, because all the NP-members of parliament that stood their ground when fighting with me were later promoted in your system to the executive." He gave the example of Barend du Plessis, who was a former deputy minister of foreign affairs and minister of finance.

During the conference Gugile Nkwinti – community leader from Port Alfred, later speaker in the parliament of the Eastern-Cape and minister in the cabinet of president Zuma – asked to meet with me privately. This discussion resulted in a close relationship between us. "I want to ask you a direct question: does the minister of law and order and parliamentarians know how activists are being treated whilst in detention?"

My quick reaction was: "Of course not." His response surprised me: "I am very happy to hear that, because I have always maintained that the inhumane assaults, that we are subjected to, could not possibly have been sanctioned by the cabinet – even if your policies stink."

He then told me how he had been assaulted by a police officer – he mentioned the name – during his detention. He warned the officer that he would phone the minister of police, Mr. Louis le Grange, and inform him about the assault. He sneered at Nkwinti and said: "You can try that. Here, I am the boss!" It was clear that the emergency regulations made some policemen believe that they were untouchable.

During my closing comments I said it was my wish that we should get to the end of this conflict Gugile's son and my son should never have to take up arms against each other.

Shortly after the conference I received the news that Nkwinti was in detention. Important South Africans such as Dr Conrad Strauss of Standard Bank, the industrialist Dr Albert Wessels and Prof John Barratt – they all knew of the friendship between me and Gugile – requested me to intervene on Gugile's behalf.

Louis le Grange, minister of law and order gave me an audience. There always had been good relationship between us since my student days at Potchefstroom. I discussed the matter openly with him and shared all the discussion Gugile and I had had. I also mentioned to him how people were being assaulted during detentions.

Le Grange promised to make the necessary inquiries. To my great disappointment he didn't have much to say when he informed me about the outcome: "Leon, you have a good reputation amongst the police. You must not allow the liberals to take advantage of you. Nkwinti's detention is justified. Let the matter rest."

In such circumstances, without facts, you are left without any argument. Le Grange refused to share any facts with me or to debate the matter with me.

I don't believe white South Africans realise how difficult those days really were. These events happened in our immediate past but it seems that we have already wiped them from our memory.

When I discussed the situation with a sympathetic colleague, André van der Walt, MP for Bellville, he retorted: "Wessels, what are you talking about? Are you talking about South Africa? I don't believe you."

In 1986 Louis le Grange during a caucus discussion disputed the fact that there were so-called "no-go areas". This was the beginning of the end of the old order: we didn't know what was happening and we couldn't govern without the iron fist of the security forces. (I discuss this in greater detail in the O'Malley interviews.)

A TV crew and I were once detained in my own constituency by a junior army officer. He was only doing his duty in terms of emergency regulations by not allowing journalists in declared unrest areas. This, however, had everything to do with what South Africans knew and didn't know about things happening in their own country.

In the mid-1980's a well-meaning South African wanted to make a TV programme to promote the image of South Africans abroad. Because there was high tension between Dan Pienaarville and Munsieville the TV crew wanted to interview me in no man's-land, in the open space between Dan Pienaarville en Munsieville. We walked for about 500 meters in the tall long grass. White Dan Pienaarville was on the one side and black Munsieville on the other side. As they were setting up their cameras and getting ready for the interview a convoy of soldiers arrived and without saying much stopped the proceedings and detained us. The only explanation was that we were breaking the emergency regulations: we were making a film in an area where filming was prohibited.

I was taken aback. I was the Member of Parliament for the area, yet I am not allowed to move or make a film in the interest of South Africa. An argument followed between me and the young officer. He would not listen. I asked him for his name and where he was from but he refused to engage me. I asked him to contact the police so that I could explain the situation to them. This also was refused. "I am not here to do you any favours."

Just before things got out of hand a police patrol passed nearby and I shouted to them. One of them recognised me.

When he realised what had happened, he laughed: “The member of parliament for Krugersdorp, detained by a bunch of soldiers.” (There was no love lost between some members of the two forces). I explained the situation and we were immediately given permission to continue with the shooting of the film.

I often moved in the townships with police in Krugersdorp and in the Western-Cape.

I got to know the stuffy atmosphere in a Casspir when people are shooting at the passengers. I got to know the unpleasant circumstances under which the police had to work. I pity them and their families who had to pay the highest price. They never received the gratitude and appreciation from those they had to protect. They were hated; they were the face of apartheid and people wanted to take revenge in protest against apartheid.

It was heart rendering to see the violence at close quarters. It was also sad to witness how many white people arrogantly dismissed the violence within the townships.

Some people in the townships also made themselves guilty of gross human rights violations. There was the callous punishment when consumer boycotts were ignored: people were forced to eat raw meat, drink washing powder and cooking oil. Then there was also the brutal necklacing where people were set alight with a tire around the neck. A very flimsy explanation by an activist in Krugersdorp when he tried to justify this horrendous act was: “We couldn’t stop it, because that was the anger of the masses.”

As opposed to this, there were the white men with balaclavas who assaulted innocent women and children – such as the Boqo-family from Krugersdorp who for years had worked for our family – with sjamboks for no other reason than that they were black.

The violence of the eighties – regardless of whether they were revolutionary or institutionalised – marks a dark period in our history.

Once you had witnessed it, you could not ignore it. We had to talk about it. I still believe we didn’t talk enough about it. That is the reason why we don’t understand the bitterness it left as legacy.

This topic haunted me: On 3 December 1985 *Die Burger* gave me an opportunity to share my views with their readers. Under the heading “Blacks not afraid to die” their correspondent wrote:

There is a new generation of blacks in South Africa who are no longer afraid to die. They believe that there is nothing more to live for and they are prepared to die for what they believe is freedom. These are not the words of a black activist. This is what Mr. Leon Wessels, MP for Krugersdorp and one of the leading young members of the National Party, said during an interview.

Mr Wessels says that he came to this conclusion after penetrating discussions with black people across the board from the Rand and in Cape Town.

White South Africans believe they understand black people and know their needs. That is not so. There is a bitter gap in the black community that is widening. The gap is between black people who want to talk with the government, and those who are totally opposed to it. Some black people demand stronger action from the security forces because they can no longer contain their children and need support. Some black leaders and some black journalists have never met or spoken with government leaders or the liaison-officers of government departments. They are uninformed about government thinking regarding its reform program.

Wessels said that he decided to have meaningful dialogue with black South Africans when he, together with other parliamentarians visited America in July. He also realised then that the future of South Africa was in the hands of its citizens; white, black, brown and Asian must dialogue with one another and find solutions for South Africa's problems.

Back in South Africa he immediately started to talk with black people from all spheres in our society. There were councillors from black areas, church leaders, sjebeen owners, drinks at the sjebeens and labourers.

One of the first things he discovered was that white people didn't know black people and still don't know their needs. The white man thinks he knows them but he doesn't, because he never gets in the home of a black person. Whites, generally speaking doesn't know the living conditions black people have to handle.

The reverse is true: Black workers come in white people's houses. They see what whites own and how they live.

That is the reason why black people wish for a better life. They want to live and work where they can earn the most money. They want to be free from humiliating treatment. They want to be ordinary human beings. Their wishes are universal amongst black people. In their communities there is tremendous polarisation. One section of the community wants to dialogue with government about a better life. Others believe the days for talking belong to the past. They want violence and the violent overthrow of the government.

In his view whites are willing to get involved on a high level and to talk with black people. When it comes to the ordinary person however, they are not interested.

The black people want to talk with the government but also with the voters that put the government in power. And that is where the duty of every supporter of the government lies: Speak with black people. Inform them. There is a lot of goodwill. But we must begin to dialogue on an urgent basis. Time is of the essence, says Wessels.

In 1986 Tian van der Merwe, MP for Green point, told me that he and Helen Suzman, MP for Houghton, had visited Robben Island and had a discussion with Nelson Mandela. Few people of my generation had had that privilege – we knew very little about him. I enjoyed listening to the stories told by Van der Merwe and Suzman – I was very jealous.

Mandela had asked them about the *verligte* politics in the National Party; specifically about an article that had appeared in *The Star* about the so-called "New Nats". Mandela asked them for their opinion. Suzman and Van der Merwe believed one couldn't take this speculation seriously. They said a leopard could change its hair but never its spots. The changes considered by this so-called group of "New Nats" were not substantive but only a few cosmetic changes. Mandela told them that they were mistaken. They are not listening properly to the debates in the National Party. He pointed out to them that there was strong reaction at the National Party public meetings. Because the National Party was persisting with its policies it was proof enough that something was happening in NP circles.

Van der Merwe said that he would in his wildest dreams never have believed that Nelson Mandela – in isolation on Robben Island – would give him a lesson on Afrikaner politics. He was impressed by Mandela and convinced that he understood the desire to change in the National Party.

On a later occasion Suzman and I had a discussion; “You guys must talk to Mandela if you are serious about negotiations. He will undoubtedly have a calming effect on the hot heads in the ANC.”

My only knowledge of him was the information that had been disclosed during the Rivonia trial.

Senior police officers had told important meetings that “he should not be released because he has the leadership qualities to set the country alight.” In spite of this, Suzman en Van der Merwe had made me very curious – I was beginning to look forward to the day when I would have the opportunity to talk to him and his ANC colleagues.

During the build up towards 16 June 1986 (Soweto day) there was a strong revolutionary climate in the air.

During the Soweto uprising on June 16, 1976, students from numerous schools in Soweto began to protest in the streets, in response to the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools. An estimated 20 000 students took part in the protests, and roughly 176 people were killed.

I was chairman of the parliamentary standing committee that had to consider legislation to declare states of emergency in areas without the state president’s intervention. The idea was to make detentions without trial easier under those circumstances easier.

The legislation itself wasn’t complicated. The minister of law and order and the state president thought it would be easy to pilot it through parliament. However, all efforts to do that failed. The standing committee worked tirelessly; day and night, officially and unofficially. All efforts failed because there were members sitting on that committee who had been on the receiving end of detention without trial. It was not an academic matter for them as it was for the members of the National Party contingent – they had firsthand experience of this arrow in the governments quiver. They understood the abuse of power that went along with detention without trial. The spiteful action that went with the detention of reverent Allan Hendrickse surfaced over and over again – his Bible was taken away from him whilst in detention. The torture of Steve Biko whilst in detention that resulted in his disgusting death was still very fresh in the minds of people. The National Party members felt rather cold about these two incidents. If you felt otherwise you were getting soft and were soon to be siding with the bleeding heart liberals and the no good do-gooders.

I had the Ggugile Nkwinti experience and my discussion with Le Grange at the back of my mind. I tried hard to find a middle ground that would satisfy both sides of the divide: deal with the revolutionary threat but also make sure that there are safeguards to arrest the fears of those opposing the legislation. I failed! There was no middle ground to be found!

PW Botha intervened and I became a spectator. He was friendly with me in private and during a very brief meeting in the corridors of parliament said: “Don’t worry; I will take matters in my own hands.” He was determined to have his way. He never said it but I could just feel that he had already made up his mind to declare a general state of emergency.

He convened a special meeting and invited Amichand Rajbansi and Allan Hendrickse, the Indian and Coloured leaders in the tri-cameral parliament. He informed them that the security establishment was of the view that they needed this legislation before 16 June because they had information that there would be mass mobilisation on that day in an effort to destabilise the country.

Botha was quarrelsome: “Is there anyone in this meeting who doesn’t want to fight the communists.” Everyone was mute. He snapped: “Then the matter is closed. I need these measures to fight the communists.”

A very light discussion followed because Botha didn’t want to get involved with the meat of the proposed legislation. There was no negotiation: there was hardly any dialogue.

This meeting took place in the committee room next to the parliamentary office of the head of state. (More about this office later).

If we had started negotiations – real negotiations – in 1986 our history would have been different and the country would have been saved from many tragedies. All this forcefulness came to nothing. This point Botha later conceded in a rare moment of compassion when I was deputy minister of law and order.

The legislation was debated in parliament and then referred to the president’s council because the House of Deputies and the House of Representatives voted against it. This was a very important reason why the tri-cameral parliament later collapsed. Botha, with his arrogance towards the leaders of the other chambers, demonstrated that he didn’t take their views seriously. In a strange way it also proved the critics of the participants from the Coloured and Indian communities wrong – they were not simple push over’s who abandoned their views when Botha tried to browbeat them.

Botha declared a state of emergency: thousands were detained. Not even I – who later became deputy minister of law and order and defended the state of emergency – can explain what happened behind the dark curtains of the security legislation and the power in the hands of the security forces. Twelve years later before the TRC – and even beyond the life of the TRC – I had to try and explain the activities of the security forces in the name of the state.

Law and order was not the only concern of the National Party; it was also important to know who was sleeping with whom. It is now almost unthinkable that the state could have believed that they had an interest in that. The Immorality Act allowed bedroom doors to be kicked open in the small hours of the night, bedding searched to find evidence if there was sex. This was an

important police function because sex across the colour line was regarded as a threat for racial purity.

For some policemen this was an embarrassment. A police friend told me that he could never move himself to charge anybody for an offence under this act. Someone told me how he just looked in a different direction when important people could not behave and had crept through the fence, so to speak. There was a case when two members of the police force broke the law: this became a matter of discussion in the State Security Council (SSC). PW Botha himself then asked that the matter be put to rest.

Professor Johan van der Vyver – my lecturer in jurisprudence – called me in 1983 with a thorny issue. He told me that if he didn't get any joy from our discussion he was taking the matter to the media.

His white client lived in Krugersdorp, with his wife, a classified coloured. The white community was not aware of his wife's racial status. Although they had been married in church, the pastor could not register the marriage and formalise it as legally binding because of her racial classification. The marriage was null and void. The couple believed that they lived according to the laws of the Lord and therefore was not concerned about the laws made by parliament. Not only did these laws not allow them to love each other but also subjected them to criminal prosecution. However, there was a new problem: the woman was expecting a child and because the child was born out of wedlock the birth could not be registered legally in their name. What now?

I called Pen Kotze, the minister of the interior, and gave him the facts. He immediately asked to meet with all of us. Kotze was a wise old owl. We met in his ministerial office in Pretoria. He listened to me, then to Van der Vyver's judicial explanation. He then asked all of us to leave so that he could have a one-on-one discussion with the woman. After a very short while he called us back in and said without any fuss: "I had decided to classify her white. All they now have to do is to legalise their marriage before a magistrate. Good luck and good bye."

What a farce! How embarrassing for the couple involved. The miserable part of it all was that nobody could feel proud about the outcome and the solution to the problem.

To me it was as now clear as daylight: these laws had to go!

In 1984 a parliamentary select committee under the chairmanship of Piet Badenhorst, deputy minister of the interior, had to deliberate on the future of these acts (the Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act). I was delighted when the whips asked me to serve on this committee. It was our brief see if it was possible to amend the legislation without diminishing the original objectives of the acts.

The formulation was typical of NP thinking in those days – change if you have to but please don't shake the foundations of apartheid.

My experience with Van der Vyver had convinced me that we had no choice – the laws had to go! A compromise was not possible. There was no space for these acts on our statute books. The committee began its work by listening to evidence.

The Dutch Reformed Church send a strong delegation: Kobus Potgieter (moderator of the general synod), GSJ Moller, DCG Fourie, DJ Viljoen and P Rossouw. The laws had to stay! The church was in favour of the amelioration of these acts. They did not provide any recommendations on how this could be done. Doctor Andries Treurnicht – the CP representative on the committee supported this delegation unconditionally.

This delegation never had the intention to debate their point of view – they had come to intimidate the committee. The committee was informed that the church represented 1,222 congregations, 1 700 predikante and approximately 1, 5 million members. The delegation made it clear that they were the only people who could speak on behalf of the church.

Dave Dalling, PFP opposition MP for Sandton, asked if there was any theological evidence to support the request of the delegation because, “up to now I have heard nothing of that”. Many disgruntled words followed on the Dalling question, but there was no clear-cut answer. Fortunately the official point of view of the DRC, as represented by their delegation, was not the only point of view in the church.

Other delegations, including a delegation from Stellenbosch University who consisted of professors HW Rossouw, DA du Toit, BC Lategan, Willie Jonker, en doctors Etienne de Villiers and Johan Kinghorn also gave evidence to voice another opinion from within the DRC. They argued that the acts had to be repealed because there was no Biblical justification for them.

Within the committee progress was poor and the NP group called for a meeting with PW Botha to seek his guidance. The view was held that Botha would not repeal these acts until the DRC had changed their official position about these acts.

After the formalities Botha immediately showed his hand: he was in favour of repealing of these acts. He made two profound statements that immediately struck me favourably; when he made them his body language made it clear that he was not going allow anybody to pick a quarrel with him: “I am tired of these hurtful acts and also of forced removals. It is impossible to justify them when foreign leaders and opinion formers talk to me.”

That was the beginning of the end of the National Party’s racial politics! With those pillars gone, there was little left of the National Party policies that had put them in power in 1948. There were no more holy cows left in the NP paddock.

Botha was now in full flight: “Do we know how much damage we had caused this country in our actions against the poet Breyten Breytenbach when we didn’t recognise his marriage to a woman from the east?”

This was where I saw political opportunism at its very best: when the party leader shows his hand, the rest follow. Helgard van Rensburg, MP for Mosselbaai, once said: “It doesn’t matter

what the argument is, but if PW supports you, you are guaranteed a majority.” All the concerns previously raised about the scrapping of these laws immediately disappeared like mist before the sun.

The scrapping of these laws was a delightful moment in my political career. The other so called racial pillars now became untenable. This was the shimmering of the dawn and the beginning of the next set of reforms. A few battles still had to be fought before we saw the last of the offensive racial acts.

During his opening speech in 1991 FW de Klerk moved that the remaining laws be repealed. Between the snow-capped Alps in Davos – where Stoffel van der Merwe and I attended the annual World Economic forum for politicians and world business leaders – I read how the *International Herald Tribune* reported the news with this headline: DE KLERK MOVES TO SCRAP LAST APARTHEID LAWS.

No matter how attractively we tried to package the changes, the masses remained unimpressed. When I complained to Colin Eglin about it he said to me: “The black people are not going to allow the NP to liberate them; they want to do that for themselves.”

I then realised that we were not going to negotiate the dismantling of apartheid: neither we are going to receive any accolades for the steps taken to dismantle it. We would just have to work towards a negotiating table where everyone around the table was equal, with no AK 47's underneath the table or no one impeded by apartheid legislation.

In 1989 there were a number of hunger strikes across the country. The hunger strikers, all detainees, wanted to draw attention to the hopelessness of their situation.

In Krugersdorp prison a hunger striker told me his mother had died and he had not been allowed to attend her funeral. He didn't know why he was being detained or for how long his detention would last. He fell into a deep depression and believed that there nothing that made life worthwhile. Another hunger striker I knew as a pleasant and helpful caddy at the Krugersdorp golf club. He had been detained for eighteen months without any explanation for his detention.

I was shocked to see how these detentions had politicised these detainees and, in fact, had contributed to their political education. Adriaan Vlok, the minister responsible for these detentions, was shocked when I shared some of my experiences with him. It was also my duty to inform PW Botha. His comments were insightful: “We have achieved nothing with these detentions. We have only made them bitter.” He seemed tired. He had run out of ideas and friends. There was nothing left of the feisty man who in 1986 had wanted to fight the communists and go it alone, against the wishes of Allan Hendricks and Amichand Rajbansi, on exactly this issue of detentions without trial and the other trappings that go with a state of emergency.

I felt very sorry for him. He looked forlorn. Little did I realise that this lonely figure that I pitied so much on this day and I would have to do two more battles before we finally and irrevocably parted ways. (Later, more about my call to him during his standoff with the TRC and the public spat we had after my appearance before the TRC).

Against the backdrop of the state of emergency and the dark clouds of violence Peter Hendrickse – son of Rev Allan Hendrickse – and I travelled to London in 1986. We arrived on the day prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson was married. London came to a halt. Londoners spent hours watching the proceedings on TV. Hendrickse and I went to the inner city early evening to have a look at the Westminster parliamentary buildings and also the Westminster Abbey. Much to our surprise the excitement would not abate.

At the abbey the people stood in long lines to enter the church; they wanted to look at the flowers and get a feel for the atmosphere of the wedding.

Hendrickse, very despondent about the situation in our country, remarked: “What we now need in South Africa is a monarchy because there is nothing that binds us together. We have nothing. We don’t have a National Anthem; we don’t have a Constitution, not a head of state, not even national symbols that unite us. We have nothing.”

Given the atmosphere we found ourselves in, I could relate to his sentiments although I couldn’t identify with the idea of having a monarchy.

We had to wait till 1994 before we could have one flag and a National Anthem which defined South Africa.

In 1992, in Wellington in the Western Cape I made a speech about flags and symbols. The seed for this was planted by Peter Hendrickse during that visit to London in 1986. The arm wrestling about the flying of the national flag and the singing of *Die Stem* during the rugby test between the All Blacks and also our own athletes who could not participate in the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona with a flag and a national anthem was the final inspiration to make my Wellington speech. “I grew up with military bands, military parades, the national flag and the anthem. Every time I participated in these events it was an emotional experience, I always had a lump in my throat. I have said goodbye to the flag and the anthem. The day I realised that it now belongs to the past, it was heart-rendering. There is a place in the history books for *Die Stem* and the flag, but we have to develop new symbols that bind and not divide South Africans. For years we sang ‘God save The King’ (and later ‘Queen’) and the *Die Stem*; the Union Jack flapped next to our flag. We must not allow people to isolate us from ‘*Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika*’ because our own supporters experience it as an emotional prayer.”

At Midnight 26 April 1994 my son Willem, our friends Eddie Meiring and Renier Terblanche and I stood in Johannesburg with thousands of people. Whilst we were singing *Die Stem* en *Nkosi sikelel iAfrika* we saw the new flag was being hoisted and the old flag lowered. That was the birth of the new South Africa.

When Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as president of the country and the helicopters flew past the Union Building they displayed the new flag. There was spontaneous applause. This historic moment reminded me of the comments Peter Hendrickse had made that day in London and the images of hate and violence I witnessed when visiting the unrest areas with the police - often flying in helicopters. The national flag and our military helicopters now belonged to all of us. This was a new beginning.

CHAPTER 12

GARBAGE IN GARBAGE OUT

In computer science there is an expression: *garbage in, garbage out*. That means that if your information basis is weak, your consideration thereof also will be weak. That is true of course of all aspects of life; the old saying is: *information is not everything, but everything is nothing without information*.

Politicians, who receive poor information, will as a consequence, also make poor decisions. It was usually the task of the security community to inform the politicians. This placed them (the “spooks”) in a very powerful position. Some of them made this into a power-game by making it clear that they possess information that they couldn’t share with the rest.

Often this information was paid for. It often made me wonder how reliable it was: do the informants not tell their handlers what they want to hear? One of the big mistakes of the 1980s was that the politicians relied only on information received through these channels. They were not curious enough to move beyond this information. Most ministers and parliamentarians didn’t read the so-called alternative media – *Sowetan*, *Vrye Weekblad* or the *Mail & Guardian* – and didn’t speak with people who were not represented in parliament. They had no desire to make contact with the extra parliamentary groups.

In July 1980 Fanie Botha – reform-minded minister of manpower and always friendly towards young politicians – had told me that there was a group of young people in Soweto that wanted to make contact with young people in the National Party. In this group was Mpho Mashinini, brother of the well known Tsietsi Mashinini, leading figure during the 1976 uprising in Soweto. This group, according to Botha, believed that the political struggle must be settled through dialogue. It was never clear to me how Botha got involved with this group of people and why he had asked me to connect with them. He gave me their contact details and encouraged me to make contact with them as soon possible.

I received the group at home. My mother and Tersia prepared traditional *boerekos* and I served KWV wine. The discussion initially was stop-start because we didn’t know much about each other. We talked about a variety of issues: the 1976 uprising, the South African war. They enjoyed it when I told them that in our circles Tsietsi – with his ability to organise and then disappear from the scene – was favourably compared to General Christiaan de Wet. His “hit and run” tactics were the same used by De Wet against the British in the Anglo Boer War. When the discussion got going we were keen to hear about each other’s expectations. The evening was much too short and left us with many unanswered questions.

After the guests had left, we kicked off our shoes and talked. The women wanted to everything that was said because they had not been were not part of the discussion all of the time. We were

content when we went to bed that night – we had played our part to the best of our ability. This first discussion was continued at different places.

I once had to meet Mashinini in front of the high court in Johannesburg. We would then go and have something to bite in the vicinity. He unexpectedly gave me an insight into his world: “You must please be on time,” he said when we finalised the meeting on the telephone “because if I am idle for too long in front of the court, the police may think I am up to some mischief and arrest me.”

After six months I couldn't hold the attention of the young men anymore. The novelty of speaking with a young NP backbencher had worn off; they now wanted to talk to the front benchers, preferably “oom Fanie” himself. They were also keen that together we should start a dialogue with the ANC. This was the first time a dialogue with the ANC had seemed like a necessity.

I promised to speak with Fanie Botha and give them feedback. The idea of a discussion with the ANC was not too farfetched amongst the *verligtes* I had this discussion with, but they were very cautious. They would definitely not be part of such an initiative if it did not have the backing of the political leadership.

My meeting with Fanie Botha took place just before the opening of the parliamentary session in 1981. He was upbeat that I had managed to get a discussion going with this group from Soweto. The mood changed when I informed him that the discussion between me and the group had now served its purpose and that we had to shift gears: we had to take it to another level. That included a discussion with him and later a discussion with the ANC.

I am not sure what he had expected me to convey to the group: possibly win them over to NP? If that is what he had hoped for, he would have been very naive. He informed me that he would discuss the matter with Niel Barnard, head of national intelligence. I was not sure how this worked and why Barnard had to get involved.

A few days later I had a call that Barnard wanted to see me at the request of Fanie Botha. Barnard was not a stranger to me; together we had participated in conferences organised by the *Afrikaanse Studentebond*. Although he was from Bloemfontein, I knew him well enough to appreciate his leadership and intellectual attributes.

The initial discussion about this and that and inquiring about each other's well-being went well. He then began to ask questions about the individuals I had been meeting. It was soon clear that he was well-informed about them. I participated carefully because I sensed that there was something fishy afoot. He suddenly concluded that I must get distance between myself and the group as soon as possible. I was very disturbed. “I started this discussion at the request of a

senior cabinet minister. I just can't terminate the relationship as if nothing had happened." I didn't want to get involved in a debate with him. He persisted with his cocksure attitude. "You have heard my advice." I decided to ignore his instruction and not to discuss this meeting with Fanie Botha. If he wanted to know about it, he would have to ask me. I was disappointed that I was not informed what the discussion with Barnard was going to be all about and why Barnard had invited me to a meeting he regarded as a nuisance. Fanie Botha also never inquired about it.

That day, Barnard had brushed the good-natured relationship that had existed between us aside. He continued to play very important roles in South Africa's democratisation process. I often had to work with him and continued to respect his competency; however it was a relationship without any warmth.

Friends with whom I discussed this story listened to me big-eyed but didn't want to put their necks on the block. It was after all Fanie Botha, a very important Botha in a Botha cabinet and Barnard, the number one spy we are talking about. Their advice was short and simple: "Get out of this; you are going to burn your fingers."

I couldn't just walk away and discussed the matter with Louis le Grange, minister of police, and Johan Coetzee, commissioner of police. They just rolled their eyes in disbelief. They couldn't understand what the fuss was about nor could they understand why I couldn't continue with the discussions with this group.

A general election was announced shortly after these discussions. I used the elections as an excuse why I couldn't give positive feedback about my meeting with Fanie Botha. Thereafter I always had to find excuses why I couldn't arrange a meeting with Fanie Botha: he was deeply involved in his struggle to change the whole labour environment; after that he was involved in his battle with the right-wingers in the Northern Transvaal. I continued to hide my frustration and to tell the one fib after the other. Needless to say this group lost complete interest in me.

In the middle 1980s there still was no desire in the NP to meet people involved in struggle politics.

In the middle of 1985 FW de Klerk, leader of the NP in the Transvaal, asked Wynand Malan and I to come and see him in his office in Pretoria. Wynand was a good friend and MP for Randburg.

FW was apologetic and said with a wry smile: "You guys must now help me. I have been instructed by PW Botha to reprimand you – but I don't know what you did. You are junior members from the Transvaal and I get hammered because I don't control you. Tell me what you have been up to!"

We were bowled over. "I am not guilty" Wynand said with a big smile.

I started to confess my “sins” like a school boy: I had made a speech in Bloemfontein the previous month about how political decisions impact on the law and order situation in the country. I had said one should have a constitutional vision because you couldn’t maintain law and order forever with security legislation. “I can’t imagine that anybody could find anything wrong with that.”

FW said: “No, it can’t be that.” He then asked: “You were not recently in the company of the ANC or other subversive elements by any chance?”

A light went on for me. We had been in the company the previous week of a group of very interesting Christians in Pietermaritzburg. A number of well-known people were there: Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chief minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi from Kwa-Zulu, Dr Stanley Mogoba, bishop of the Methodist church of South Africa, the politician Dr Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, Prof Johan Heyns, moderator of the Dutch Reformed church, the Anglican bishop Philip Russell and Dr Ernst van der Walt, PW Botha’s own *dominee*.

FW then said: “Yes, that sounds more like it. I think that is what this fuss is all about. You are two promising politicians but please be careful with who you keep company with.”

All three of us felt unhappy about our meeting. Wynand and I then volunteered to prepare a memorandum about the gathering and use that as a basis for discussion with PW Botha. We were convinced that it had been an honest attempt to bring about peace and reconciliation. We failed to see why anyone could draw poison out of such a meeting. FW welcomed our proposal. He wanted to be present at such a meeting so that he could also get to know what this was all about. He said he also wanted to keep his hand of protection over the younger members in his flock.

Wynand and I walked into the meeting with PW with the aim of not only justifying our actions but also to convince him that he should support such activities. We were ready for anything that he might hurl at us.

In this discussion Botha was supported by Neil Barnard. FW also was in attendance. Botha was very friendly. He didn’t mention a word about our memorandum. It soon became clear to us that he had been told a lot of stories and didn’t know what was fact and what was fiction. He made a few sweeping allegations about our involvement in setting up meetings with the ANC. Not one of his allegations could stand the test of open debate. Barnard didn’t utter a word.

After Botha had spoken we gave our views about the meeting. We emphasised the importance of meetings with extra parliamentary groups. The meeting was scheduled for 30 minutes but ended with an hour-long discussion when Botha thanked us for the new perspectives we had opened and for the very important work we did.

It remains a riddle who the mischief-makers were that brought us into trouble. I have a hunch that it often happened that half-baked stories were dished up as the gospel truth to the head of state. The bravado with which it was presented I can well imagine.

CHAPTER 13 SLAP IN THE FACE

Nobody has the right to be a part of government. That is the prerogative of the head of state to invite whoever he wants, to support him in the execution of his plans. If you forget this, you are about to stumble.

When you are informed by newspapers and informed by ministers – who on the face of it are well connected – that you are about to be invited to serve at a higher level you tend to lose perspective.

When PW Botha invited a new team of colleagues to serve as deputy ministers with Roelf Meyer (deputy minister of law and order) and Kobus Meiring (deputy minister of foreign affairs) in my favourite portfolios where I had served as chairman and secretary respectively – when not one of them had served on any of those committees – I knew that something was terribly wrong.

That was not an oversight. This was intended to be slap in the face! That was exactly how I had experienced it.

This experience certainly made me, politically speaking, more astute. I looked at the National Party and politicians with fresh eyes and realised that you couldn't rely on favours from princes. I developed a less intense approach to politics. The seeds were sown for my exit from politics. Up to then I had always thought about surviving in politics, but never about my leaving politics.

Louis le Grange, outgoing minister of law and order phoned me: "I don't know what happened here, your name was on a list. I want to give you one piece of advice; pretend that nothing has happened. Don't mull over it." I also had encouraging discussions with Dawie de Villiers, Sam de Beer and Pietie du Plessis. I followed Le Grange's advice and observed who acted like me – pretending that nothing had happened. It wasn't difficult to see who was sincere and who wasn't. In politics you know many people but you don't have many friends.

Helen Suzman – MP for Houghton and champion for human rights – and I had a very friendly relationship in spite of us being on opposite sides during many debates. When she met me in the corridors of parliament, she pulled me aside and said: "Listen Leon, I was surprised that you were not appointed as a deputy minister. Just remember: politics is cruel; you must not doubt your own ability, because there are other reasons why you were not promoted."

After this discussion, we even had a closer relationship. When she left parliament in 1987, I went to say goodbye to her in her parliamentary office. We had a cup of tea and had a light hearted discussion. Her successor in her constituency, however, did weigh heavily on her mind. She was annoyed because he didn't step down for her friend, Irene Menell. She was, however, not blind to Tony Leon's talents and potential.

I often recalled discussions I had with two friends in the British parliament, Keith Best en Peter Bottomley. Best was an interesting politician who believed that politics was about elections: to win an election and represent people. Those were the highest accolades a politician could ever receive. To be invited to serve in the cabinet was just an opportunity to be of service at another level. Peter Bottomley always said: “I would rather be a competent front bencher than an incompetent minister.” He later became a deputy minister and his wife Virginia a minister.

When the dust had settled around my non-appointment FW de Klerk spoke to me sympathetically: “I hear good things about you. Don’t feel dejected.”

The Conservatives circled like vultures and quickly tried to cash in on the situation. In Krugersdorp they mocked me: “You were rejected by your party, why must we still be saddled with you?” In parliament they unsympathetically “sympathised” with me. They really managed to rub salt in the wounds.

It was clear to me: I couldn’t be something and somebody that I am not. The NP leadership didn’t like me. There was nothing I could do about that. I also realised that it was not possible for me to retire from politics because such a step would be too petty and haunt me for the rest of my life. That left me with no other option – I would have to fight. The Krugersdorp seat had to be retained for the National Party. After such a victory I could consider alternatives. To lose an election was also no shame. Deciding when I would quit politics suddenly made me captain of my political ship and not the party leaders.

I enjoyed politics in my constituency. There we closed the doors and discussed matters openly. Interesting political commentators, academics, journalists, businesspeople, black community leaders participated. The NP’s holy cows were slaughtered as we tried to find answers to difficult questions.

NP supporters always encouraged me to move the politics forward. Nic van Rensburg, devoted NP supporter, said: “We didn’t send you to parliament to be a ‘somebody’; we want you ‘to do’ something – you must help to correct the wrongs.” Those words became my lodestar.

FROM SHORT PANTS TO LONG PANTS

CHAPTER 14

SHORT PANTS MINISTER

PW Botha’s private secretary, Ters Ehlers, a dapper navy officer, called (March 1988) to say that the State President wanted to see me. He didn’t provide reasons for the meeting, and I didn’t ask questions. There was not time to dilly dally so I took off to Tuynhuys next to the Parliament buildings. When I entered the room it struck me how tidy the office looked, Botha was in a pleasant mood and immediately got to the point: “I want to appoint you as deputy minister of law and order. Please talk to Adriaan Vlok en Roelf Meyer; they will inform you about you duties.”

I stutter, “Thank you president. I will do my best.”

“I know you always do your best” he says.

Hmm . . . This was interesting. I had not forgotten how he had treated me in 1986 when he had given me a cold shoulder during that round of promotions. This was not the moment, though, to entertain petty thoughts and I could not allow spiteful emotions to get the better of me. My head was already in this new assignment as I left his office.

Max du Preez – editor of the *Vrye Weekblad* and at the time of this appointment a pain in the neck for the NP – interviewed me in 2007 in another capacity. His last question was a direct hit: “When PW Botha, as state president, appointed you as deputy minister of law and order, did you at that moment foresee that Nelson Mandela, as state president would ten years later appoint you as a human rights commissioner?” All I could stammer was “No”.

If I had said that day in Botha’s office: “Thank you president, I will do my best, because this will be good preparation for my later appointment as a human rights commissioner by Nelson Mandela, when he sits in this office,” the pleasant mood of our meeting would have changed for the worse. Botha would have exploded and immediately set a process in motion to have me expelled from the National Party.

Fortunately I did not foresee that eventuality even in my wildest dreams. Mandela, after all, was in prison for sabotage, his organisation was engaged in an armed struggle with Botha’s regime, and his front organisations were trying to make the country ungovernable.

The discussion between PW Botha and I had to remain confidential for a day or two to give him time to announce his appointments.

I met FW in the parliamentary corridors. He asked playfully: “Has he moved?” I replied: “Yes.”

“Congratulations! Make sure they don’t militarise you. Good luck!”

His good wishes were sincere, and with those few words he explained his whole philosophy. He was a civilian to the core.

When he became State President, he moved with speed to dismantle the security management system in which the Defence Force played a major part.

Dawie de Villiers also had wind of the discussion with Botha and moved quickly to offer advice: “You will not be able to change the system, but always ask questions. A question here, a question there, will keep everybody on their toes. Force those around you to continue to seek peaceful solutions.”

Roelf Meyer – who was moved to constitutional development – also came to talk: “Come and sleep at my house in Pretoria tomorrow. We have must talk. I want to introduce you to the members of the National Manage System (NMS) with whom you will have to work.”

Wessel Ebersohn described the system as follows in LEADERSHIP (Volume 7 1988).

The camel, they say, is a horse designed by a committee. What then do you get out of security system consisting of some six of seven hundred committees?

The National Security Management System rests heavily on the committee model, beloved of French strategic experts. It also rests on the widely accepted but unprovable assertion that the provision of material comforts to the disenfranchised will buy off their inclination to revolt.

The National Security Management System (later called more coyly the National Management System) functions on nine different levels. At the top is the full cabinet, still officially the decision-making body for the nation's security. Statutorily inferior to them is the State Security Council, but because the State President presides over it and because of its extraordinarily wide powers, most observers have concluded that in matters of security, and therefore also matters of upliftment, what the council says, goes. Other members are the ministers of police, defence, justice, foreign affairs, the heads of their departments, the senior minister of the cabinet and the head of the National Intelligence Service (NIS).

Below them, and with the job of seeing to it that their decisions are implemented, is the Working Committee of the State Security Council, made up of senior officers and bureaucrats.

Next in terms of status is the Secretariat of the State Security Council, a body made up of some 80 officials. Originally most were members of Defence Force, but at the moment NIS operatives predominate. The secretariat evaluates and processes raw intelligence coming up from below, co-ordinates strategy and handles public relations.

Taking its orders from the secretariat are 13 inter-departmental committees to facilitate co-operation and coordination between government departments. The committees each deal with a particular area, such as transport, manpower or the economy, but only the departments directly involved with that facet are represented on any committee.

Below the Committee are the Joint Management Centre (JMC), each controlling and co-ordinating security in a specific part of the country and passing raw intelligence on and upward to the secretariat. Originally there were 11 of these, and here the influence of the military can again be seen as the boundaries of the JMC were the same as those of the regional military commands. At the present time there are 10 in South Africa and one in Walvis Bay. Each JMC is divided into a Communications Committee, a Joint Intelligence Committee and a Constitutional, Economic and Social Committee. Their members are senior officers, bureaucrats, both black and white local government officials and the occasional private citizen, often occupying a key position, such as the manager of a bus company. Their members are the hands-on ground floor of the system.

To keep control tight and operations cohesive, smaller areas are sometimes run by a sub-, mini-or local JMC. The Witwatersrand, for example, has a JMC, while Johannesburg has a sub-JMC and Alexandra township a local JMC. The chairman of each is chosen annually by a vote of its members. In practice, the subject being security, the bureaucrats normally steps aside for the military and the police. In 1986 the system was further extended with the introduction of a National Joint Management Centre with Deputy Minister of Law and Order, currently Leon Wessels, as chairman.

When I met the members of the NMS I recognised two old friends general Bert Wandrag, instructor from my days in the SAP College, and prof Joh van Tonder, lecturer in political science from Potchefstroom who was then working in the department of constitutional development. I then realised that this was going to be an interesting time if this is how the NMS functions – on the face of it this is the place where constitutional and security matters meet.

Adriaan Vlok – minister of law and order – was friendly when he welcomed me. “Welcome here. I am happy that you are coming to help us. This is the 75th Anniversary of SAP Force and you must help me, because it is impossible for me to attend all the functions. Your main function is however to attend to the NMS.”

Little did I know then that years later I would have to explain over and over again what this meant and how I had discharged my responsibilities?

When news of my promotion was made public there was a lot of excitement in Krugersdorp. NP activists wanted to do battle with the CP there and then because their argument about me (“His own party has dumped him, why must Krugersdorp be burdened with him?”) was now refuted.

In the parliamentary corridors, I met Pieter Mulder – member of the Conservative Party and later leader of the Freedom Front Plus: “Congratulations! I don’t understand it, because to me you still look like the same man that wasn’t good enough in 1986.”

I smiled, but did not answer him. I took that as a compliment: I had not changed in order to be appointed to this position.

When I was appointed – 18 months later – by FW as deputy minister of foreign affairs, Pik Botha, minister of foreign affairs, at our first meeting, made a comment that I didn’t understand: “You should have worked here a long time ago, but PW wanted to teach you a lesson.” I smiled but didn’t take the discussion further.

My first day in the office as deputy minister of law and order was hectic. Everyone I was going to work with came to say “hallo” and appointments had to be made to brief me about my responsibilities. Martin Koekemoer – seasoned public servant and leader of the constitutional, economic and welfare projects in the state president’s office – made two very interesting comments: “Congratulations. I hope you will enjoy your work. My further wish is that you will soon be appointed as minister. Because if that happens, I will know that I gave you the correct advice. Here is my first piece of advice to you: whenever you are briefed by the security community or the public service community, be on your guard. Every now and again, you must stand up and swing your arms wildly.” He demonstrated what he meant and swung his arms in big circles. “If you don’t do that they will spin you yarns. You will look like a mummy with only your mouth open. They will then spoon-feed you whatever they like and you will swallow it.”

I couldn’t believe these direct comments from a stranger I had just met. I didn’t know how to respond. Long after Koekemoer had left I mulled over his words. It didn’t take me long to realise that Koekemoer was in a league of his own.

General Hennie de Wit, police commissioner, had worked with my father in Vryburg. My father was a captain in the police force and De Wit a young sergeant. It was a great experience to be amongst the police people. Almost every day I met someone who had worked with my dad or somebody I knew from my days in the police college.

Every day was hectic – a whirlwind of meetings with government officials across the spectrum; they were competent and nice people who served the state with dedication.

I will defend the honour of the officials I worked with anywhere. I even stated that before the TRC when I appeared before them. The decisions I took, will undoubtedly stand the test of daylight. Whether they will stand the test of Constitutional scrutiny is another debate and the answer would undoubtedly be no. But the Constitution of 1983 and the laws that sprung from that Constitution will also not stand the test of Constitutional scrutiny as we know it today.

I still struggle to find answers to the question where all the atrocities and illegal activities came from. The working committee (representative of a group of senior officials) had to develop broad strategic objectives. The documents that served as background material for the SSC agenda had to be prepared by these government departments and consensus had to be reached before they could be placed before the SSC.

Senior officials are busy people and regarded these meetings as a waste of time. There was no lively discussion; hardly any discussion. I asked questions, I pushed, I probed, I prodded I nudged – I tried everything without success. It was like pulling teeth. I complained to PW Botha that I couldn't get a debate going with these officials. He asks: "Why? Is it because you are a politician and they don't want to voice their opinions in front of a politician?" I didn't have the answer. He shrugged his shoulders as if this is of no consequence.

A well-meaning official one day said to me: "You ask so many questions in these meetings. One day, you will get an answer that you didn't expect and then you will not be able to say you didn't know." To me this was a riddle. I didn't even think that this was a warning that something illegal was happening. As far as I was concerned we were not involved in anything illegal; only doing our level best to ensure that the revolutionaries didn't get their way. It certainly was not our intention to abdicate but to ensure that law and order should be maintained. We wanted a new constitutional order to be thrashed out at the negotiating table, not through the barrel of an AK-47. As far as I am concerned the irregularities that later came to the surface, cannot be attributed to the NMS or the working committee.

General Charles Lloyd – member of the defence force who was the secretary of the SSC – always closely co-operated me. We often met. Once every two weeks we took the agenda and the minutes of the SSC to PW Botha and Lloyd then explained the documents to him. I used this opportunity just to talk to Botha and bring certain matters to his attention. My overarching impression – especially when we had to meet with him on a Sunday afternoon – was that the office of the head of state is a very lonely place.

PW had the reputation that he could be a bully and intimidate people. I always treaded carefully in his presence. Story has it, that he at times had treated senior officials like school children in SSC meetings: he had made them stand up and then hauled them over the coals. I was very fortunate that I had had been on the receiving end of his rage.

General Hennie de Wit – a kind of fatherly figure to me – often called me before an SSC meeting, whenever he got wind that we were about to be part of a difficult meeting and

somebody was about to receive a tongue lashing, he then invited me to sit next to him: “Now you have to be silent and sit still! Let’s see what will happen.”

In spite of all of this, I still don’t believe that the SSC where I served for 18 months - or any other SSC – would have approved the atrocities that were unearthed by the TRC. I do believe however that we created the atmosphere which provided the umbrella for these wicked, gruesome deeds.

The truth is that we – collectively and individually – were not curious enough to establish what actually went on. It was easy to look away when “our people” were involved in human rights violations.

Did the information community hoodwink us with rubbish? I don’t know. We didn’t question the information enough. I was in the system, I was the system, and I allowed people to pull wool over my eyes, exactly as Martin Koekemoer had warned me would happen. The police was like family. And you defend your family. You stand by them, because you believe in them.

CHAPTER 15

THE LEAP OF AN UNLIKELY REFORMER

On 2 February 1989 the National Party Caucus members were waiting for the doors to be opened. Boet Bothma, chairman of the caucus, was the only person who knew how dramatic that caucus meeting was going to be.

Behind the mysterious walls and windows with the closed curtains many members of the National Party had over the years spent hours debating issues that moulded National Party history. Not everyone with political dreams made it into that caucus sanctuary.

I always remembered the words of oom Jack Looek – seasoned politician and senior senator – when he welcomed me shortly after my arrival in parliament: “The caucus is a very exclusive club. It is a privilege to be a member of it. You must never forget that!”

The caucus was, second only to the cabinet, the most intimate place for me in the whole NP organisation. What stories would those walls not be able to tell about the debates the Nationalist had amongst them?

In 2009 I visited the caucus chamber again – as a human rights commissioner – when the Human Rights Commission made their annual appearance to defend their annual report. The old caucus chamber of the National Party had been refurbished into a committee room. In my mind’s eye I relived all the big events that had taken place there during my career: my first caucus meeting with John Vorster as party leader and prime minister; his last caucus meeting when PW Botha was elected as leader; the breakaway of Andres Treurnicht and the conservatives.

Before every caucus there was always a sense of excitement. The 112 caucus members cackled like school children in the schoolyard. After the every meeting, everything that was said during that meeting was considered and weighed.

After the chairman had called the meeting to order everyone took their seats. Everyone always sat in the same place. Frontbenchers, backbenchers, cabinet members – regardless of rank – sat together. The idea was that everyone in the caucus was equal. That was the ideal, because backbenchers (regardless of age) often were treated like children – they could be seen but not heard. Everyone listened attentively. If you make wild statements and put your case aggressively you would encounter difficulties.

2 February 1989 was not just another caucus meeting. From his sickbed – he had had a light stroke – PW Botha surprised everyone. He had written a letter to the caucus chairman requesting, no instructing, caucus to elect a new leader. He wanted to be relieved of his duties as National Party leader but wanted to stay on as head of state.

There was immediate tension in the air. Everyone realised immediately that something dramatic was about to happen. The one thing politicians can do exceptionally well is to scheme and caucus. On this occasion there was going to be nothing of that. Everyone was trapped in the caucus chamber and couldn't even leave for a smoke. The matter had to be settled there and then. Whatever the outcome, it was going to have far-reaching consequences.

We proceeded to vote. I was surprised that my candidate, Barend du Plessis, minister of finance, lost against FW de Klerk. Du Plessis drew the *verligte* support when first Pik Botha and later Chris Heunis didn't have enough support to move to the next level.

I didn't feel downhearted when FW won because he was intelligent and not a schemer. In his acceptance speech he made it clear that he was determined to make things happen.

He said amongst others that we would have to take giant leaps forward. Barend du Plessis immediately interjected: "If you take those leaps, you will jump into our arms. We will support you."

How far and how high he was prepared to jump surprised me. I would never on that day have predicted that he would unban the ANC or that after a democratic election he would give up power. My greatest expectation was that we would end the national and international conflict so that credible negotiations could begin.

Although the *verligte* candidate did not win, it was clear that FW would not be able to move without taking the views of the *verligte* group into consideration.

There was no bad blood between the different groups because there wasn't time to drum up support before the election. Such canvassing usually goes hand in hand with wild gossip. Those on the receiving end of such gossip, seldom forget it.

There were no post-mortems after FW's election. FW also didn't embark on a witch hunt. He moved swiftly to lead the country out of the political impasse it found itself in.

When FW had been a student at Potchefstroom in the late Fifties, he organised a group of students to meet with ANC leader Albert Luthuli. After the meeting the students asked: "What is the matter with this man? Why doesn't he want to be a Zulu? We want to be Afrikaners who govern ourselves on our own territory. We grant him the right to do exactly the same!"

Luthuli had left the meeting perplexed. "What is the matter with these young Afrikaners? If they are honest in their approach to divide the country along racial lines, then surely they must give at least 75% of the land to black people – which they will never do. Why can't they understand that I am not 75 per cent, but 100 per cent South African? I am South African just like them!"

Little did they know then that both of them would later receive the Nobel Prize for Peace, Luthuli in (1960) and FW in (1993). FW, now the head of state, was called upon to find the answers for the old vexing questions that had haunted South Africa for so long.

CHAPTER 16

SURVIVAL: "You are a fighter"

The three chambers of the Tri-Cameral parliament had to go to the polls on the September in 1989. The House of Assembly (whites), House of Assembly Deputies (Indians) and the House of Representatives (Coloureds) voted on the same day, in different elections. The nature of these elections was not comparable. There was a violent battle – stone throwing, damage to property and intimidation – fought in some these communities.

Under the Emergency regulations thousands of people were arrested and detained for long periods. Those opposed to the tri-cameral parliament believed it served no purpose to participate in the election – it would only undermine their democratic ideals.

In the midst of this turmoil the CP was boasting how they would unseat Leon Wessels. For them, it was only a question of time before the CP would hold the Krugersdorp seat. All they were waiting for was Election Day. They would then forcefully move the people of Munsieville, deal with the unrest and build their white *volkstaat*. One of their ringleaders in Krugersdorp said: "We will issue the black reservists with *knopkieries* and *sjamboks* and then send them into the townships to restore order. This will be more effective and cheaper than the useless rubber bullets used by the police."

In NP circles in Krugersdorp there was no time to be idle or to get caught up in long-winded discussions with the CP that led to nothing.

In our camp, everyone knew the issues: South Africans would have to start negotiating to bring about peace. We would have to organise and find every voter who supported this idea and make sure they voted on polling day. This was elementary politics.

After the 1987 election many people made mention of the fact that I had established my credibility as a *verligte* because I didn't roll over for a few votes. In 1989 it was not going to be different. The idea in those days in NP circles – namely that once you had lost your seat you carried favour with party leaders for one or other position – never appealed to me. There was no way that I would be attracted so that; I am either in or I am out.

The question on everyone's lips was: "What would the Progressive Federal Party do in the election; would they put up a candidate and hand the constituency to the CP on a plate? Nationalists began to ask the question: "Are you talking to the Progs?" My answer was firm: "No. I am a Nationalist, I carry the NP-flag and that is how we will fight this election. At the national level there was no understanding between the two parties. We had to accept that and conduct ourselves accordingly." Rumours had it that the local PFP branch was divided – some wanted the PFP to put up a candidate and make their presence felt; others were of the view that their participation would lead to nothing and only hand the seat to the CP.

I made peace with the idea that the PFP would put up a candidate and that the NP would simply work twice as hard to secure a victory. This was, after all, a new party under FW de Klerk's leadership and that made our task easier. It would, nonetheless be a major challenge to win a three-way contest with the PFP on the left and the CP on the right of the political spectrum. I firmly believed that a victory, even under those circumstances, was achievable.

Out of the blue I received a telephone call from an unknown leader of the PFP on the West Rand. She informed me that they had accepted a motion not to oppose me in Krugersdorp. They couldn't care less whether the CP would win the seat but they wanted me to remain in politics, they believed that I had a political role to play – that was the reason why they would not put up a candidate in Krugersdorp. I thanked her politely and said goodbye.

This was the only discussion I ever had with this lady. To my disappointment, I never had any further contact with her.

I didn't broadcast this discussion. The public would in the course of the campaign just notice that the PFP was absent. It would then be the responsibility of the Progs to explain why they were not putting up a candidate – it had been their decision not to contest the election.

I was touched by this decision of the PFP. They were political opponents who saw their way clear to make common cause with me in spite of the fact of the differences between our parties. This was further motivation to make sure that the seat would not fall in the hands of the conservatives. The NP in Krugersdorp did not only carry the flag for the *verligte* NP supporters, but also for the PFP supporters who believed that the *verligte* voices of the NP should be heard after the election.

In 1987 I had declined the CP challenge to have public debate with Clive Derby-Lewis in the Town Hall. I realised that in this 1989 election I would not be able to dismiss such a challenge. Right from the beginning of the campaign I was planning on how I could capitalise on such a debate.

It came as no surprise when Derby-Lewis announced, without prior consultation in the local newspaper that he challenged me to such a debate. He also gave the dates of his availability for such a debate. I just had to choose a date and he would be there.

Annie Fourie – staunch supporter – books the Town Hall in her name for the last date on Derby-Lewis list. This was the date nearest to the election because I wanted the debate to have the greatest possible impact. She used her own name as we didn't want to make our intentions known.

Everyone in our office knew of this cat-and-mouse game. All public discussions about this challenge were met with this lame response: "We don't know whether such a debate will serve any purpose. We'll think about it." This feeble response made the Derby-Lewis camp crow! Wessels is a coward. Wessels is again running away! Wessels doesn't have the courage to stand up for his convictions. Clive Derby-Lewis will cut him to size and smash his political career.

Shortly before our identified day for the debate we announced that we had booked the Town Hall and that I was ready for the debate. I also set out the rules for the debate. There would be no chairman. Each one of us would have the opportunity for an opening speech whereafter we would put questions to each other. Thereafter there would be an opportunity for each of us to reply. No questions would be taken from the floor.

Derby-Lewis wriggled like a snoek on a hook. He bleated that he had entered into other obligations because we didn't respond when he threw the gauntlet down. He was no longer available for this debate. The rules of the debate also were unacceptable.

I enjoyed every moment because it was clear I had the upper-hand. My cheeky response rubbed further salt to the CP wounds. They were livid: "The Town Hall was booked and the rent paid. I will be there to put my case. If Clive Derby-Lewis's chair is empty everyone will know that it was he who shied away from the debate." Reluctantly he agreed to the debate and the rules for the debate.

Many supporters offered advice how I should conduct the debate: People admire a fighter, not a street fighter; focus on the political issues and forget about the person Clive Derby-Lewis; don't try to convince the Conservatives – that would not be possible – because they had come to witness your downfall and not to listen to arguments; give your supporters heart and courage to take the fight to the Conservatives whenever they meet them. Don't try to be clever during question time; ask questions that you know the answer to – that will give you the opportunity to look smart when you reply to the debate. Take the initiative from the first moment: arrive late; wait till he has taken his seat before you make an appearance, then walk straight to him with outstretched hand to greet him, force him to stand up for you and look up to you because you will be taller. Those who knew him well said he would be irritated with the proceedings – that was exactly what was wanted you want.

Derby-Lewis walked into all the traps we had set for him. He couldn't hide his frustration. To insult to injury he bumped against the table he was sitting at and his pile of documents fell on the floor. During the debate he tried to be witty but made no impression on the Nats.

The success of that night can further be attributed to an advertisement that Leunis van Rooyen and I had prepared before the meeting. In this we told the readers how I had won the debate. My speech and all the questions that I asked Derby-Lewis as well as my answers to those questions as well as rebuttal of all the CP platitudes used during the campaign were contained in the advertisement.

After the meeting Gaye Derby-Lewis walked over and congratulated me: “You are a difficult man to compete against. You are a fighter.”

As we were speaking, the local newspaper was busy printing our advertisement. It would appear on the street the following day. The local knock and drop was delivered to every household. With this advertisement we reached thousands of readers, many more people than the 500 who had attended the meeting.

This strategic trap made Derby-Lewis livid – he puffed and fumed much to our delight. We didn’t dwell on this small victory for too long but kept our focus on the bigger prize – winning the election.

We worked like bees – every supporter was handled with great care.

6 September finally arrived. It was bitterly cold and blustering wind which tested our resolve. Derby-Lewis was granting interviews to the foreign media, claiming that this nasty weather would work in his favour because all his supporters would be prepared to do their duty and come out and vote for him. My supporters were a bunch of fat cats that would not brace themselves for this cold weather – they would rather stay at home.

Early evening the CP supporters were stoking the braaivleis fires and they began celebrating: they believed that they had bagged this one.

When the counting of votes started, Derby-Lewis’ body language changed very quickly. The pile of votes placed before the counting officials told the story – he was in for a shock! His bravado was replaced with a grave silence. There was no fight left in him; he had lost complete interest.

The NP won the election handsomely. For the second time, just as in 1987, the CP supporters left the voting station with their tails between their legs.

Shortly after the results were announced, FW de Klerk phoned: “Congratulations! Well done!” His further comments undid his previous friendly comments: “You are lucky the Progs didn’t oppose you.”

I was dumbfounded! Was he unaware of what had happened in Krugersdorp the previous years? Was he not aware of the statement released by the PFP why they were not putting up a candidate in Krugersdorp, and if he was aware of it, how come we understood it so differently? In believing the PFP supported me because they wanted me to play a role in transforming our country; he diminishing – almost ridiculing – their absence.

Two years later, Walter Sisulu and I were sitting at the Wonderboom airport – talking politics – as we were waiting for Nelson Mandela. He asked me about my background and the constituency that I represented. When he heard that I came from Krugersdorp he was astounded. He asked me about people, election campaigns, and the debates. In disbelief he said: “If a conservative constituency such as Krugersdorp can send someone like you to parliament, then there must be hope for our country.”

In 2003, at the request of Lenswe Mogatle, mayor of Mogale-Krugersdorp, I addressed the council in the same Town Hall where Derby-Lewis and I had had our debate in 1989. During the informal gathering after the meeting I tell him and his colleagues how we had fought for every vote during those elections. I also tell them about the debate with Derby-Lewis. They listen in total disbelief. For them it was difficult to comprehend that I could fight an election against a man that had been responsible for the murder of Chris Hani and have a public debate against him in the Town Hall.

After this discussion I realised – once again – how little we had known about one another and how little we had tried to understand one another. The one was simply not interested in the politics of the other. White people were concerned about the red (communist threat) and black (majority rule) threats and black people about being liberated from this oppression by white people.

CHAPTER 17

FROM JUNIOR SECUROCRAT TO JUNIOR DIPLOMAT

New Address

On Monday, 11 September 1989 there was a feeling of expectation and anticipation at the regular State Security Council (SSC) meeting. It was the first meeting after the election of the Tri-cameral Parliament on 6 September. The meeting took place a few days before Parliament would meet to induct new members of parliament for the new term and to formally elect a new State President. FW de Klerk, the leader of the National Party, had led them to victory in the elections and definitely would be the new president. However, it was uncertain what course he would adopt, because he was not exactly known as a *verligte* politician. During the elections, though, he had made no secret of the fact that reform and the politics of negotiation would be high on his agenda.

These parliamentary events would not be without incident, however, because the democratic forces that had not participated in the elections wanted to stage a mass rally in the streets of Cape Town to show to the world that it was a minority government and that the matter now had to be put right.

As Deputy Minister of Law and order I sat next to Herbert Beukes, Deputy Director general of Foreign Affairs who represented Foreign Affairs in the SSC along with its minister, Pik Botha.

FW inquired about the demonstration and the proposed handling of it. The answer is that everything would go well as there would be enough police officers on duty to ensure that the event would be orderly. FW was patently irritated because there was no understanding of the fact that the place now was ‘under new management’. The time had come for constructive ideas and the sort of action planned by die police dated from the old days and was something of the past.

Peaceful protest should not be kept in check through force and violence. Herbert Beukes ever so often would whisper excitedly: “*hier kom ’n ding*” – something’s in the air. It was as though he had an intuitive understanding that it was the beginning of a regime change, away from autocratic, semi-military action to civil, democratic action.

The days of security driven decision-making were over for good. The protest march would not be disrupted at all. Police would remain on standby out of sight and the organisers of the march would, in consideration, accept co-responsibility for the orderliness of the march. It was a small gesture, but one with great impact which put South Africa irreversibly into a new orbit. FW’s media statement and message to the organisers would be: “You are pushing against an open door. Let us talk.”

I was given the instruction to pass the message on to one of the organisers of the march, Franklik Sonn, who later became SA Ambassador to the United States. He was distrustfully relieved and could not hide his surprise.

The atmosphere in Cape Town was tense. Foreign journalists prepared themselves for the confrontation. That night at dinner in a Cape Town restaurant where a few of us raised a few glasses to our re-election as members of parliament, an unknown journalist cornered me and wanted to know what had happened at the SSC meeting. What was being planned to stop the protest march? Would there be conflict? He thought I was talking through my neck when I said that there would be no conflict and the all everything would go down peacefully.

After the peaceful conclusion of the march, FW informed me that he would dismantle the whole security management system and that he wanted to restore the Cabinet as the highest body where government policy would be coordinated. He wanted to move me to Foreign Affairs to involve me from that address in the negotiations for a new political dispensation and a new era. Answers had to be found for the future of the TBVC states—the former homelands.

REPORTING FOR SERVICE

When I reported to Foreign Affairs Minister Pik Botha for service, he gestured dramatically to the pillars to the east of building, behind his back. “These are my pillars,” he said. He then pointed to the western side of the building where my office would be: “Those are your pillars. Take care that they do not fall down.”

He took me on an imaginary world tour and sketched my responsibilities. He suggested that I visited the places in my sphere of responsibility as soon as possible. Get to know it for once and for all. You only had to walk through your farm once to know how you would manage it. I had to pay a quick visit to the TBVC states and then I had to make sure that I paid a quick visit to President Hastings Banda of Malawi to inform him about the latest developments in South Africa. Banda was annoyed because Pik had taken FW to Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia and not to him.

QUICKLY OUT OF THE BLOCKS

There was no time for small talk and I was out of my Homburg hat and into my diplomatic pinstripe suit before I could bat my eyes; a soft-stepping diplomat to the surprise of my colleagues who believed that I was a *Sturm und Drang* politician only who would not be able to make the grade in the polite and sophisticated world of the diplomat.

One of my first tasks was to entertain a group of diplomats who were involved in negotiations about the South West African question. I was amazed about the opportunity to rub shoulders with the Cubans and Russians—the hated enemy against whom we had waged war; and here we were now, arguing very civilly about peace.

I was in my kindergarten shoes still when I had to stand in for Pik Botha to accompany FW, as chief of the Defence Force, to a *bosberaad* organised by the South African Defence Force where he would be informed about their strategic goals and planning. Magnus Malan, Minister of Defence, and Finance Minister Barend du Plessis were there too. After their impressive presentation about the state of affairs in Southern Africa from a military perspective, FW unexpectedly halted the proceedings. He was impressed by the thorough briefing, but there was no scenario for peace. There was going to be peace in Southern Africa. What will happen to their conflict scenarios then? State funding and financial priorities then would be a different kettle of fish altogether.

Peace? When? How? It all sounded so unreal, but it was clear that for FW it was not a far-fetched dream but a reality which he wanted to help bring about soon.

VELDSKOEN DIPLOMAT, MALAWI

I paid a visit to Banda. For many years the Malawi head of state had been one of South Africa's few friends in Africa. He had been in office for many, many years—a democratic dictator, in fact.

On walking into his office, I realised that it would not be one of the regular stoep talks as had been the case with the likes of homeland leaders such as Holomisa, Sebe, Mangope and Mpefu. This was not my territory. To me this was unknown Africa. Those visits to Mmabatho, Bisho, Thohoyandou and Umtata had been part of South Africa even if we viewed them as independent states with full diplomatic status. Here in Malawi the farcical aspect of it all dawned on me more clearly than ever before.

With my newly acquired skills of both treading warily and being verbose, I laid on my own importance somewhat. I told him that I was an emissary of FW and that I was conveying his personal greetings to Banda as well as best wishes from Pik Botha who had wanted to make the trip to Malawi personally, but he had to assist the new president with some pressing matters concerning arrangements for the approaching session of parliament and his opening address.

He accepted the greeting and wishes with an old world grace and courtesy. He said that South Africa was important to him. The South brought forth good things. Missionaries had penetrated Africa from the south and when it rained well in South Africa they also could expect to prosper. Things had to happen in South Africa now to enable Africa to advance.

I started to relax and congratulate myself on my neat, diplomatic success. Self-satisfied, I believed that I had mastered the art of diplomatic speak.

Suddenly and unexpectedly the tone of the conversation changed. In front of my eyes the dignified old head of state was transformed into the tyrant others had accused him of being, and he lectured me. It was as though he wanted to take out his frustration and anger on me. How dare we establish a tricameral parliament without participation by any Africans? It was an insult to Africa. How dare we establish a parliament filled with “half-halves” and Indians and exclude Africans? We were humiliating all Africans and now were left without any friends in Africa.

When are you going to release Mandela? Without him all your nice words about FW and his neat plans for reform will not get anywhere. Mandela must be released.

Any idea I might have had that we would be given time to settle into a new course was dispelled completely by this tirade. For the first time I was experiencing personally Africa’s anger about the exclusion of Africans from the tricameral parliament and about Mandela’s imprisonment. FW’s nice words and statements and my opening moves in which I had declared solemnly that we would take reforms forward with everything in our power sounded good, but Africa’s patience had run out. Even our interlocutors did not have patience with us anymore, never mind those who did not even want to speak to us.

Right there I realised in my heart of hearts that I was a veldskoen diplomat. The Africans were our people; the heat, the droughts, the dust and poverty we shared with one another. This was where the challenges were to be found; where our integrity would be tested to the finest detail. Africans experience racial discrimination to the core. For them it is not merely a theoretical injustice as it is for Westerners.

EXCITEMENT IN THE WAKE OF 2 FEBRUARY 1990

After 2 February and Mandela’s release everyone wanted to know: What does this mean? We had to be here, there and everywhere to talk and to explain. This went on around diplomatic dinner tables where people talked and talked about it and argued about it. It also gave rise to opportunities to debate these matters with South Africans who until then had avoided such opportunities and discussions. It all turned out to be precursors to the talks that would follow later in the eye to eye negotiations for a new political dispensation in South Africa.

CHILE

I was honoured to represent FW in Chile and Brazil at the inauguration of their new democratically elected presidents. It was arranged that the one event would follow on the other in order that the guest could first attend the one and then the other.

In Chile it was a clutter of one diplomatic reception after the other. It was somewhat creepy to meet August Pinochet in the same place where Allende’s power had been ended and where he had come to his end.

I was deep in conversation with American Vice-President Dan Quale during the official inauguration of President Patricio Aylwyn Azócar when former dictator Pinochet entered the council chamber. There was an instant and intense emotional outburst from the public gallery—shouting and insults aimed at Pinochet. I was astounded at all the hurly-burly and more than a bit puzzled by it. Quale then remarked that the reaction was from people who had lost loved ones during Pinochet's dictatorship. They now demanded retribution and wanted to know what had happened to their loved ones. As I listened to President Patricio Aylwyn Azócar's address about their truth and reconciliation commission I had a vague feeling that this was where we would be headed ourselves. Later, on my return to South Africa, I made a few remarks along the lines that we could be in need of some kind of truth and reconciliation commission to help put the past to rest. At the time, I was glared at as though I had lost my marbles in South America.

Nobody in political circles wanted to believe what was happening in South Africa. One and all wanted to know what had happened. Why would things change for the better now? It still was the same old lot of players, just with a new agenda. How were we going to pull it off? It really was an exhaustive experience. With the last function before our departure, I had become *gatvol* with all of this scepticism. I took off my jacket, sat down on the carpet and told them the whole story as I knew it. Malcom Ferguson, a SA diplomat, afterwards came to me and said: Throughout the discussion people had not believed a word you said. But when you took off your jacket and went down on your haunches and told them how you had grappled with these matters and what you wanted to do now, they took you seriously for the first time.

I had an invitation to deliver an address in Toronto, Canada, and he advised me to write my speech in the same vein as when I had sat on that carpet and had talked right from my gut. It turned out to be my first practice run in explaining what had happened in South Africa.

OSLO

Unexpectedly, I had to attend a conference in Oslo, Norway in August 1990 on behalf of the government at short notice. The international conference's theme was 'The Anatomy of Hate'. Nobody expected the ANC to be represented there at high level, therefore only a deputy minister was delegated. Little did we realise that the conference would be held in the heartland of the Nobel Peace Prize's committee. Neither was it known to us that the organiser, Elie Wiesel, himself was a Nobel Peace Prize laureate as well as a man of stature.

On the Friday morning of my departure it became known that Nelson Mandela would address the conference.

There was absolutely no time to consult anyone about the address I had to deliver, therefore I told my private secretary, Tom Markram, as well as Stephen Aldridge of Foreign Affairs who would accompany me, I would not say anything that I had not said before in any of my speeches. I did not regard it as the place to make contentious statements. They took along speeches I first had delivered in Toronto, and later had repeated at Vryburg and then before the Johannesburg Press Club. We could hammer the final address into shape on the plane that night.

The work on the address that night was conducted among loud arguments about the structure and composition of the speech. To the irritation of other passengers we argued good naturedly about the choice of words.

On arriving in London the next day, Tom and Stephan went off to the embassy to round off the night's work. My wife, Tersia, and I then visited old friends in the Thatcher government, Peter Bottomley (who had been a deputy minister) and his wife Virginia, who was a minister in John Major's cabinet, on the Isle of Wight. Our political friendship had held fast for longer than a decade.

The next morning on the flight to Oslo, I chewed over the address and made a few final changes.

It is remarkable, but the address I would deliver in Oslo had its birth pains on four continents. It had started in Chile at the inauguration of President Patricio Aylwin, where I had to defend South Africa's dramatic change of policy. On the advice of Malcolm Ferguson of Foreign Affairs I used this as the basis for an address shortly thereafter in Canada. He had judged that when I informed people about my own growth process as well as the elements that had helped to form it, the listeners was inclined to accept my integrity without qualification.

On those occasions I had told of the good intentions which we had when separate development was embarked upon, of our many reform measures as well as the eventual realisation that our policy had flopped while injuring people very deeply in the process. This was the reason for the address which President FW had held on 2 February 1990.

In Toronto I said for the first time that apartheid had been a terrible mistake which had injured the country and its people. "I concede readily that we should have talked with groups such as the ANC much earlier, but with the advantage of hindsight our eyes are now fixed on the future. Today I represent a generation of South Africans who strive for full justice and who are not afraid to cast off the millstone of apartheid."

This speech caused hardly any reaction in South Africa.

In South Africa I developed this theme further without jeopardising the political boat whatsoever.

My presence in Oslo had the protesters out in force. Apparently they were not aware of the major reforms taking place in South Africa.

That Sunday evening there was an informal meeting of the participants at the conference. I had never met Nelson Mandela, but realised that we could not meet and confront one another for the first time on the stage. Therefore, before the buffet supper I waylaid him in the aisle. He was approaching with his entourage and Tersia and I went up to greet him.

On putting out my hand to Mandela, he reprimanded me with a big smile because I had not flown there with South African Airways. I said: "No you are mistaken. I took another route than you did."

Mandela then said: "Nice meeting you. Strange, that we should meet so far from home."

I wanted to introduce him to my wife and said to him: "Mr Mandela, I want you to meet..."

But he interrupted me, put his arm around Tersia's shoulders and said: "Oh, now I see why you are so confident, it is because you have this lovely lady to support you."

What could have ended in a fiery altercation, ended on this light-hearted note, perhaps to the surprise of the important guests who had formed a circle around us and who had listened to every word.

Mandela then said goodbye: “We will see each other at the conference tomorrow.”

I wondered what his words could mean. Was he going to try and make mincemeat of this short pants minister or is he looking forward to a lively debate?

I had seen him in action for the first time and now I understood why they treated him like royalty; it was because they expected to see someone who looked and acted like a bloodthirsty terrorist. But his old fashioned charm and charisma disarm and simply overwhelm everyone.

That evening I realised that my speech was too long. We would only be given ten minutes and the organisers were strict on time limits, speakers were not allowed to go beyond the ten minutes. We judged then that it did not matter that the address was too long. It would be incorporated as is in the official documentation. However, I had to whittle down my presentation to abide by the ruling of ten minutes. We argued about the speech among us to see to it that emphases about which we felt strongly would be highlighted. We left just one minute within which I could react spontaneously to whatever Mandela would say.

With a well-prepared speech and very confident I arrived at the conference venue on the following day. On entering the conference hall, I witnessed at least 30 photographers at Mandela’s table. Adjacent was Elie Wiesel as well as South African Nobel Prize Literature laureate Nadine Gordimer, the author, who also would participate in the discussions.

Nobody paid the least attention to me. I realised then that Mandela would destroy me totally unless I took the initiative. So I unearthed a trick which I had learnt from Nicky Swart in 1989 before the public debate with Clive Derby-Lewis. When Elie Wiesel called the meeting to order, the media people took off. I waited until there was total silence in the hall. Then I got out of my chair, went over to Mandela and gave him my hand. With this gesture I forced him to stand too and to take my hand. In this way I was certain that the delegates could see that my approach to the meeting did not begin on a hostile note. It gave me more confidence too.

Mandela spoke for 20 minutes. His address was well received and he received warm applause. Elie Wiesel then introduced me coldly and neutrally as “the deputy minister of Foreign Affairs who will put the case for the other side”. There was a very weak, if any welcoming. Only three people audibly clapped hands: Tersia, Stephan and our Consul-General, Willem Bosman. Tom had to remain outside, because there was no place for him. He had to follow the event on television.

I realised that my opening words would mean success or failure. I then related two stories.

When Mandela was released from jail, I was in West Africa. There I had watched on satellite television how he became a free man. When, a week later, we returned to the Johannesburg airport in a small plane, someone remarked that it was another South Africa to which we were returning than the one we had left a week earlier. However, it also was not the same Leon Wessels who was returning compared to the one who had left just a week previously.

In addition, I was about as old as formal apartheid. I was born when the National Party came to power, but now it was my joy to be involved with the funeral arrangements of apartheid.

I could feel how the audience's attitude towards me was beginning to change.

Then I spoke and made these nine statements:

- It was wonderful to experience how Africa was watching developments in South Africa.
- I explained the status of South African politics in the previous decades. I repeated my position of Toronto: "Apartheid was a terrible mistake that had injured our country and our people."
- Our goal is a fully democratic political dispensation in a truly constitutional state.
- The processes that had to be followed to make our vision for the future a reality: There had to be a meeting of minds.
- This change is being threatened by mindless violence.
- We had a wonderful opportunity, because we could start building afresh.
- The challenge now was to reach out beyond the other side of apartheid in a spirit of nation building.
- Unfortunately, there were too few ANC leaders with an understanding of white fears.
- A common goal of true South Africanism and freedom now bound us together like never before.

On my way back to my seat, Mandela stood up, took my hand and said: "Thank you very much. It is speeches like these which give hope for the future and which make my job in my own organisation so much easier." That Mandela and I shook hands in this manner, elicited tremendous applause.

That evening the Norwegian government had a dinner for the guests. Mandela was at the main table and I was an ordinary guest among the other delegates. He called me over in Afrikaans and then said in English: I just want you to know there is tremendous appreciation for your speech and I think the two of us did a great job for South Africa."

After the dinner Mandela and I said goodbye to one another and he said to me in Afrikaans: "Please convey my greetings to your wife."

The conference continued the following day and conflict situations all over the world were discussed. However, it emerged clearly that South Africa was the country that provided the best hope for lasting solutions.

Someone said: "Did you see the interaction between Mandela and Wessels? Why can the others not also do it? It is because two leaders with the stature of Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk are leading the process. Nowhere else are two leaders of the same stature present at the same time."

Denmark, Ireland and London

In 1991 I had to accompany FW de Klerk on official visits to Denmark, Ireland and Britain. I was a great privilege to be able to sit at FW's side during talks with heads of state and important formers of opinion. To enter Number 10 Downing Street for dinner as guests of the head of government was a very special occasion which I always will cherish. FW was a bit tense, but also excited about his first visit to Number Ten. The diplomacy and word-play between John

Major and FW was something special to behold—would we press on with negotiations or would we draw back? Would the violence be contained? When would the political settlement process be regarded as negotiable in order for economic sanctions to be lifted? How are you going to satisfy democratic aspirations? How are you going to lay minority anxieties to rest?

HIGH TEA WITH THE TAMBOS

To me, the cherry on the cake was when it was decided that Foreign Affairs director general Neil van Heerden and I would make a courtesy call on the late president of the ANC, Mr Oliver Tambo, and his wife Adelaide. He was experiencing health problems and we had to convey good wishes to him for a speedy recovery from FW.

Neil and I went to the ANC's South Africa House at Muswell Hill. The Tambo residence was a place from where many a campaign had been launched against South Africa. At that stage Mr. Tambo was still recuperating after a stroke, but we were warmly received nevertheless. We had tea with them.

The discussion was not meant to resolve South Africa's problems. We wanted to chat to them spontaneously and in a relaxed way about how we in South Africa could move closer to one another and away from hostility. We also wanted to persuade them to return to South Africa.

At the end of a very cordial conversation, Mrs. Tambo said to Neil and me: "Look, I didn't say much, but now I want to ask you two things. You are two young men, you listen to me now. Firstly, tell Mr. Vlok (Minister of Law and Order) that I really want to return to South Africa, but I don't want to have to look over my shoulder all of the time to see who are trying to do harm to me. Therefore, you also have to contain the violence in those quarters that are opposed to the ANC. And, secondly, tell me, are the jacarandas in Pretoria still as lovely?"

This remark about the jacarandas caused us to chat for a while about her experience of Britain and her longing for South Africa. She also remarked that if she had known beforehand that it would be expected of them to remain abroad for such a long time, she was not certain that they would have attempted the task. She told us that she had a special nostalgia for Pretoria because as a young nurse she had always passed underneath the jacaranda trees when walking to work. She clearly was overcome by longing.

Inside story by Dali Tambo (*THE SUNDAY INDEPENDENT* April 14 1996)

About 12 years ago I asked my father what he thought would happen about the cold war. He said he thought that that the two sides would move towards the centre and that there they would reconcile their differences. When I asked whether he thought the same would happen in South Africa, his answer was an unequivocal yes.

Leon Wessels was a leader in the National Party's move to the middle. He is also the man who before Pik Botha or FW de Klerk stood alone in the Scandinavian chill and declared remorse for apartheid.

To admit, even in your heart, to wrongdoing is no easy feat. To say the sorry to an individual in private requires yet more courage, but to apologise to millions for an ideology that you have been a part of upholding, takes a special kind of bravery.

Since that time he has come in from the cold and has been embraced as an important participant in the new South African politics

The future president was present at that meeting in Oslo and the inspired speech from the young Afrikaner must have been music to his ears.

Today, though still a nationalist; Leon Wessels is at the core of South African constitutional affairs.

What he did in Oslo was just the beginning of continued displays of individuality. Now, of course, there is much shaking of heads among the National Party whenever the word “apartheid” is so much as whispered, but when Leon first publicly apologised for its deeds, there was no warm embrace from his colleagues. In fact, he was shunned by many in his party and risked the loss of constituency support as a result. Yet his historic speech was *avant-garde* rather than treacherous.

This week Leon and his wife Tersia appear on People of the South. I’d met him briefly once before when, in his capacity as deputy to foreign minister Pik Botha, he had tea with my parents at our home in London.

On that occasion, despite the security men getting a little jumpy about entertaining the enemy, much laughter emanated from the room where the foursome sat.

I recall feeling confused and amazed that such a pleasant, dignified and sincere man could be a champion of apartheid.

Why did I like him? Perhaps it was because his amiable manner gave a hit of inner anti apartheid spiritual turmoil. One thing was clear: this man was no racist.

Leon has since devoted a chapter in his book to the occasion.

Leon and Tersia Wessels are visibly in love. Though they have been sweethearts since high school, their mutual affection is still clearly evident. Tersia is more than just the woman behind the man. She works in the Gauteng Legislature and is active in a variety of community projects.

They are definitely a team. Tersia even ran the Comrades marathon with her husband and 90km on such tiny legs could not have been easy.

If and when I marry, I hope to have the mutual respect and love that is evident in their relationship.

Some people have already made their contribution – whether positive or negative – to this nation. Many still have contributions to make. Knowledge and forgiveness of past wrongs is essential if we are to clear the way to optimise that potential and, by so doing, hopefully remedy the situation and pursue national happiness.

Anyone who has witnessed Leon Wessels’s work over the past two years will know that, as well as Afrikaner blood, nobility, integrity and southern grit run in his veins.

LAST CONVULSIONS OF THE OLD SOUTH AFRICA

In 1991 we were on the eve of the US administration’s lifting of sanctions against South Africa. One of the unresolved questions was the release of all political prisoners. In Bophuthatswana

there were some people who in terms of the definition still could be described as political prisoners. They had embarked on a hunger strike.

The position of the South African government was that Bophuthatswana was an independent state and that the prisoners therefore could not be regarded as political prisoners of the RSA. However, the Americans were immovable: they did not recognise the independence of Bophuthatswana and, therefore, the hunger strikers were the responsibility of the South African government.

ANC president Nelson Mandela and Foreign Affairs Minister Pik Botha discussed the matter one Saturday morning. Mandela had phoned from Cape Town, requesting that permission be obtained from Bophuthatswana President Lucan Mangope for Mandela to visit the hunger strikers that very day.

Pik Botha undertook to arrange for the necessary permission through the South African ambassador in Mmabatho. That afternoon at three o'clock I would give Mangope's reply to Mandela at the Wonderboom Airport in Pretoria. Late that morning Pik called me to request that I convey an important message to Mandela personally. The message was that we could not make contact with Mangope as he was attending a funeral at Thaba Nchu. The South African government would treat it as an urgent matter, but only on the Monday. Pres. FW personally would see to it that the prisoners were properly cared for and that talks would be held regarding their release. The government could not afford to have President Bush's attempts to have sanctions lifted jeopardised by these actions in Bophuthatswana.

I was at Wonderboom Airport, right on time in order to meet Mandela. The airport was abuzz with activity. Senior officials of the ANC had arrived as well as people from the media. It was clear that the ANC had indicated that Mandela would be there. A reception committee was at the ready as well as a contingent who would look after his safety. On my arrival I learnt that Mandela had been delayed as his aircraft had developed engine problems. He would have flown from Cape Town to Durban to take care of official business and from there he would fly to Wonderboom. He was en route to Durban when the problem developed. In the meantime, Mr Walter Sisulu would liaise with me.

At four o'clock Sisulu arrived, accompanied by the newly appointed secretary-general of the ANC, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa as well as Archbishop Trevor Huddleston. I explained the situation to Sisulu and his reaction was that the matter was too serious, he could not decide on it. We had to wait on his president. Christo Prins, the Director in Chief of Foreign Affairs, and Chris Botha of my staff ordered tea for everyone in the very small room where we were waiting. The ANC people were very keen to get to know more about the various trains of thought among Afrikaners and in the National Party. In turn, I wanted to get to know the views of Sisulu, Ramaphosa and Huddleston.

Having aired my opinion on a range of subjects, Walter Sisulu remarked that he could hardly believe that I was the MP for Krugersdorp. He could not believe that I came from such a conservative background and still held enlightened views. I then pointed out to him that in both the 1987 and 1989 elections we had successfully weathered aggressive campaigns by the Conservative Party in Krugersdorp. In public I had never said anything different than what I just had conveyed to him. He found it very encouraging that a conservative constituency could have

sent someone like me to Parliament. Huddleston was on another wavelength, because he clearly did not have Sisulu's sensitive perception of contemporary affairs and often referred to events from long, long ago. He did not really contribute constructively to the discussion, but nevertheless, it was interesting to meet him.

Ramaphosa acted very courteously and modestly towards Sisulu and Huddleston and treated them with the greatest respect as though he was in awe of their status and age. It was the first time that we met. He was friendly and correct towards me, but very calculating. His actions that night (as it would become) were very impressive and it became clear then already that he was someone we had to take into serious account politically.

In the corner of the little room was a coin telephone. A little further away there was another telephone in an office which resembled a glass case. The telephone was meant for the airport staff and someone was on duty there. The telephone was not available to us, but after Chris Botha had explained the situation to the official we could use the phone every now and then. The ANC, Christo Prins and I often made use of the coin telephone. Thabo Mbeki called to that phone to ask me what the status of the situation was. I informed the operations room of Foreign Affairs from this phone about the situation and where we were. Whenever anyone of us spoke on this telephone, all could hear what was being said.

Mandela's plane landed at six o'clock and he joined us in the little room. It was the first time we saw each other again since Oslo and he immediately referred to it. We could speak to one another in a relaxed manner, but immediately I could sense that he did not regard it as a social talk. He sat down down and said businesslike: "Come, let me hear what you have to say." In conveyed Pik's message as diplomatically and completely as I could and explained that the minister regarded the matter as being so important that he sent me to convey the message to Mandela. Unfortunately he could not be there himself, because he wanted to pass on the message personally.

Mandela listened attentively to everything I had to say and to all the facts. The quieter he became, the more correctly I tried to formulate and the more detail I reported. On hearing me out, his answer was short and powerful: "It is not good enough." He then asked one of the people with him: "Tell me, what is the condition of the hungerstrikers?" The man clearly was well-informed and he said that one of them was in a critical condition. Mandela then said that he could not accept my version of the situation or that the matter could rest until the Monday. If something had to happen to one of the hungerstrikers before the Monday, he would not be able to forgive himself. Therefore, the matter had to be resolved that evening still. He also said: Mangope is your problem, not ours. I do not recognise Bophuthatswana and therefore do not regard it as an insurmountable problem. If it presents a problem to the government, the government has to resolve it. He wanted to speak to the State President about it. As a matter of courtesy he would speak to Pik Botha first, but if he could not get a satisfactory answer from Pik Botha, he wanted to speak to the State President that very evening.

I asked him to understand that it was half past six on a Saturday, but that I would contact Pik Botha.

Just here Chris Botha's nightmare began. He had to raise Pik Botha through the Foreign Affairs operations room via the coin phone. We had decided that if we were unsuccessful in tracking

down Pik Botha before a given time, we would phone FW directly. I had a number of discussions with the ops room from the coin telephone. Chris used the other phone in the glass booth. He had to use all his diplomatic skills to persuade the official there not to go home and lock up behind him, but to keep his telephone available for us. Chris Botha also had to determine where the State President was in case we had to call him directly. It was just after seven when I spoke to the the President. I explained the situation, but he said he did not want to speak to Mandela before Pik Botha was there himself or had spoken to Mandela. In any case, I informed him about the situation.

Shortly thereafter Pik Botha called me on the coin telephone. I was in a very difficult position, because there were people all around me, listening to every word. With the President I had used the other phone, but here I had to count my words very carefully. Initially he was angered, because he thought it was because of my bungling that the matter had not been resolved yet. This was such a simple matter that it should have been resolved at three o'clock already. How have I messed up? He really was teed off because I had spoken to the State President first before consulting him on such a trifle.

After I had set the record straight, he realised that it was not so simple after all and that I had had no choice but to involve FW. He developed a full understanding of the position I was in, and then a whole series of phone calls took place. Quite some time later I spoke to Pik again, and he was irritated because he could not understand what the problem was. He said Mandela was sitting by a telephone, the State President was sitting by a phone, Mangope sat by a telephone, but we could not get the three to talk to one another. In addition, there was a problem in having to phone Mangope every now and then. Pik said he would call the Post Master-General to clear the technical difficulties out of the way for such a conversation to happen. Still later it was arranged that Mandela himself would speak directly with Mangope. I walked with Mandela to the glass booth where Chris Botha had raised Mangope. He listened to the conversation because he anticipated that the whole affair would not be resolved so easily.

Intially, Mandela addressed Mangope as "Chief", but gradually their conversation had teriorated to such an extent that Mandela concluded with a curt "Mangope". He had started very courteously, but ended very abruptly.

Meanwhile, Pik Botha had advised that I treat the people. I had to give them the best meal possible that the airport could provide. I had to keep the people at the airport and calm them down. But yet another problem cropped up. A dinner had been arranged in Johannesburg to honour Huddleston and both Mandela and Sisulu were important guests. What now? Mandela then said: "Trevor, you are the guest of honour, you have to go. You know what my position is: I have to see this matter through tonight. I cannot attend the dinner any more. I will remain here until this matter has been resolved."

In a sense, Mandela had begun a sit-in, because he had indicated that he would not leave the airport unless the matter was resolved to his satisfaction. Huddleston left then, but the others remained behind with me. We began organising a "diplomatic dinner" and Chris Botha rushed off to the restaurant. They assured him: Tonight you will have the fattened calf. They laid the table and after a while eight of us tucked in.

It was the first time in South Africa that I had the opportunity of witnessing Mandela's charm at work. It wasn't two minutes, or he had twisted the restaurant chief around his little finger. He said to him: "What is it with you people? I so want a nice piece of liver on my plate and you have no liver." It became a whole joke between them. I noticed that every dish was being served by another set of waiters. Among them there were white ladies too. They then asked Mandela to sign the menu for them. When he had done that, they confessed: They were not waitresses at all, they were from Pretoria and had been eating in an adjacent room. "We heard you were here and we just wanted to see you and greet you."

During the dinner we often had to go to the telephone: Chris Botha to speak to the operations room and I with Pik, Mangope and Mandela. Late that evening, at about eleven, Pik Botha said: "The whole matter has been bedevilled now by Mangope and Mandela's obstinacy. But I will see what I can manage to do."

Still later Pik Botha called again: He had been given permission by Mangope. I had to take Mandela and his people directly to the Odi Hospital where the hungerstrikers were and do all that was necessary to see the matter through to the end. I had to take decisions as I went along. If any problems arose, we would resolve them at a later stage.

To this very day I am not convinced that he (or us) ever had that permission.

Pik ended the call: "You do exactly what is needed. Use your own discretion. If you experience any problems, use my name: say Pik Botha has sent you. I do not want to hear from you again before the matter has been finalised."

At the dinner I announced cheerfully that Mangope had granted the necessary permission for a visit to the hungerstrikers.

With Mandela and his security guards ahead, we left for Odi Hospital. They raced like men possessed. Chris, Christo and I battled to keep up with them.

On arrival at the hospital, things were not peaceful at all. There actually was blood on the tarred road and there were many people standing around with injuries to their faces. Apparently, they had been driven away from the hospital earlier that day by the Bophuthatswana defence force and police when they protested in support of the hungerstrikers and because they wanted to wait for Mandela's arrival.

I identified myself at the hospital which was being guarded by the Bophuthatswana defence force. I asked to speak to the officer in command. My request released a cat among the pigeons. Later a junior officer interviewed me and told me that I could not speak to the officer in command, because he had gone home. This officer was rather hard-boiled and he dangled his firearm rather carelessly from a finger. He clearly was not going to enter into debate with me. I then told him that in the red Mercedes Benz parked nearby there were Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu. I had President Mangope's permission, via Pik Botha, to take them to the hungerstrikers immediately.

However, the chap remained unmoved and we realised that we were not going anywhere in this way. Then I said: "I am the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. I am here on the orders of Mr. Pik Botha. I respect you and your fire-arm, I respect your status and everything you have, but I

also respect Mr. Pik Botha who has given me this order. If I have to go away from here, away from you and your fire-arm (and I am scared of it), then I am going right to Pik Botha. And I am telling you straight: I am more afraid of him than I am of you. Therefore I am going to remain here until this issue has been resolved. Mandela and his people are not going to get out of their vehicle and we are not going to turn around. We are going to remain here until the whole matter has been sorted out.” Ramaphosa stood there all the time, listening to what I was saying, but he never said a word. They still regarded it as my problem.

It was a very cold night and the ANC leaders remained seated in their vehicle. Ramaphosa’s instruction and request was that they did not want to become involved in any sortie between me and the Bophuthatswana defence force. When I returned, Mandela wanted to know what the status was. I informed him that the guy on duty did not really have authority, but that he would see what he could do. I then joked with him, saying they were a bad influence on me, because I now was learning all about resistance politics from them. I told him that if they were prepared to wait there the whole night, I would wait too. Their answer was: We will not turn around. We will stay right here.

Later, someone with the rank of colonel showed up. I repeated my story to him, but he said he had no knowledge of President Mangope’s authorisation. I then played my trump card: Who is the head of the prison service? We are not going to turn around. He had to speak to the head of the prison service because I was convinced he had been informed in the matter. While we were talking, I walked with him onto the hospital premises. In this way, Chris Botha and I walked with the colonel right into the hospital. We got to a telephone. It must have been very late, long past midnight. He said he wanted to call a certain general, but I had to tell him again who I was and what position of authority I had, because he questioned my authority.

Just there and then Chris Botha started blazing away because of what he regarded as my inability to bring home the point to the colonel. He said: “Sir, it works like this.” He took my diplomatic passport from my case. “Do you see this is not an ordinary passport? This is a diplomatic passport. In matters of foreign affairs it works like this: President De Klerk is number one, Minister Pik Botha is number two and Minister Wessels is number three. This is Minister Wessels.” The man then showed respect for Chris’s aggression and called the general.

The general immediately questioned the story. He said he knew nothing about it. Mangope had not informed him about anything of the kind. I insisted on speaking to the general myself and said to him: “Look, I am inside the hospital. None of us is going anywhere now unless Mangope himself tells us that we may not enter. I dare you to call Mangope and have him inform me himself that I may not enter this hospital, because I disbelieve all of you. Pik Botha himself had informed me about Mangope’s permission. Only Mangope can convince me otherwise. Anyone who wants me and Mandela away from the front gate first has to phone Mangope so that he personally can tell me to leave.”

I banked on the fact that nobody would have the guts to call up Mangope that time of night, if they could reach him at all. After further arguments on the phone they agreed to let us in, but only Mandela, Sisulu and Ramaphosa; no-one else. They were allowed to speak to the hungerstrickers, their vehicle could enter the premises, but it would not be allowed in front of the hospital’s door.

On conveying this to the ANC delegation, Ramaphosa refused the offer. He was very definite: "These are old people. They cannot walk in the cold." The distance was just 25 metres, but the principle was very important to them. However, Ramaphosa revealed some compassion, because it was extremely cold and what he said did make sense. Now Mandela's security people refused bluntly that he enter the hospital without them. They said right out that it would be impossible to accede to the demand. I had understanding for their view and negotiated that they could accompany Mandela. When the permission was granted, Mandela refused: No, Wessels had to come along too. I had to hear what he would say to the strikers. In the end that was not too difficult and the whole crowd of people walked through the hospital to the ward where the men were being held.

On arriving there, Mandela had them woken up. There were ten to 15 of them. I will not forget the expression on one young man's face; it was as though he had woken up in the presence of a deity. His veneration, his disbelief that Mandela was standing right in front of him, was too much for him. His first reaction was to call out: "Amandla!" and right from his hospital bed he raised an *amandla*-fist into the air. With that the others also woke up. When they saw Mandela in their midst, they greeted him by shouting "amandla!" Mandela had the other hunger strikers fetched from other wards and let them sit together.

He said: "I want to talk to you." He put one foot on a chair. "But first I want to tell you who we are." He introduced himself and then Sisulu and Ramaphosa and me as the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Africa. He then said that he was not there to take decisions on their behalf, but to advise them. His information was that their strike had reached a critical stage and continuation of the strike could cause permanent damage to their health. They had to take this into consideration when they decided on whether they should continue with the strike or not, because the new South Africa was going to need healthy people with guts, determination, enthusiasm and application. He just wanted to reassure them that they *would* be free. They had to accept this as fact. He could not tell them exactly when they would be released, but the ANC was not going to stop protesting and will not forget them. Against this background, he would like to know what they were going to decide.

The man who shouted *amandla* first, spoke on behalf of the group. He said Mandela would never know how much respect and appreciation they had for the fact that he was with them now. They had learnt that he had started off in Cape Town and had come there via Durban. He would never know how his presence inspired them, because this told them that he cared. He was going to advise his colleagues to end the hunger strike. They have not had time to caucus on the matter, but he was convinced that they would agree.

Then he said: "We were held at the Rooigrond Prison. There everything was bad for us, because the people treated us badly. But if this means that we have to return there, then we will bear that too, because your presence here tonight will inspire us."

Then he addressed me: "I know you are FW's man. We read your statements and watch your activities. All you have to tell FW is that he is doing the right thing, only he also has to start the same process in Bophuthatswana too. Then all will be well with us."

Later, when we said our goodbyes, the man thanked me for having taken the trouble to bring Mandela there. He assured me that he had been following my statements since I had been in Oslo with Mandela. I also had to pass on his greetings to President FW and wish him all of the best.

Mandela thanked the hospital staff for the work they were doing in caring for the hunger strikers. On his way out, he talked to other people who also had come out to greet him.

Outside, Mandela insisted that we accompany them in our vehicle as part of their convoy. It was after two o'clock that morning. Together with Christo and Chris we had a glass of sherry just after three that morning and reflected on all that we had experienced over the past 12 hours. It was unforgettable.

CHAPTER 18

LONG PANTS MINISTER

In September 1991, Chris Botha, my private secretary, stepped into my office in the east wing of the Union building and informed me that the state president wanted to see me urgently. He didn't know what this is all about. Obliging I walked the long walk towards the west wing to the president's office.

The beautiful Sir Herbert Baker-building has been the seat of government since 1913. It is 285 meters long and 100 meters wide. As I walked past the elegant Meintjieskop restaurant where government officials and politicians often went to for discussions, I wondered what my feelings would be when I passed the restaurant again on my return.

When I stepped into FW's office I had immediately sensed that he was not in the mood to dilly dally: "I want to appoint you in the cabinet." I pretended to be calm: "Thank you. That will be an honour." "You were a member of the provincial council in Transvaal, were you not?" he asked and doesn't really wait for an answer: "I don't want to move you to police, because I want to appoint someone who doesn't carry any baggage." My instinct was to immediately ask: "What baggage are you talking about? What 's brewing here?" I realised that this was not the moment to ask questions. FW was in a hurry and I realised I have to get out.

As we parted he said: "Thank you very much and good luck! We'll meet in cabinet."

Just that! I am a member of De Klerk's cabinet.

When I left his office I wanted to jump in the air and click my heels like Andy Capp! Before I do it, Keith Best and his group of backbenchers from Westminster, in my mind's eye stood there, hands on hips as if to say: "But you forget quickly! Do you remember our discussion in 1985? To be appointed as a cabinet minister is an important event in any politician's career, but winning an election and to represent people in parliament is what politics is all about – a cabinet position is a side-issue. It is another working address that opens doors to serve the public."

This memory quickly brought me back to mother earth. I walked slowly back to my office in the east wing, trying to make sense of what had just happened. When I passed the Meintjieskop-restaurant, I paused for a moment to check my emotions before and after the De Klerk

discussion. On my way there I had been a little nervous, uncertain of what to expect. Now, I was calm but excited. I suddenly burst out laughing because I couldn't remember the full title of my new portfolio. FW had mentioned something of provinces but we didn't have a proper discussion about it. He had asked me not to discuss it with anybody before he made the announcement. Checkmate! I had nowhere to turn to and couldn't clarify the situation. My only option was to wait till I heard FW's announcement over the news and then I would have to think on my feet when journalists called me about the appointment.

Fortunately Jannie Roux, director-general in the state president's office called to congratulate me. I explained my awkwardness. He couldn't remember either but checked the official press statement about to be released: "You are appointed as minister of planning, provincial affairs and national housing and as minister of local government in the house of assembly," he mimicked importantly.

This was a mouthful. I was stunned. In my parliamentary career I had never made a study of any of these departments. It suddenly dawned on me that I would have to say goodbye to the many pleasant people I had enjoyed working with. The diplomats – South Africans and foreigners – were wonderful people. South Africa had changed dramatically in this time and the world now looked at us through different eyes. I had broadened my horizons and I had also changed dramatically. It was a privilege to witness how South Africa had lost its polecat status.

I would not have liked to miss out on my stint in FW's cabinet. It certainly wasn't about the official residences and the motor cars and the support staff – far from it; for that we worked much too hard. But to be present when history was made was a privilege.

It was impossible to do justice to the portfolios I held (managed) during this period. To have served for 31 months in the executive is not a long period, but in the nineties in De Klerk's cabinet, it was a lifetime. We slogged from early morning till late at night. One day I said to De Klerk: "There is too much happening – simply too much excitement for one lifetime."

For almost two years I also was a fulltime negotiator together with Roelf Meyer, Dawie de Villiers en Tertius Delport. During 1993, when negotiations really got going, Meyer, De Villiers and I also had offices at the World Trade Centre where negotiations took place. Officials with thick ministerial files that couldn't wait brought them there for me to attend to. Senior officials drove over to Kempton Park to discuss matters that could not wait.

If it had not been for these dedicated and competent officials everything around me would certainly have collapsed.

There is not a manual on "how to be a good minister" available. What you don't know on the day of your inauguration, you have to learn as you work. You learn by trial and error.

Jokingly, De Klerk always would say: "A good minister can do more than one thing at a time." The best example of this is Pik Botha. He would sit in a cabinet meeting, right under De Klerk's nose, and write important memoranda and letters. But at the same time, he would pick up any

injustice intended against anyone or anything that had to do with his portfolio. Nothing escaped his attention.

Cabinet meetings were unkind. Early during my tenure, one of the colleagues buckled under De Klerk's cross examination; Barend du Plessis – then leader of the National Party in Transvaal and minister of finance – wrote me a friendly letter: “Now you know what not to do! A good minister makes sure he understands the problem, discusses it with his officials and important role players, and after these discussions brings the solution to the cabinet. You bring you solutions and not your problems to the cabinet.”

Bill Deedes, member of the British Conservative Party in Westminster and editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, gave me very good advice during an official visit to Britain: “Stand up and make speeches; that is the only way you will make a mark in politics. You can never be a better technocrat than a government official. You must have the feel for politics and know what will work best in practice. Only if you can take that decision can you give direction and lead government officials when they come to you with long winded technical reports and recommendations.”

A few weeks after my appointment to cabinet, a member of the public wrote a letter to the state president and the leader of the opposition, Dr Andries Treurnicht complaining that I couldn't even organise my own office; what chance was there that I would be able to oversee the departments that had been placed under my leadership? He complained that he had received a letter of acknowledgement from Richard Kruger, the administrative head of the office, and that he had had a telephonic discussion with Chris Botha, my private secretary, but that he was not satisfied with their responses and that he was receiving no help from me.

I knew nothing of this letter. Kruger and Botha explained to me that they had forwarded the letter to the department. They first wanted a report from the department before they came to me for direction. They had not received the report yet. The complainant was informed about the proceedings but he would have none of that. That is the reason he had reported me to De Klerk and Treurnicht.

We decided to invite the correspondent to a meeting so that I could explain our position to him and give an undertaking that I would try to speed up the proceedings and act immediately after I had received such a report from the department.

On the arranged date a young man – Kruger and Botha's age – arrogantly walked into my office. I immediately disapproved of his demeanour: how dared he besmirch the names of the young people - his age – in my office and me? I called Kruger and Botha to the meeting and said to the visitor: “Now listen to me sir; you are now going to discuss this matter with my staff while I make tea for the four of us. When I return, I want you to apologise to them for your totally unreasonable allegations levelled against them in your letters. I will refuse to participate in any further discussions with you if you don't do that. You are then welcome to report me again to the state president and the leader of the opposition. You and I will then discuss this matter further in public.”

I immediately left the meeting.

As I was waiting for the water to boil, I had to suppress a nervous chuckle. I hoped it would turn out nicely, because I was angry I had not considered my actions carefully. Things could now go terribly wrong. Eish! To think a young upstart could cause so much stress.

The complainant did have a serious problem regarding squatters in his area, but that didn't give him licence to treat us with such disrespect. I expected him to be reasonable whilst he was waiting for our reaction. The department had to receive information from the provincial administration as well as the local authority before we could prepare an answer to his complaint. When I arrived with tea – now calm and collected – the three young men were full of jokes and the misunderstandings between them brushed aside. The man quickly tendered an apology. After a very cordial discussion we parted with a better understanding of the difficulties we all faced.

The president called me in May 1992: "I am sorry that I am calling you on the telephone but I will be announcing a cabinet reshuffle this evening. I want you to also be the minister of manpower. In this capacity I want you to become more involved in the constitutional negotiating process. I want to bring you closer to the coalface of the negotiations."

This was a very exciting development. Little did I know that this portfolio would irrevocably drive a wedge between me and some of my cabinet colleagues and the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU). It would, however, also help me to understand what negotiation was all about. The lessons learned from key players in the employer and employee organizations would later stand me in good stead.

My first round of discussion with interested parties yielded no results. There was simply too much baggage: too many promises not kept and too many resolutions not implemented. This left everybody disgruntled: Robin Carlisle from the opposition benches, the SAAU and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). Jay Naidoo of Cosatu made a public spat of this. I called him up and said this bickering was not in South Africa's interest. Let's meet and resolve all the outstanding issues once and for all.

Jay Naidoo, Sam Shilowa and Mike Madlala came to see me. We agreed to set up a task team to work through the minutes of all the meetings held between the department and them and list all the outstanding issues. The labour rights for farm workers were one of the many outstanding matters. We regarded reorganisation and the reappointment of the National Manpower Commission a priority. Our task team ploughed through the old minutes for eight hours and made recommendations aimed at taking us forward.

Officials from the department and I then worked towards a possible agreement between us and the relevant stakeholders. One of the senior officials warned me that the farmers would come to Pretoria and protest if we were successful. This comment irritated me: "That is not the test. Is their merit in what we want to achieve?" There was an unequivocal yes to this question. A further remark by one

of the officials: “I don’t believe that the SAAU is negotiating in good faith with you” was all I needed to proceed with the Cosatu negotiations.

I then called Boet Fourie, president of SAAU, to explain the tentative agreement to him to ensure that he wouldn’t read about it in the press. However, he was abroad. In his absence I called Chris du Toit, who represented the SAAU in labour matters and informed him that I was going to implement the outstanding agreements as I had previously explained to him when I paid a courtesy visit to him on his farm.

The following day, after a six hour meeting, Cosatu and I agreed on how the outstanding matters would be addressed. We then signed our agreement and released a joint media statement.

Mike Madlala said to me: “Mr Wessels, you must not resign. There is going to be big trouble.”

“I will not resign, but I might be fired.” I responded.

“If that happens, there will be mass action.”

There was no reaction to our media statement. Cosatu then released its own statement whilst I was in Port Elizabeth attending an important meeting about Local Government. In their statement, Cosatu created the impression that our agreement was a direct result of their interventions. That set the cat amongst the pigeons.

Just before the weekly cabinet meeting Dawie de Villiers cagily walked over to my seat and warned me that immediately after the opening prayer the sparks would fly; my agreement with Cosatu had caused quite a commotion. The Minister of Agriculture, Kraai van Niekerk, had complained to FW, asking him to haul me over the coals. I payed no attention to the opening prayer but used the opportunity to harness my thoughts.

Hardly had the prayer ended when FW swooped onto me like a hawk. He was up in arms. “I want to deal with the controversy regarding the Minister of Manpower before we start with our agenda. Why did you not consult the relevant stakeholders? Why did you enter into an agreement with Cosatu without consulting us?” I took my time and explained how all the relevant sections of the agreement had been approved long before I became Minister of Manpower. I explained the efforts I had made to inform the relevant stakeholders – including the SAAU – that I was going to implement all the previous agreements and also promulgate the amendment to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, which had already been piloted through parliament, which provided that farm workers would now also benefit from this Act. These agreements were old hat and the stakeholders, including the SAAU, had no reason for complaint. One of the major actions would be the reorganisation and reappointment of the National Manpower Commission. I had not consulted cabinet because cabinet had already, under the stewardship of my predecessors at different cabinet meetings, agreed to everything contained in this agreement.”

After my detailed explanation, the highly respected Minister of Finance, Derek Keys, sitting next to me, whispered: “You made a meal of it.” I was calm because whilst speaking I had sensed that FW was now listening to another side of the story. He had not expected this. He then said; “Because of this controversy I will have to intervene and meet the SAAU. The ministers of Agriculture and Manpower must join me in this meeting.” We agreed on a date there and then but there would be no time for the three of us to meet and prepare for the discussions with SAAU. This left me in the dark because I didn’t know what FW had made of my explanation.

To prepare for the meeting, I consulted widely amongst the stakeholders. Without exception, they all agreed that it was a very good agreement. The only criticism some representatives from employer organisations expressed was that they were not part of the agreement. “We are jealous that you didn’t include us in the agreement, but we are not making a song and dance about it because we don’t want to undermine the agreement.” The message was also very clear: “If you are repudiated by FW, you will have no credibility. You will be dead in the water.”

I then decided that my point of view was not to be tampered with or watered down. If I am expected to eat humble pie, I will resign. I prepared a letter of resignation and a short media statement. Armed with this I went to the meeting at the Union buildings. This gave me confidence. I had also remembered the old truism: “If you stand for nothing, you will fall for anything.”

After FW’s words of welcome and the formal introductions, the SAAU delegation pounced, asking for my immediate dismissal. FW immediately rejected their demand out of hand: “I appoint my ministers. I dismiss them when I don’t have confidence in them. I have confidence in this minister. So let’s get on with the business.” I smiled inwardly; I wouldn’t need the letter of resignation. The meeting agreed that the discussions between SAAU and myself would resume, ensuring the implementation of the agreement. Farm workers would be brought into the fold of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act – that was a non-negotiable.

After the meeting FW walked up to me with a big smile. “I could never allow them to tell me who I should appoint in my cabinet.” I couldn’t stop laughing: SAAU as well as the farming lobby in cabinet and caucus had overplayed their hand.

In its February edition in 1993, the glossy Afrikaans magazine *De Kat* published a list of influential South Africans. I was included in this group; “ ... [D] it sit nie in enigeen se broek om die wit boere in die openbaar aan te vat nie. Hy is erg verlig en het hom maklik by die veranderde omstandighede in die land aangepas. Die man het murg in sy pype. ” (Not anyone will stand his ground against the white farmers. He easily adapted to the changed circumstances in the country. The man has guts).

If ever I had been involved in a political fight for a just cause, it was this one. I have no regrets whatsoever about this battle or the tensions it had caused!

In the late December 1992 Ferial Haffajee (now editor of *City Press*) wrote in *The Weekly Mail*: “Wessels had taken the department from one of the most contested and controversial to one of the

most productive in the short time he has been in office. Unlike his predecessors, there will be no backtracking for Wessels even if faced with pouting farmers and hysterical housewives who have long resisted regulation for their workers.” In this interview I said: “Reform is a serious matter and you have to be punctual about it. I will not be the captive of anybody, be it the department, employer organisations or employee organisations. The best arguments should carry the day, not because of the institutions or the personalities involved.”

I was never part of De Klerk’s inner circle. That didn’t bother me, because he was always open and willing to listen to anyone. There was always an opportunity to influence debate. If you didn’t enjoy debate, he could unsettle you. Nobody could, however, complain that he didn’t get an opportunity to state his case.

That is the reason why De Klerk could hold his cabinet and caucus together. In some respects those cabinet members didn’t belong together – we had different views about the future. With the National Party’s loss of power and De Klerk’s departure from the political scene the National Party caucus followed almost every political leader in sight – Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki (ANC), Mangosuthu Buthelezi (IVP), Bantu Holomisa (UDM), Mosiuoa Lekota (Cope), Kenneth Meshoe (ACDP), Louis Luyt (Federal Alliance), Tony Leon and Helen Zille (DA), Cassie Aucamp (National Action), and also Pieter Mulder (VF+).

EYE TO EYE NEGOTIATIONS

Chapter 19 “Viva negotiations!”

The “waiting” which Vincent Crapanzano writes about in his book *The Whites of South Africa* (1985) and which I mentioned earlier, was over. The “something” that Crapanzano claims everyone knew had to happen, was about to happen. Formal eye-to-eye negotiations had begun!

The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) would be the vehicle. About 228 delegates from 19 political parties attended and pledged their commitment to negotiations by signing the Declaration of Intent at the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park. The air was electric. Delegations arrived brimming with excitement. Nelson Mandela moved from one delegation to the other and greeted them like a statesman: “Good morning. Good to see you. How are you?” He acted like the host that had invited everyone to his function.

Some members of the NP-delegation looked miserable, as if they had been dragged there against their will. They were clearly not excited about this historic moment. This forced the NP on the backfoot and there it would stay till the end of the process 5 years later when the Constitution was signed in the George Thabe Stadium in Sharpeville.

The negotiating process had, amongst others, to deal with voting rights for all South Africans, ownership of land, the form of the state, demarcation of provinces and their powers, the function

of the courts, education, official languages, national symbols and the seat of parliament. South Africa's troubled past was never far away. All the contentious issues had their genesis in the imbalanced Peace Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902 and all the political developments that had sprung from that Treaty.

The white cause was a lost cause before the negotiations had even started. The harm done by past injustices, associated with white privilege, were immeasurable. White power, white exclusivity, was so discredited that well-meaning concepts such as self-determination, power sharing, checks and balances and veto rights in a consensus-seeking government could not sugar coat the injustices of the past. All these concepts and mechanisms had to stand the test of hard-hitting debates and could not be slipped into the Constitution unnoticed.

Roelf Meyer was the right man to support FW and lead the NP negotiating team to achieve the NP objectives. He didn't have a match in NP circles; he could hold the quarrelling factions together, earn the respect of the ANC and also massage the overworked government officials and technical advisors.

In rugby and football jargon, one can say that I played from the bench. My role was a supportive one. At Codesa I often had to hold the practice bags for Roelf Meyer en Dawie de Villiers. Sometimes I had the opportunity to play when I had to stand in for them or when I had special responsibilities at Codesa, or when I became the deputy chairman of the Constitutional Assembly in 1994 when the final Constitution of 1996 was written.

How I had arrived at the negotiating table and what I had to do there, was not important to me. What mattered to me was that I was there when negotiations started in December 1991 at Codes 1 in Kempton Park. I was part of the process until Nelson Mandela signed the Constitution on 10 December 1996 in Sharpeville, Vereeniging. That was a journey I would not have missed for anything in the world. To be so close to the constitution drafting process was the most pleasing experience of my political career.

What I enjoyed most were the serious debates – also the intense arguing – where everyone knew that there was no room for personal feuds because the big issues had to be resolved. Tim du Plessis – former editor of *Rapport* and *Beeld* – made a true observation when he said that in South Africa there are two kinds of people; those that were at Kempton Park and those that were not. This statement is only partially correct because in addition to the Kempton Park experience there were also those who stayed the course to Vereeniging and Sharpeville where Nelson Mandela signed the Constitution on 10 December 1996.

A group of negotiators visited Australia in 1994 to get a feeling for how their Constitution functions. Pravin (PJ) Gordhan – later Commissioner of the South African Revenue Service and Minister of Finance – and I one Saturday morning wandered through the street market in Melbourne. We wanted to buy leather jackets to remind us of this visit. Different traders were selling very attractive products. We inquired about the price and the quality of the jackets and

then decided to support a Russian lady. She was pleasant to do business with, the quality of the jackets was good and the price suited us. It was a family business, her husband and children made the jackets. To Russia she never wanted return in spite of democratisation there. The Russian mentality, the authoritarian nature of those in power and the citizens always wanting the government to support them, will never change.

I had my purse in my hand but Gordhan pushed me aside: he had other ideas. “Are you sure this is the best price you can offer us?” he asked. “Yes” came the reply. “Are you sure? We are happy with the quality of your products but are now going to look around in the market to see if we can’t find a similar products cheaper. If not, we will return and support you.” The lady, visibly anxious, lowered the price. Gordhan went through the same process again with the same positive outcome. We then nonetheless went for a short walk-about before buying the jackets. When we parted, she asked: “Where do you come from?” Gordhan answered: “We are from South Africa; we know how to negotiate.” “I can see that!” she answered good-humouredly.

The newspapers and Hansard tell the story of the Conservative Party that didn’t want to negotiate. They didn’t want to talk to Nelson Mandela and his ANC alliance. Their demands were unrealistic and unacceptable.

When the negotiations started in 1991 in Kempton Park, the thousands of voters who supported the Conservative Party during the 1989 general elections were not represented at Codesa. They were the only party not represented when the negotiations began.

I can understand why leading members left the party. Koos van der Merwe (chief information officer) joined the Inkatha Freedom Party; Andries Beyers (who won a critical by-election in Potchefstroom) joined the National Party and the Mulder brothers together with Constand Viljoen formed their own party, the Freedom Front.

Kallie Kriel and other young guns left the CP because they believed that you cannot complain when your concerns are not adequately argued by others at the negotiating table; you had to face your adversaries yourself. Many of those who complain so bitterly about the negotiating process conveniently forget about this pathetic chapter in their own past. They want to wish it away. The CP first stayed away and then walked away – the Mulders and Constand Viljoen later had to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. They did well but the time lost – before they reported to the starting blocks – they could never regain. In my mind there was never room for the self-determination ideas advanced by the conservatives because it was nothing more than a sugar coated white “homeland” (*volkstaat*).

They had a right to put their case, but they had to put their case themselves by arguing and persuading the negotiators; they could not expect others to do it for them.

Debate and persuasion was never part of the armoury of the old CP and AWB-members' political behaviour.

With the constitutional negotiations picking up speed the AWB under the leadership of Eugene Terre'Blanche together with other Afrikaner groupings felt isolated and excluded from the process. They wanted to show to the world that the voices of many Afrikaners were not heard during the negotiations. This they wanted to do by demonstrating at the place where the negotiations took place. On the 15 June 1993 they burst through the fence of the World Trade Centre. Panic broke out. Participants of the negotiations screamed and ran to their offices. They yelled: "Where are the police? If this were black people they would have fired at them like they did at Sharpeville (1960) and Soweto (1976)."

I was deeply disturbed as I watched this drama unfold: the arrogance of the intruders, the lack of leadership by their ring-leaders as well as the absence of senior officers to take charge of the situation. I was still trying to figure what was happening when two young policemen came to me and said: "It is not safe here; we have to take you away."

Moments later the AWB members, in an armoured vehicle, burst through the glass doors of the World Trade Centre. In the corridor – outside the offices were most of the negotiators where bundled into – a handful of young policemen – with cocked weapons – took position.

The AWB ringleaders – armed to their teeth – ran up the stairs in the direction of the negotiators; heaven knows to do what. The table was set for a bloody tragedy when an unsung hero stepped forward to take responsibility way beyond his years or rank.

The uniform of the first AWB-man indicated that he was a colonel. The young police sergeant – Hannes du Toit – addressed him respectfully: "Colonel, are we going to shoot one another or are we going to talk? I want to go to the rugby tomorrow."

This respectful and very human address stopped the self-styled AWB colonel dead in his tracks. He paused ... That was the moment when sanity prevailed. That was the turning point in the AWB's uninvited visit to the World Trade Centre negotiators. After that, intervention opened the door for further discussions and paved the way for the departure of the uninvited guests. They had made their presence felt and had made their point. They left peacefully.

The negotiations proceeded as if this unruly demonstration never had happened. It is disconcerting to me that a few young policemen could negotiate with the AWB and stopped the right wingers from firing at the people and thereby avoid a tragedy, whilst senior leaders, such as Constand Viljoen, was unable to speak with the protestors.

Later that day, a group of people came to hand over a petition regarding a land claim. Mac Maharaj and I were asked to receive the petition. We were introduced to them. When I was introduced, I was received lukewarmly. After the petition had been handed to us, we each had the opportunity to make a speech. Maharaj spoke first and began with the usual "Amandla!" (Power) the protestors responded with an enthusiastic "Awethu" (for us).

Whilst Maharaj spoke, I was making plans to save the situation in front of the television cameras. I also knew that as a member of the De Klerk government I should allow Maharaj to steal the limelight.

I considered my options. To roar: “Viva National Party!” with clenched fist would be out of tune. To shout with clenched fist “Viva negotiations!” would be in stark contrast with the right wing Afrikaners earlier that day. But how do I do that, remembering that the National Party earlier published a photo of Pierre Cronje, former PFP parliamentarian when he gave the power salute with a clenched fist (right hand) during a public meeting to embarrass him and his party?

“Viva negotiations!” was the correct option, but it had to be done with the left hand.

When I stuck a fist in the air and energetically roared: “Viva negotiations!” there was friendly laughter and a spontaneous “Viva!” response.

The ice was broken; hostilities forgotten. I could address a sympathetic audience. I promised that the petition would receive the necessary attention. Problems would not be solved in a rude and undisciplined manner as the one we had experienced earlier that day from the AWB and its fellow travellers. I assured the protestors that they had done the right thing to speak with us. We were listening.

In the weeks that followed, Macharaj, mocked: “You must come for lessons that I can teach you how to become an activist. You must punch the air with your right fist.” My defence was that one uses the right fist when you are in a fighting spirit. You use your left fist when you want to reason and debate issues. He laughed as he listened to my glib explanation.

In spite of my cautious approach I didn’t escape criticism. When my good natured “Viva negotiations!” salute appeared on TV a very concerned viewer wrote a letter to FW: “Can you trust this Leon Wessels?”

De Klerk once again had to buck-jump and defends me. In a friendly letter he put the lady’s mind at ease.

When the negotiations at Kempton Park were reaching its climax in 1993, I received a call from the German Embassy, a very important diplomat was visiting South Africa and he wanted to talk to me. This turned out to be the Dr Hans-Joachim Vergau, the man I first had met in 1982. We were pleased to see each other again after so many years. During lunch he said: “I wanted to see you again and offer my congratulations. This must be a wonderful feeling. I am sure you can’t believe that you have experienced all of this. When we first met in Germany there were not many people who believed that you guys would manage to pull it off! I was one of the few who were hopeful that you would resolve your problems peacefully around the negotiating table. It was the young *verligtes* that gave me hope. Thank you for not betraying my hopes!”

This discussion was one of most pleasant memories I have of that period.

A Transitional Council, representative of all the parties that had participated at Codesa, was formed to manage the last phase before the democratic elections in April 1994. I was the government representative on the sub-council of foreign affairs together with John Barratt, Stella Sigcau, Godfrey Hetisani, Osman Gani en Aziz Pahad (later Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs). The mandate of the sub-council was to achieve the broadest possible consensus on matters affecting SA's international interests; securing agreements with the international community regarding the contribution that community could make to the peaceful transition to democracy in SA, and to ensure that any foreign policy initiative benefits the country as a whole and not one or other political party.

On 23 December 1993 there were dramatic last speeches in the old House of Assembly, so much history and so many historical debates. The House of Assembly dissolved never to meet again. It was a very melancholy atmosphere which did not sit well with me. Elsewhere in parliament the sub-council on foreign affairs was in session. I could not get away quickly enough from where there was nothing doing and to be with the birth of something new. One group wanted to talk about a funeral and the other group about a birth. It was the start of one of the most wonderful experiences in my political career. For four months I could rub shoulders again with my old friends at Foreign Affairs, make new friends and also experience how important people and organisations experienced the dawning of the new South Africa.

The sub-council held 21 meetings and during official visits abroad had the privilege of meeting influential people and organisations: the United Nations Secretary-General; the Commonwealth Secretary-General; the Organisation for African unity Secretary-General; European Union Commissioners – External political relations, Co-operation and Development and External Economic Relations; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Secretary-General; the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

The sub-council participated in regional planning conferences in Nairobi, Paris, Singapore and Washington. Meetings were also held at New York – United Nations; Brussels – European Union; Addis Ababa – Organisation for African Unity; London – Commonwealth; Geneva – UN specialised agencies and meetings in The Hague, Tokyo and Seoul.

There were a few interesting moments during the deliberations and travels of the sub-council.

In one of the little halls at the United Nations, I listened to Jim Stewart, SA's representative at the UN and Tebogo Mofole – the ANC representative – talk. While watching the sun set through the screens, I was amazed how two people from the same country had worked in two completely different and separate worlds. Africa House in New York used to be the place where African States and the ANC caucused. It had been totally inaccessible for white South Africa. And now we were here. It no longer was a taboo.

In Washington, our ambassador, Harry Schwartz, gave one of the biggest receptions ever in the official residence. Outside, everything was covered in snow. This prompted him to remark how wonderfully things were changing in South Africa. Only a short while ago, if someone would have suggested that Lindiwe Mabuza (ANC representative in the USA) and him would meet and spend an evening together, “all hell would have frozen over.”

To walk into the OAU Building in Addis Ababa and to meet Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim, together with his other senior colleagues, was a special experience. There we met in the organisation’s inner sanctuary and I delivered a short speech – it simply was an opportunity I could not pass up on, stating our sincerity in wishing to embrace change in our country and to build Africa, hand in hand with our fellow Africans. These sentiments, coming from somebody representing the hated old order in SA, were very well received and the sincerity thereof was not questioned.

CHAPTER 20

From White Power (Rule by Law) to democracy (Rule of Law)

When the National Convention met in 1908/1909 to form the Union of South Africa, a Bill of Rights was not part of their thinking. They were mainly concerned with reconciliation between the English and Afrikaans (or Dutch) speaking sections of South Africa. These negotiations produced a constitution that adopted the British Westminster style of government in which political power would be won by a simple majority. The question of voting rights for blacks would be left up to each of the four self-governing colonies to decide for itself (the Cape and Natal based their franchise on a property qualification; the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal denied all blacks the vote).

This set the tone for the future. One of the main features of the South African constitutions of 1910, 1961 and 1983, were the absence of a Bill of Rights that protected the citizens against abuse of power by the state. These constitutional dispensations were grounded in race and did not ensure the participation of all South Africans. Structures created to accommodate those not represented in parliament lacked credibility and created a feeling of resentment.

A further feature of these parliaments was that parliament was sovereign, which meant one parliament could not bind another and the courts could not overturn their decisions: the will of the majority of the whites could not be challenged by the black majority, politically or legally. It was white rule by law; enforced with all the instruments and resources of the state.

The intention of the 1983 Constitution was to broaden democracy to allow for the participation of the South African Indian and Coloured communities in the national parliament. Other mechanisms and forums were considered for Black South Africans but not in parliament.

When the 1983 constitution was debated, the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) wanted to include a bill of rights that would protect the rights and freedoms of the individual in the constitution.

The National Party Government rejected this proposal on the following grounds: The rights of the individual could be protected through the Courts and the common law in the normal course of legal practice; if you want to protect the rights of the individual, you must do that in the context of the group. Only by protecting the rights of nations/peoples and communities can the rights of minorities be protected; the courts should not be able to review or overturn the decisions of parliament because that would give them a legislative function and would make them the supreme legislature.

The 1983 constitution was an opportunity missed. The race-based, half measured constitution resulted in intensified conflict and strife.

The internal democratic forces and the liberation movements in exile intensified the armed struggle and other forms of protest against the government. Protests, demonstrations, mass meetings, boycotts, people's courts and necklacings were the order of the day in an attempt to make the country ungovernable.

The South African government's viewpoint was that lawlessness and destabilisation would not be tolerated. Such conduct met with action in terms of security legislation and emergency regulations. This was based on the common law principle that the safety of the nation should be the highest principle. There was no debate beyond this slogan.

In February 1993 the NP government responded to the human rights debate in the country – they had come full circle. It took 10 years of internal and external pressure to persuade them to abandon its position against a bill of rights, accept that groups rights should be protected by acknowledging the rights of the individual; that in South Africa, given the legacy of apartheid, there would be a need for affirmative action provision in the constitution, that the courts should be allowed to review parliamentary legislation and executive action, even a declared state of emergency by the executive.

There were certain fundamental differences between the parties – human rights issues, after all, form the heart of political and ideological thinking. These differences had to be ironed out during a number of meetings between the negotiators – bi-lateral meetings between political parties behind closed doors and technical meetings between different structures setup by the political parties.

During these closed meetings when contentious issues were discussed, negotiators spoke frankly without pulling their punches while remaining true to the hopes and aspirations of their constituencies. In these robust sessions the intention never was to alienate anybody or to abandon the ideal of negotiating a bill of rights that would meet the requirements of South Africa. The one aspect that was never questioned was that the South African Government would in future be a limited government and act only in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

To whom do you want to entrust the care of your poverty—politicians or judges? That was the question which had to be answered during constitutional negotiations—should socio-economic rights be included in the bill of Rights, that is, rights over which the courts would supervise?

Politicians have a tendency only to pretend to be listening during political debate without really doing so—they are actually considering their reply to you. Judges, most of them, listen to what

you say in court. To them it what is being said is important. Usually it is of less importance *how* things are said. In spite of the assurance that you will get a fair opportunity to plead your poverty case in the courts and that you will be listened to intently, it costs a small fortune to fight open your way through the courts, right up to the Constitutional Court. It is extremely expensive and unaffordable for most people to put across their pleas of poverty in this manner.

Politicians, on the other hand, control the state's financial coffers. Relief from poverty has to come from that source. In terms of old political dogma judges should keep their hands out of those coffers. It is the prerogative of the government to put together a country's budget and to determine the priorities for that budget. The politicians also have to carry out the judgments of judges. The final agreement was that the politicians would care for the poor, but that the judges should look out that it is done in a reasonable manner.

For the National Party's delegation that participated in the negotiations at the time it was an intellectual exercise because none of them knew the crude South African poverty from own experience—all of us knew stories about how poor our parents and forebears had been, but were representative of a generation whose people had overcome it—many were farm owners and not sharecroppers as their forebears had been. The rest were professional people. Our supporters were the advantaged group—afraid of losing that which they possessed and not filled with expectation of what they would gain. Not many of that group of supporters actually were beating the drums because we would be rid of the yoke of apartheid, because they had not really suffered under that burden. Also, there were aspirations to continue in power in the years to follow, so the state treasury should not become overburdened with unrealistic and justiciable constitutional rights.

Next to this, the ANC delegation was knee-deep into the poverty question—the parents of some of them were illiterate or only had a rudimentary education and lived in very humble homes. Of course, there also were people who had been raised in highly educated prosperous homes. The limitations on where you could live and where and when you could move had forced them, however, to gain excellent first-hand knowledge of the country's poor, displaced and homeless people in spite of their affluence.

ANC supporters regarded their leaders not only as political liberators, but also as front runners in the battle against poverty. That also became the flag under which they would sail—a better life, also economically-speaking, for all.

The differences in approach were, by nature, deeply philosophical. The one side wanted to limit the state powers and, therefore, opposed the inclusion of socio-economic powers. The other side wanted extended state power and, therefore, was in support of including socio-economic rights. Also, it was felt that the traditional divisions of power between the executive authority, parliament and the courts would become unnecessarily vague with the inclusion of such rights. The undemocratically elected elite, the judges, would be given too much power through such a step.

The argument was that there was a growing international tendency that human rights ought not to be seen in a negative light only (that is, the state may not interfere with my rights) but also should be viewed positively (that is, I can lay claim to and force the state through the courts to do certain things for me—for example, to look after my socio-economical exigencies). There is

wide acceptance internationally for the idea that all human rights, political and civil rights as well as socio-economic rights are interdependent and inseparable.

In countries such as China and Cuba they believe differently and there the point of view exists that socio-economic rights hold sway. All other rights are reduced to nothing.

At an international conference in China a Cuban delegate preached their point of view with great conviction. While delivering her address, she choked and indicated with panicked gestures that the Chinese chairperson should pour her some green tea. After having had some of the tea, she regained her voice and continued her address.

When I had to put across the point of the interdependency and inseparability of human rights, I made reference to this incident. The Cuban lady's need for green tea (representative of socio-economic rights) would have come to nothing if a limit had been placed on her. See! Those rights are inseparably intertwined, I told them like some fancy magician.

The audience, of which the vast majority was Chinese, smiled courteously as if to say: Good point, but you will not convince us to part from our tried and tested ways that easily. Also, you are not as clever as either Confucius or Mao.

During negotiations the question had to be answered—how would South Africa deal with its past? Would it be talked about or would we try and ignore it and just push ahead? It was clear that it could not be ignored. However, you also could not deal with it in a spirit of revenge.

In May 1990, in the course of a long and highly delightful conversation with Breyten Breytenbach, his remarks about the past astonished me. "All of us only act with the insight we have about events at a specific point in time. The main question which South Africans still have to provide an answer about is how they will deal with the past—will we talk about it or will we try to ignore it like the Germans did."

Years later, during visits to different countries, it became clear to me that people's appeals to let the past be were falling on deaf ears. People want to know what happened and victims want to tell their stories. History can never be locked away—even if the security files are shredded.

When the epilogue to the transitional constitution was accepted at a late stage of the negotiations in 1993, many breathed a sigh of relief. The relief was that the truth now would come to the fore in an orderly way and not in a spirit of revenge. The Epilogue made it possible for many to support the 1994 democratic elections as well as the subsequent handing over of power.

A country has to know its history. We have wounded one another and the time has come to settle old divisions. It was the beginning of a path through the past that South Africa had to take in order to arrive at the future.

The drafters of the Transitional Constitution realised that the transition to a democratic order only would be possible if there was a commitment to reconciliation and national unity. It was realised, too, that certain aspects of the past could not be put right and that sometimes it would be necessary just to keep on walking on the new road ahead. This is the reason why the Epilogue in the Transitional Constitution was accepted under the headline of: National Unity and

Reconciliation after the National Party government and the ANC had come to an agreement about it.

This Constitution builds a historical bridge between the past and a deeply divided society that was characterised by discord, conflict, unprecedented suffering and injustice, and a future which is established on the acknowledgement of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence as well as development opportunities for all South Africans, regardless of colour, race, creed or sex.

The aim for national unity, the welfare of all South African citizens and peace requires reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the social restructuring of society.

The acceptance of this Constitution creates a solid foundation for the people of South Africa to bridge the divisions and discord of the past that had led to severe violations of human rights, the breaking of the principles of humaneness during violent conflict and a legacy of hate, fear, guilt and revenge. The opportunity now presents itself to put it right on the basis that there is a need for understanding and not for a thirst for revenge, a need for recovery and not for retribution, a need for ubuntu (common humanity) and not for victimisation.

In order to promote this reconciliation and restructuring, amnesty has to be granted with regard to acts, omissions and misdemeanours connected to political aims and that was perpetrated in the course of the conflict of the past. To this end Parliament must adopt a law in terms of this Constitution which will determine a firm cut-off date, being a date after 8 October 1990 and prior to 6 December 1993, in which provision is made for mechanisms, measures and procedures, including tribunals, if necessary, through which such amnesty should be dealt with at any time after the passing of the law. With this Constitution, and the associated obligations, we, the people of South Africa come to meet a new chapter in the history of our country. [*Own highlighting*]

This paved the way for parliament to pass the necessary legislation in terms of which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was brought about. The instruction was to paint as complete a picture as possible of the gross human rights violations that had taken place since the Sharpeville tragedy on 21 March 1960 when protesters were shot at and 69 people had died tragically.

Applications for amnesty also had to be considered. Such an application would succeed if the applicant fully disclosed all the relevant facts about the human rights violation and if the act had a direct political aim. The law determined a set of criteria that had to be considered in judging an application, among others the relationship between the crime committed and the political aim as well as the proportionality of the crime and the political aim.

In National Party circles the atmosphere was tense and polarised between the full time negotiators and the other colleagues in cabinet. Every time you returned from Kempton Park and joined the cabinet your colleagues – those who were not there the whole day, every day, or those that never came there – looked at you as if you were the enemy.

Roelf Meyer and I were late for a cabinet meeting. There was a big protest organised by Cosatu and the SACP at the World Trade Centre. Our exit was blocked. Eddie Meiring, police officer, asked us to leave the WTC unnoticed and move in the direction of the Pretoria highway running next to the WTC grounds. We must then climb over the two meter high barbed wired fence. His colleagues from Pretoria would then pick us up next to the highway and drive us to the cabinet meeting.

That posed quite a challenge: to sneak away on foot where there was always a beehive of activity and a journalist around every corner. I could imagine the questions the journalists would ask if

they saw us slipping away. Are you running away from the protestors? Why are you climbing over this barbed wired fence with you smart suites? Where are you going? Why are people picking you up next to the highway?

Like naughty school boys slipping away from school we gingerly walked out of the building not to draw any attention. To have my trousers torn was not my greatest fear. I was afraid I would plunge into the dust on the other side of the fence. I didn't want to enter the cabinet room looking tattered.

Inside the depressed cabinet Roelf and I could exchange glances and smile about our adventure. That was the moment that I realised I didn't enjoy being in cabinet anymore. The cabinet represented the past and Kempton Park represented the future; the one the dead the other the living; a funeral and the other the birth of a new united nation.

I often had the sense that most of my cabinet colleagues were totally unconnected with the hard realities we were exposed to day after day at Kempton Park.

I listened carefully to the debates in cabinet and posed the question to myself: who of the 23 members of cabinet will support us three – Roelf Meyer, Dawie de Villiers and I, asked by FW to over and above our cabinet duties also be present at Kempton Park on a fulltime basis – when push comes to shove. I carefully took stock – which colleagues could we rely on and who was not trustworthy?

I started with myself. I was afraid. Would I have the courage of my convictions to stand my ground when the crunch came? I considered my views and decided that I could trust myself more than anybody else but wasn't sure that I wouldn't falter under pressure. I gave myself 0.7 out of a possible 1.

I trusted Dawie and Roelf more than anybody else in cabinet, but less than myself; they received 0.6 each. Pik Botha always understood what was right and what was wrong, but you never knew what he was going to do. He was always on his own highway and not a team player. He was busy with his own negotiations, parallel with the official negotiations. He received a 0.5. Based on the cabinet debates everyone else received less than 0.5. From some quarters around the table one couldn't expect much support, depending on the matter under discussion, but there were others from whom only opposition could be expected – they received 0. The average was a poor 3.5.

One morning, before another difficult cabinet meeting, I told Roelf and Dawie that there we were only 3.5 of us. They laughed and said I was too strict with my marking. They had more confidence in some of the colleagues. I wouldn't give way and pointed out to them how some of the colleagues they had so much confidence in barked with the dogs and ran with the hares.

The stark reality was a very simple one: if FW turned against us, these colleagues would pounce on us like wounded prey. They would maul us. They would, however, not have the courage to stand up against FW. Not a single one of them had the courage to lead a revolt against FW and walk away from the cabinet.

This was simple political arithmetic: 3.5 and FW constituted a majority! The rest would follow. FW had to be on our side at all times! Without him, we were doomed!

The media had identified six colleagues as ‘antis’, that is the group opposing the direction and pace of the political changes. The main characters, according to media reports, were: André Fourie, Hernus Kriel, Tertius Delpont, Rina Venter, Danie Schutte en Japie van Wyk was. Fourie years later claimed that they had tried to slow the pace and change the direction of the negotiations, but De Klerk wouldn’t listen.

In any cabinet the honourable thing to do – after the chairperson had listened to the debate and had given his summary – is to pack your bags and step aside if you don’t agree with the chairperson.

The feather in FW’s cap is that he managed to keep this diverse lot together. The six antis later supported three different parties (DA, National Action and the VF+). The cabinet members supported nine different parties.

Tertius Delpont – a good friend with whom I could walk along distance, in spite of our political differences – one day said to me: “I stand for justice and you stand for democracy. FW never had the opportunity to choose between the two radical poles because he always had to decide whether he was going to accept or reject the compromise that came from the cabinet working committees. If he had the opportunity to choose between the opposing views my point of view always would have carried the day.”

The hard facts are that the antis never put a viable proposal on the table and buckled before De Klerk’s decisions.

In cabinet you put your case softly and then listen to the reaction. If the reaction is lukewarm, you take your case to the court of public opinion. You stand up and make speeches as Bill Deedes had advised me to do. If you are not repudiated, you continue your struggle. Often people would mumble about my views, but FW never repudiated me. That gave me courage to press on. I would not allow the grumblers to sideline me and ultimately push me out. FW would have had to chase me away himself.

A politician, just like a negotiator, must know what his Batna (“Best Alternative for a Negotiated Agreement”) is; you must know what you stand for. If you stand for nothing you fall for anything, the old saying goes. I stood for democracy within a constitutional state. For me the choice was a simple one –constitutionalism or populism.

It was with a sense of relief and joy that negotiators witnessed Mandela and De Klerk sign the agreement that captured the Interim Constitution, well after midnight on 17 November 1993 at Kempton Park. This historical event and the subsequent general elections launched South Africa into orbit. The old pariah state had become the envy of the world. The justiciable Bill of Rights signalled that South Africa was never to be the same again.

The job was not done yet, but with the Interim Constitution, South Africa could face the future.

Some believe the Interim Constitution was nothing more than a transitional document, yet it had created a constitutional state with all the trappings of a modern constitution; a Bill of Rights and an independent Constitutional Court as well as a Human Rights Commission mandated to protect and promote human rights.

The Interim Constitution made it clear that the Constitution would be the supreme law of the South Africa and that any law or act inconsistent with its provisions would be of no force.

The Bill of Rights was not a final Bill of Rights suitably drafted to serve the long term hopes and aspirations of all South Africans. It did, however provide a solid foundation. One of the constitutional principles that had to be given effect to during the deliberations of the Constitutional Assembly provided that:

“Everyone shall enjoy all universally accepted fundamental rights freedoms and civil liberties, which shall be provided for and protected by justiciable provisions in the Constitution, which shall be drafted after having given due consideration to *inter alia* fundamental rights contained in Chapter 3 of this Constitution”.

This principle provided the basis for the 27 rights embedded in our Constitution.

During the negotiations the greatest denominator between all South Africans and only viable idea was the one of a constitutional state. South Africans were in future not only going to be governed by law but the law had to comply with the rule of law.

CHAPTER 21

WRITING THE CONSTITUTION ... words, words and more words

Codesa started with a declaration of intent (December 1991); two years later (November 1993) we left with an Interim Constitution and a set of principles that would form the foundation for the final constitution. Everyone who felt short changed by the Kempton Park negotiations would have another opportunity during the next two years – the lifespan of the constitutional assembly – to make them heard.

The roles, however, had changed because democracy had spoken; the ANC was now in power. The National Party, with its deputy president and members in cabinet had limited power; they nonetheless still had power in the Government of National Unity (GNU). The NP was increasingly becoming very lonely because they were bitter. They fought like cats and dogs among themselves and with the ANC. To sit as members of the opposition in the GNU was just too much for people who wanted to make a dispute of every disagreement.

In the build-up towards the first election there was wide speculation that I would be invited to serve in the cabinet of the GNU. De Klerk’s friendly comments about my work over the years made me believe that this speculation wasn’t too far-fetched. On the other side of the coin; I had also given him some headaches with maverick statements and by not towing the party line.

On the first day of the newly elected parliament, just before Mandela made his grand entrance as the victor of the elections, Dawie de Villiers walked up to me and whispered softly: “I had been elected for many rugby teams I never played for. You are not elected for the GNU team.”

As I sat quietly in my bench; thinking about Dawie’s words to me and the whole build-up to that moment. I remembered De Klerk’s comments earlier that morning and it suddenly made sense. He had inquired about my well being and with a very strange tone in his voice had wished me well. Just that! At the time, I couldn’t make anything of it.

It flashed through my head that this was a repetition of 1986 when PW Botha, under similar circumstances had snubbed me – there was favourable speculation on my appointment as a deputy minister and then silence, except for words of encouragement by a few friends.

I smiled; I would respond exactly as I had done in 1986: keep my mouth shut.

Dawie’s words liberated me: I could just be myself. I tossed the NP shackles aside and immediately walked over to the ANC benches and welcomed them to parliament. This was a momentous occasion for them. After years of struggle, this group of ANC parliamentarians were the first to take up their seats in a democratically elected parliament. They were ecstatic. I could just feel the NP eyes staring at me. I couldn’t care a damn. I was happy that this was now a representative parliament and couldn’t care less what the NP benches were thinking about “my crossing” the floor. My hand of friendship to the newcomers – now sitting in the benches we used to occupy during all the years that we had been in power – was warmly received.

A few days later, the very same Dawie was next to me in my parliamentary bench. He whispered: “Thabo Mbeki (deputy president) is ready to move. He will propose you as the deputy chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly.”

The Constitutional Assembly (CA) would be the joint session of the national assembly and the senate – charged to write the final constitution. How did this happen? Did FW encourage this? I don’t know; but this didn’t come about without his approval.

I immediately brushed all these questions aside immediately. This was the job for me. I was excited. This challenge invigorated me.

Cyril Ramaphosa’s election as chairperson and my election as deputy chairperson were pleasant experiences. Roelf Meyer, as chief NP negotiator would be deeply involved with the whole process.

After the session, a light finger lunch was served in one of the parliamentary dining halls. Melanie Verwoerd – Member of Parliament for the ANC and later South African ambassador in Ireland – stood next to me and said: “Congratulations! I want to tell you something. The ANC wasn’t keen on a Nationalist filling that position. Any other nomination from the NP benches would not have been successful.”

Her words hung in the air as she walked away. I didn’t reply to her.

Cyril and I only had the opportunity to meet after lunch.

I said to him: “I know the CA elected me as deputy chairperson and not as a joint chairperson. I was taught that the task of the deputy chairperson is to help the chairperson. That is exactly what I am going to do; I am going to support you to ensure that we finish our task within the prescribed time limit of two years.”

That is exactly what happened. Two year later, on 8 May 1996, at 12:08 – eight minutes later than planned – the CA adjourned. The job had been done. This had been the most memorable experience of my political career.

There was a great relationship between Cyril and me: I didn’t discuss politics with him, I didn’t negotiate NP matters with him, we didn’t socialize together – we worked together to write the South Africa Constitution.

Two very interesting offices were allocated to Cyril and me. In the old House Assembly we were separated from our party colleagues. Cyril moved into the office formerly used by the head of state. That was the very same office in which John Vorster, 20 years earlier had had made those uninspiring comments about the political future of the “urban blacks”. Now an ANC-leader from our urban areas was being asked to lead a process to ensure that the legitimate political aspirations of all South Africans would be accommodated in the Constitution.

Next to this office was a committee room, where the head of state used to receive delegations when parliament was in session. I had been in that very same committee room where PW Botha received delegations from the House of Delegates and the House of Representatives – he scolded them because they didn’t take a firm stand against the communist onslaught and they didn’t support him when he pushed further security legislation through parliament.

It was in that office that the executive of the CA met every week to manage the CA process so that it would remain on track.

Often when I visited Ramaphosa in his office or sat in the committee room under his stewardship, I could see Vorster and Botha in my mind’s eye; sometimes I had mock debates with them about the current events. I frequently had to pinch myself to appreciate how profound the changes were that I was privileged to witness at close range.

My office was immediately above Ramaphosa’s office. Earlier occupants of that office had been NP heavy weights: Fanie Botha, Piet Koornhof and FW de Klerk. Their ghosts were not as active as the ghosts in Cyril’s office.

The National Party members occupied the Marks building across the road from parliament. It was a blessing that I was so far away from them. I could see them from a distance – ready to fight with all and sundry.

The idea of not finishing my term became stronger and stronger. The offices that Ramaphosa and I occupied far from our colleagues probably contributed to the fact that we were both looking for other pastures when our task at the CA was done.

One of the interesting moments during my tenure in the CA was when Queen Elizabeth visited parliament. As deputy chair I and other officials from the national assembly and the senate had to welcome her when she, accompanied by Nelson Mandela, entered the parliamentary precincts in front of the senate building with its impressive pillars.

When I looked through my office window, I realised that I was late: I could see her and her entourage not far from our rendezvous. I dashed out of my office and reached the gate just in time to be introduced to her by Nelson Mandela.

This was vintage Mandela; he sung my praises – as he did with everybody – that I blushed. “This is Leon Wessels, a former minister in FW de Klerk’s cabinet. He has played a major role in bringing about democracy. He is currently the Deputy Chair of the Constitutional Assembly, the body that writes our final constitution.” The queen listened with great attention, exchanged a few friendly words; congratulated me on our achievements and wished us well with the further task at hand.

I am not a fan of the British monarchy and was very sceptical about this meeting. I joked about my meeting with “aunty Liesbet”. I had to swallow my words. She impressed me: she listened attentively and clearly was informed about developments in SA. My grandmother, ouma Lettie Nieman, who had only harboured bad feelings about the South African war, would not have been impressed with her grandson’s delight at meeting Queen Elizabeth. I think I would have been able to put her mind at ease by saying: “Don’t worry Ouma, I have not forgotten the hardships that the Boer women and children suffered in the concentration camps.”

In the CA, power sharing between political parties was a problem from day one. The ANC, through Thabo Mbeki, made it clear that constitutionally entrenched power sharing was not acceptable to them. The term of the GNU expired in five years time, that was when the term of the first democratically elected parliament expired. This statement stirred up a hornets’ nest in the NP – they were difficult about the ANC’s stand.

Anyone who had been in a swimming pool with Joe Slovo – the father of the sunset clauses in the Interim Constitution – understood that you would have to use this period (five years) to your maximum advantage to set a pattern. The GNU provisions made it clear that the NP and ANC would share power for a fixed period. That was how the road was demarcated for the GNU.

The first time I really got to know Slovo – senior member in the SACP and MK – was during a bosberaad between the ANC and the NP in 1992. After my early morning jog I went to the swimming pool where I usually met Dawie de Villiers. When I arrived there, I saw there was someone in the water, but it definitely was not Dawie. I hesitated for a moment and considered not swimming when I realised it was Joe Slovo – what would it look like if Joe Slovo and I splashed around in the pool. What would my late father – battlehardened policeman – have said about this?

When Slovo became aware of my presence I had no choice but to jump into the pool with him. Shortly after this, Dawie joined us.

What an interesting discussion I had there! I peppered Slovo with a lot of questions. “How difficult is it for you to put your ideas on paper? How did it come about that you wrote about the sunset clauses?”

He spoke about his own despair and how uncertain he felt when he started to put pen to paper. There were many critical voices in his own ranks; always ready to make mischief against him and the negotiators. From my own experience I knew that it was no different in NP circles.

I had the impression that Slovo genuinely grappled with the challenges that faced the country and that he was sincere in his approach to find a settlement.

After this discussion with Solvo, it was clear to me that the GNU model would only survive if we worked carefully to make it succeed. It would not receive constitutional protection. The fact that first Mangosuthu Buthelezi and later Pieter Mulder served in the executive, proves the point that one can serve in the executive without losing your identity, and that co-operation is possible without constitutional direction.

The walking away from the GNU by the NP will undoubtedly be one of the negative inscriptions on the FW score card.

When De Klerk, stepped out of the GNU the others should have stayed as he had proposed. Pik Botha and Roelf Meyer would have played the part splendidly. De Klerk maintains that Botha didn't want to get involved and stay on without him. Whatever the arguments, the decision to abandon the GNU was taken with not enough consideration. The advocates for this step gained nothing from it – they only brought forward the demise of the National Party.

Now, years after the 1994-election, there are segments in our society where people are still very far apart. Some jump up and down when you dare to suggest that we still live in two worlds. “You keep on harping on the past and do not allow us to move forward,” they say.

I see these different reactions when I participate in radio programs. On the one hand some – mainly white – are concerned about the crime situation and the abundance of human rights: their children are abroad because they can't find work as a result of affirmative action programmes; they are concerned about property rights and language rights. To them, human rights mean nothing because it is just words on paper.

Black listeners talk about poverty and the high level of unemployment. They ask aggressively: “Wessels, do you know what you are talking about? Have you ever been in one of our townships? There can never be reconciliation in this country if one section of our society lives in poverty.”

Although not all young people necessarily know the injustices of apartheid from own experience or the great moments of apartheid, the legacy of apartheid has left them with deep scars. And nowhere is it as clear as in the gap between those that have and those that have nothing.

Over the years one gets used to criticism of the negotiating process. But from some critics one expected more. .

The article written by Kaizer Nyatumba, in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* on 9 September 1999, must certainly get the prize for the most derogatory article about the Constitution. He writes that it is “flawed to perfection”; it is too sophisticated for our circumstances; with so many rights in the Constitution, why can’t people exercise their right to housing? One of the lies in the Constitution must certainly be the farce that there are eleven languages; the joke is the national anthem that people can’t sing properly. As can be expected, he complains without offering any solutions.

However sometimes there are acknowledgements for the work from unexpected quarters. On a visit to the countryside, a stranger, an aged *tannie*, addressed me early one morning at the hotel where I was staying. “I know you, sir.”

“It is possible, because I often visit these parts.”

“No, sir, this is not what I am referring to. You were one of the people who sat talking day after day, night after night at Kempton Park. We watched it with great interest.”

“What did you think would happen?”

“We prayed night after night that something good would come of it.”

“And did something good come from it?”

“Yes, sir, everything is not as it should be yet, but at least our own people can now speak on our behalf.”

This is the meaning of participatory democracy—you do not get all that you want, but you get representatives who are your intercessors and who must guard over your interests.

FROM VEREENIGING TO VEREENIGING

CHAPTER 22 THE LAST FOXHOLE

During the last caucus meeting on 3 May 1996 – attended by members of the provincial legislatures and members of parliament – before the voting would take place on the acceptance or rejection of the Constitution on the 8 May 1996, FW openly flirts with the idea of not voting for the Constitution. This gave the anti-Constitution camp a lot of courage.

Friday evening (3 May), during a meeting of the negotiating council of the Constitutional Assembly, the NP delegation was difficult.

I was sitting next to Ramaphosa, listening to the aggressive debate – it sounded as if parliament was in session and not like a negotiating council at all. After André Fourie, one of the hardliners, had stated his argument about labour matters, Ramaphosa whispered to me: “I can just see he is spoiling for a fight. I am looking forward to it.”

I knew this was a fight Fourie couldn't win; he didn't have the armoury with which to do battle with the former trade unionist.

Roelf Meyer asked for an adjournment to calm the nerves. In the small NP caucus I cautioned against Fourie's tone and state that his arguments are not on firm ground because the settlement that had been reached in 1994 regarding strikes and lockouts could not be cut and pasted into the 1996 negotiations; there was a new political wind blowing and with his stubborn conduct he and his posse was playing into Ramaphosa's hands. My words of caution were the fat in the fire.

Meyer, forever the peacemaker, phoned FW there and then (this was about 23h00) and asked for direction. He was still in his office and invited everyone for a drink when the negotiating council concluded its business for the day. When we returned to the council Meyer proposed that the proceedings be suspended so that we could get new mandates. The NP members immediately left to FW's office.

There still were a few administrative matters that I had to attend to and arrived at the FW's office shortly before midnight. After years in politics you just know when there is tension in the air and that you have been the subject of discussion.

When FW welcomed me he immediately put me on the spot: “I have been informed about the tension regarding some of the outstanding issues. Let's try and resolve them.” I was prepared for this discussion.

There was a concerted effort from the hardliners to undermine anything that pointed in the direction of a settlement with the ANC. They were upset because there was not a permanent power sharing model such as the Government of National Unity built into the Constitution; they had also hoped for a model with stronger devolution of power – federal elements – in the hands of the provinces.

I was calm but very determined when I started talking. I started by telling him what I had read recently in the history books: The Afrikaner women had listened to the hoofs of the horses on the road when the burgers returned and from it knew that the Burghers had lost the war. When I listened to my colleagues, they sounded like losers. Regardless of the outcome of these outstanding matters, I believed that we have achieved enough that I intended to vote for the Constitution on Wednesday 8 May. I didn't even respond to merits of the discussion regarding the right to strike and the lockout of workers by the employers.

I stated my case cautiously and very diplomatically – definitely not as an ultimatum. There was no debate regarding my comments. Shortly afterwards we adjourned.

When I said goodbye, Meyer was standing next to FW and whispered. "I want to talk to you urgently; please wait for me."

We were hungry and decided to have something to bite. Abré Hanekom from the NP support staff and professor Rassie Malherbe, technical advisor who also attended the late night session with De Klerk, went with us to continue the discussion.

Meyer informed us that after the meeting he had spoken to De Klerk privately and had told him that he also wanted to vote for the constitution on Wednesday 8 May, regardless of the further outcome of the sticky points. We had achieved enough and had everything to lose should we cast a negative vote. He didn't want to cause an embarrassment for him in the meeting and had come to tell him that in private. FW looked stunned and surprised.

This was great news for me. I was no longer involved in a solo-flight. The adrenaline was rushing as we debated this matter. At 5 o'clock we ordered bacon and eggs.

Meyer asked Malherbe to draft a document in which we highlighted all the negotiating gains and from a process point of view what we stood to lose if we voted "no" on Wednesday. This document had to reach De Klerk before Meyer and Ramaphosa join De Klerk and Mandela for the final round of negotiations.

The Malherbe-document (eight pages) titled, "Why the National Party has to vote for the Constitution" made it clear: we would lose all our hard-fought gains if we didn't vote "yes" for the Constitution. It would open the door for the ANC to unilaterally draft an alternative constitution where all the agreements reached with the NP would be ignored. They could change the articles regarding the two-thirds majority required to change sections of the constitution as well as the sections required that required a 75% majority. They could change the minimum age of eighteen required for the right to vote, change the requirement for language- and culture rights as well as the provisions regarding property rights.

This document, together with other concessions made by the ANC, made it possible for FW to move the caucus to vote for the Constitution. A number of members on the NP benches found it difficult to hide their displeasure but they voted nonetheless. And they sat. They didn't have the courage to organise a revolt or to protest and walk out. It didn't preclude them from continuing with gossip campaigns. It also didn't stop them from telling anyone who wanted to listen how little they thought of the Constitution.

I was asked to chair the final proceedings: I was over the moon when the Constitution was accepted. There was no stopping Ramaphosa. He jumped up and sang with the cheerful ANC members.

I also wanted to jump for joy. I had one look at the NP-benches and saw them looking glum. They didn't look like a group who was part of the process that had yielded this result. They disowned their own work. I decided not to embarrass FW by joining the singing and the dancing. I sat tight lipped. I was relieved that I would part ways with this disgruntled lot. I was sick and

tired of politics where you were not judged on the merit of your argument but by who supported you.

It was time for me to move on. I wanted to study and practice law. It was time to rekindle my friendships with my friends in academia and the legal profession.

On 7 November 1996, at the last caucus meeting of the year, I had the opportunity to say goodbye: “I made my maiden speech in this caucus in Afrikaans. Things have changed. English speakers joined the NP and made their presence felt. When Dennis Worrall delivered the opening prayer at one of the regular caucus meetings it was the first time I had worshipped in English. When I visited Desmond Tutu in his office, he asked me to join him in prayer before the discussion began. It was the first time I had prayed with a black person.

I cite these small examples to illustrate how much I have changed over the years. To change isn't easy. You cannot change your environment if you do not change yourself. This idea I embraced with the fervour of the newly converted. You have to set the tone. This brought me in conflict with many people in Krugersdorp and in this caucus. I am tired of the never-ending political battles. It is time to move on.”

The internal squabbles in the NP soon reached break point: FW de Klerk and Roelf Meyer parted ways on 17 May 1997. Meyer went on to form the UDM with Bantu Holomisa. Marthinus van Schalkwyk succeeded FW as NP leader in 1997. On 9 April 2005, the Federal Council of the NP decided to merge with the ANC.

Years later (2009), Marida Fitzpatrick of *Beeld* interviewed me and asked: “Why did you not walk away from the NP and Afrikanerdom like Beyers Naudé (theologian and leading Afrikaner anti-apartheid activist)?” This direct question caught me on the wrong foot because I had never compared myself with anybody. I answered: “It is wrong to compare me with Beyers Naudé. His struggle against apartheid was courageous. He was a fearless opponent. My campaign for change was modest and it never was a solo flight. *Verligtes* were fighting for the heart of the NP. We had to do battle within the NP and our battle had to be won there. That happened. That is the reason why I never broke ranks with the NP.”

CHAPTER 23

A CENTURY LATER ... FROM PEACE TO PEACE

The Boer generals and their black contemporaries, in the South African Native National Congress – became the ANC in 1923 – were the founders of a democratic South Africa. The current issues around land, mining rights, language, place names and a home for all can be traced back directly to those years.

One of the reasons why the many uprisings, and finally, the revolution as well as the political settlement of the 1990s are so poorly understood is because the long historical walk to democracy is ignored.

The suffering and the humiliation of the Boers during the South African war is imprinted on the psyche of the Afrikaner community.

When one group looks upon another group as inferior and of lower standing that becomes fertile ground for discrimination and contempt. The group that is frowned upon loses its self respect and submit to the authority of the other group. This phenomenon is described by Viktor Frankl in his book *Waarom lewe ek?* (Why do I live?); he writes of his experiences in the Nazi concentration camps – that is comparable with what had happened during the South Africa War when British leaders had reduced the Boers to second class human beings.

When Nelson Mandela, after years of negotiation, had to sign the Constitution in 1996 he also had not forgotten the South African War. The signing ceremony had to take place in public in Vereeniging: “Because it was there that we experienced the first betrayal of the British and Boers.”

Not only did it have to be in Vereeniging, but specifically in Sharpeville in Vereeniging; “because those who sacrificed must know that their struggle was not in vain and their efforts are not forgotten.” It was in Sharpeville where 69 people were shot down on 21 March 1960 by the police and another 180 were injured when a peaceful protest against the *dompas* system went horribly wrong.

I was not surprised when 10 December was suggested as the date for the signing ceremony. It was, after all, International Human Rights day and the day in 1948 when the Universal Declaration had been accepted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Now, 48 years later, South Africa had its own constitution with its own Bill of Rights.

The signing ceremony was the highlight of my political career. My participation – sitting next to Mandela and Ramaphosa and saying the final word of thanks, was the last political function I participated in.

The day was filled with emotion. My father had been a policeman in Vereeniging, transferred there shortly after the heartbreak catastrophe happened at Sharpeville. I often accompanied him there when he visited the local police stations. I remember how afraid I was when we moved around after dark; wondering whether my father was brave or did he know the lay of the land? Years later, I was back in Sharpeville: to celebrate the dawn of a new South Africa.

With the signing of the Constitution in Vereeniging-Sharpeville, the struggle for equal rights – that had started shortly after The Boer Republics and the British Empire agreed to the negotiated peace treaty at the end of the South Africa war (1902), was concluded.

The peace treaty stipulated that the “issue” of the vote for the “natives” be dealt with after the colonies had received self-government. That paved the way for the minority to rule the country, which in turn was the beginning of a struggle that lasted 92 years. This aspect of the peace treaty was never emphasised in my history classes at school or during other discussions.

Black people, with a few exceptions, didn’t understand how gashed we felt after the war against the British Empire. We in turn didn’t have the faintest idea how gashed they had felt after that war. Both groups had been humiliated.

The British government in 1902 made a commitment to black people that they would not conclude any peace agreement if black people didn’t have the same privileges as white people. This agreement was not honoured and is remembered as a shameless betrayal. This gave rise to Black Nationalism.

Black and white nationalism had to travel long, separate roads before the democratic elections of 1994 paved the way for a single citizenship in one undivided South Africa.

On 10 December at the signing ceremony, Mandela’s words triumphantly echoed across the George Thabe stadium: “Today, together as South Africans from all walks of life and from virtually every school of political thought, we reclaim the unity that the Vereeniging of nine decades ago sought to deny.”

South Africa now has a constitution and a bill of rights that is in step with ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

De Klerk was not on the stage nor was he asked to make a speech. I felt for him. As leader of the opposition he was sitting in the sun and following the proceedings as a spectator. Vereeniging was his old constituency and his old political stronghold. He had played an enormous role in the transition and would have made a fitting speech.

By walking out of the Government of National Unity he relinquished the office of deputy state president and made it easy for his opponents to relegate him to this spectator’s role. How De Klerk and the NP could have abandoned their seat of power – in the GNU they had the opportunity to influence government decisions – I have never understood.

The political sun was already setting on De Klerk and the NP. They just didn’t have the appetite to work with others in government to solve national and minority issues – this in spite of their enormous investment in South Africa’s negotiated settlement. They walked away – untimely and unceremoniously – from their own creation.

The long, hard battle with the Conservative Party (CP) had sapped their energy. The CP protested against the new direction early in the 1980’s and broke away from the NP to fight them tooth and nail. Both these parties disappeared without honour. The NP accepted negotiation and change reluctantly and the CP never accepted it. For this obstinate behaviour they both paid a price.

FW had played his part in writing the 1994 and 1996 constitutions: Thereafter the mountain to climb proved to be too steep for him. However, internationally there was recognition for the role he had played.

During a visit to Washington DC in 2010, two friends and I were travelling by taxi to Capitol Hill for an appointment with a few senators. The taxi driver, a man from Africa, heard we were from South Africa and started talking with us. He was a graduate from a university in Lagos, Nigeria and had written a thesis for his Masters degree on the negotiating process in South Africa. He told us with passion: “You talk about Nelson Mandela all the time – undeniably an icon in the world – and then forget that he would have achieved nothing had it not been for FW de Klerk. You needed two people on centre stage.”

Jasser Arafat – Palestinian leader and Nobel Prize Laureate – had in 1995, at a conference in Europe, told me exactly the same thing. When Thabo Mbeki received the Israelis and the Palestinians in 2002 to expose them to the negotiating process in South Africa, I told one of the Palestinian delegates about Arafat’s admiration for FW de Klerk and how he couldn’t stop asking questions about De Klerk. With a big smile he told me how Arafat had said on TV during a debate with his Israeli opposite number that one of the challenges he faced when the Israelis and Palestinians negotiated was that there was no De Klerk present on the other side. Benjamin Netanyahu – then Prime Minister of Israel — immediately snapped: “When I look across the table, I don’t see a Nelson Mandela either.”

CHAPTER 24 UNEASY TRUTHS

An appearance before the TRC was no a joke. Ghosts rising from the security rooms of the old government or possible surprises from the TRC files contributed to this ordeal. Proud soldiers and police officers on their knees before the TRC, pleading for amnesty was not a pretty site. Their actions I cannot defend; yet, I can also not condemn them – we were after all on the same side of the conflict.

Jan Wagener, well known attorney who had appeared in many legal battles on behalf of the security forces and members of the security forces seeking amnesty, tells the story of the parents of one of the victims who requested a meeting with the applicants for amnesty. Their son had been shot in the head in cold blood when he did not want to co-operate with those who were now seeking amnesty.

Wagener arranged this meeting and the parents just had one question: “When you put to death our son, how did he react?” They answered: “He was a terrorist, but he was also a brave man. He looked us in the eye when we shot him.” The parents were satisfied. They were proud of their son. He gave his life for the struggle of freedom and had died like a man. They thanked the applicants and walked away.

There are proud people, heroes, cowards, traitors, joiners and murderers and rapists on both sides of any conflict. Nobody arrives at the negotiating table pristine.

In August 1996 I appeared with FW before the TRC when he tabled the NP's submission. I was not expected to say anything. My appearance later was one of the most difficult of my public life.

From NP circles Pik Botha, Adriaan Vlok, Roelf Meyer and I were invited to share our experiences and explain how the SSC functioned. We appeared in October 1997. Piet Meiring, TRC Commissioner, writes in his book, *Kroniek van die Waarheidskommissie*, that the TRC wanted us to explain how the SSC functioned and also to accept responsibility for the gross human rights violations committed in the name of the government. Each of us testified individually.

This was an intellectual and emotional challenge; an exercise that I would not have liked to miss for anything. It was my historic duty to be there and explain what had informed our decisions. It was also nerve wrecking: the one moment you had power, and the next moment you have to explain in public what you did with that power. When you had power, there were people around you – generals, senior cabinet colleagues, lawyers and – very importantly – government resources. When the moment arrived to give account, I was alone – there was nobody to help with the preparation of my submission. I was on my own. I fretted: what will my children think; what is Erika's and Willem's experience of all of this? Will my conduct be of such a nature that they will be humiliated? Will the circumstances force them to ask: Is this my father? Is that what had kept him busy when he was absent from home? How is it possible that he didn't know?

The images from the movies of World War Two, where children were so disillusioned with their father's secret government activities, haunted me. What did you know? What did you not know? What should you have known? What will the TRC throw at you?

I was concerned, not about anything I did, but about the things I knew nothing about, but should possibly have known about.

When I drove to Johannesburg on 15 October 1997 to participate in this public hearing, I was nervous but I also was very angry. Where were all the other caucus members? Probably still in bed and saying to themselves: "Well I was not involved. I had nothing to do with this."

I was infuriated with the great PW Botha. His disgruntled non-appearance before the TRC was a missed opportunity. With his former colleagues, government resources and a wealth of information at his disposal, he could have hijacked this process strategically, explaining what had informed us. He was the most suitable person to give the context of the conflict. Botha could have used the platform and turned the tables. What seemed like an embarrassment could have been transformed to an opportunity for the sake of those members of the security forces who had applied for amnesty. Without someone of his stature explaining the political context, they now had to do it for themselves.

When Alex Boraine, the deputy chair of the TRC, called on me to take the oath, I declined – contrary to what everybody from the National Party had done. I preferred to affirm that I would speak the truth. I didn't want to take the oath, because how was I to know that what I was about to say “was the truth and nothing but the truth.” I could only offer them the truth as I knew it.

Before I started my submission – we all had to hand in written submissions before we gave oral evidence – I asked that my written submission be amended: “That whenever I used the ‘we’ I it should be changed to ‘I’. I did this because I wasn't sure everyone was going to agree with me. (In the next chapter, more on how well my gut feeling had served me here.)

Amongst others, I said the following. “I can think of no reason why Afrikaans speaking South Africans and their children or any other Afrikaner should carry the apartheid label till the end of time.” And: “Apartheid – of that I now more convinced than ever before – was terrible mistake that blighted our land. South Africans didn't listen to each other's laughing and crying. I am sorry that I had been so hard of hearing.” I also said: “Although direct orders to kill political opponents were never issued, speeches were made by members of the NP that created a climate for serious transgressions. I had suspicions about things that happened, and that had caused discomfort in official circles. Because I didn't have the facts to substantiate my suspicions, I must confess, I only whispered in the corridors.”

To me my appearance seemed like a very lame affair. I felt it was neither here nor there. When I arrived home, General Magnus Malan called: “I am proud of you, but I now want to give you some advice: lie low because there is still a Big Crocodile (PW Botha) lurking. Be on your guard.”

I didn't know what this was all about but realised that I had touched a raw nerve. I declined all further opportunities to speak to the media and said that my statement spoke for itself. However, Pdraig O'Malley and academic from the USA, was not to be shaken off that easily.

CHAPTER 25

TRYING TO CLOSE THE BOOKS

South Africa's past will not let us be in peace. I was hoping that I could now close the old books after my appearance before the TRC. Alas, that was not to be. Some questions you have to answer over and over again. William Faulkner was correct: “The past is never dead, it also is never past.”

Pdraig O'Malley – professor from the University of Massachusetts in Boston – interviewed me on ten occasions between 1990 and 2000. He interviewed 130 South Africans about the change in the country. By 2000 I was part of a group of 25 he had interviewed through this period.

O'Malley asked tough questions. He received sincere answers because there was an initial embargo on the material. O'Malley, over and above all the interviews he published, also published a stand-alone document – *Leon Wessels: The Good Boer* – on his website.

After reading the 10 O'Malley-interviews I decided to formulate my views as follows: I loathe what members of the police force did – not the whole police force –to detainees. They were beaten to pulp. Biko was transported hundreds of kilometres in the back of a police van. People were shocked to death, dumped into hippo water holes full of crocodiles; burning pieces of wood shoved in someone's backside. I do realise this did not happen the whole day and every day. I also don't lose sight of the fact that the other side also have skeletons in their closet.

I shake my head in disbelief – how is it possible that those guilty of this kind of abuse of power could possibly have thought that the SCC would sanction their actions? I also shake my head with the same measure of disbelief that my political colleagues could distance themselves from this behaviour as if it had not been “our people” who had been guilty of this conduct.

I sat in NP study groups where people laughed when we were informed how a terrorist received a few slaps in the face because he was cheeky. If this didn't have the desired result he would receive more “medicine” – stronger this time. All this then resulted in the disgraceful transgressions that were disclosed to our shame. When this creature got out of control, we treated it with kid gloves: always trying to explain and justify the wrong doing – “yes, but the other side also don't have clean hands.”

A member of the security forces wrote an anonymous letter to Rapport (5 February 1995) claiming that Roelf Meyer and I as chairpersons of the Joint Management System (JMS) knew much more than what we were prepared to admit to. This rumour mongering brought me up from my haunches. A week later I answered this anonymous letter writer in the same newspaper: all the decisions I was a part of will stand the test of daylight – not necessarily the test of constitutionality as we know it now. Should any government official be on the receiving end of any decision taken by the JMS during my tenure, I will accept joint responsibility for it and that official can rely on my full co-operation and support. There has been dead silence ever since. Nobody has ever asked for my support or implicated me in any misconduct. I did not apply for amnesty because there was never anything, judicially speaking, I should have applied for. Public accountability, however, obliged me to talk about those misdeeds of that era and explain them to the TRC.

These are some extractions of the O'Malley interviews. This is not a word-for-word report; but I try to be true to the spirit of my answers to his questions at the time.

13/3/1996:

O'Malley: White people have closed their eyes for the past; black people now govern the country. Many now say: Let them rule and abuse power as they see fit – many leave the country.

LW: Yes! They don't take moral responsibility for the state of affairs in the country. They remember the atrocities of the South African war, but then turn their backs on the atrocities committed against black people.

O'Malley: Do white people experience the TRC as a witch hunt?

LW: It is clear to me that Desmond Tutu tries to be fair; however many do believe that this is a witch hunt. I do believe that the NP-caucus is ready to hear about the ANC-atrocities but not ready to hear about the NP-atrocities and wrongdoings. These irregularities were not necessarily committed in the name of the NP, but it happened right under our noses. O'Malley: People say

“we didn’t know”. This is a cop-out. Just like the Germans – they said the same thing about the Jews.

LW: What people knew and what they didn’t know will be a very interesting debate. What did John Citizen know? People will be confronted with facts that will confuse them because they didn’t want to know. I don’t know how you can call them to order and hold them accountable.

23/01/98

O’Malley: What did you mean when you said to the TRC, “I didn’t know; is no defence?

LW: I still believe that to say “I didn’t know” is no defence. Biko is dead – he was tortured. We read about it in the newspapers – did we protest? How can we say we didn’t know? Our minister said that his death left him cold. Did we protest? The answer is “no.”

O’Malley: Did PW attack you because of your submission to the TRC?

LW: [This question I answer now more comprehensively to explain my frame of mind more adequately]. Botha’s written submission to the TRC appeared on 8 December 1997 in *Die Burger*. Therein he denounces me because I said we were not inquisitive enough to establish what was happening around us and also that the argument that we didn’t know was no defence. We didn’t want to know. He blamed me for not using my position of power to get to the bottom of the problem. When he bashed me like this I was irate and said to myself: “Now I owe you nothing. Let’s make this a public fight.” I then said (also in *Die Burger*) that he is now rubbing me thin; in the light of his statements I was willing – should the TRC request that – to give evidence again before them. I then argued that he was more isolated than people had alleged; also that he conveniently forgot about the four occasions when I was in his office to discuss the abuse of power of the security forces. These discussions happened between 1985 and 1990; and also how I, as a backbencher in 1986, with his knowledge – and inspiration – aired these matters in a caucus meeting. He wanted his ministers to hear my allegations.

When Botha attacked me like this, I understood for the very first time why Magnus Malan had called me on the 15 October 1997, the very same day I had appeared before the TRC, to congratulate me with my submission: “I am proud of you, but I now want to give you some advice: lie low because there is still a Big Crocodile (PW Botha) around. Be on your guard.”

I appreciated his friendly words and his words of concern.

When Botha, through the media, brought this fight to me, there was no room to manoeuvre out of it. There was only once choice: to fight or to run for cover. For the very first time this was a fight between equals – bar the age difference: Botha was not the state president and I was not his deputy minister. This was a clash of words about one issue only: who was serving our people – the security forces – the best? He who ran away from the TRC? Or I, who wanted to give context and sketch the circumstances the security forces had to deal with?

I said in public that we cannot deny that we were on the same side as Eugene de Kock and his colleagues and that we managed them poorly. We would have to admit that had we managed them better, there would not have been these wrangles – with the politicians in one corner, that vehemently deny that they knew anything and the securocrats that believed they were only doing their job – following orders. We can’t disown them. Therefore: I was never part of anything that would not stand the test of daylight and legality. We can’t justify these acts of violence, but

neither can we condemn the people who were involved. Eugene de Kock was correct: we forcefully clung to power. If you keep this in mind, I can't understand how people can say: "We didn't know." In a criminal court that may be a defence' but in the court of morality and public accountability it will not suffice.

O'Malley: Lord Carrington said during the Falkland-war: "I should have known, but I didn't know that the Argentine ships were on their way to the Falklands. I am sorry, but I am leaving now."

LW: Well, if the facts of Vlakplaas were placed before parliament, the relevant politician would not have survived the public outcry. Jimmy Kruger's statement that Biko's death "left him cold" was the end of his career.

O'Malley: Why did things go so horribly wrong?

LW: We didn't have an inquisitive mindset. We heard the rumours, but didn't want to listen. One couldn't make wild allegations that you couldn't prove. It was as if we all thought: there was revolutionary battle and the masterminds behind all of this wanted to grab power violently – peaceful negotiations were at that stage not on the horizon – therefore, we acted as if the end justified the means. We lived under security legislation and information was limited.

One example: I was in the USA in 1985 when a partial state of emergency was declared. What I saw on the TV screens was alarming. Back at home, my family and friends didn't know what I was talking about. They had a sense of security and couldn't understand my unease. South Africans lived in total ignorance. After Peet de Pontes, MP for East London, and I had introduced a motion on the unrest in the country, Louis le Grange – minister of police – called De Pontes to order because he dared to talk about "no-go areas"(areas where the police and outsiders were not allowed to enter). Le Grange was convinced that there were no such areas. According to him, De Pontes was talking rubbish. Not even the minister of police knew what the real situation was.

O'Malley: What did you mean when you said that you suspected that people were being tortured?

LW: If you see a truck full of policemen with sjamboks, you know they are going to use them. When someone is subjected to solitary confinement, do you think that person will not be subjected to pressure to talk? We all knew we were living in extraordinary times. People must have suspected something.

O'Malley: When people say they didn't know, is that a half-truth?

LW: There were known facts: the thousands of people in detention, the abuse of power was from time to time disclosed... but we were not receptive enough to probe further. There was not a desire to enquire further. There was just not enough probing at NP meetings. So, people didn't know, but there were also many things they didn't want to know.

O'Malley: Do people talk to you about the TRC; what they hear and see on TV?

LW: Definitely! Someone recently said to me: "We should all be with you in the warm water, because we continuously pushed you to act against these terrorists. We were always saying: your attitude towards these terrorists is insufficient." There were of course others who questioned the sincerity of the victims and they were also saying: "The TRC is nothing but a witch hunt."

O'Malley: Is it therefore a matter of: if we knew, we would never have justified it, but because we didn't know, we can't be held responsible?

LW: The majority will say: we didn't know, please leave us alone. If we knew, we would never have defended it. I don't quarrel with John and Jane Citizen as far as this is concerned. But I had

expected more of the larger Afrikaans community; that includes the Afrikaans newspapers and the church community. Arrie Rossouw, editor of *Die Burger*, years later told the Cape Press Club, when he repudiated his colleagues and his bosses who were not on the same page with him, that to have “demonised” the TRC was a mistake. There was dominee Freek Swanepoel, who confessed that he couldn’t speak on behalf of the DRC, so his *mea culpa* was his own, and only on behalf of a section of the DRC. Right there the TRC entered troubled waters. We (the politicians) didn’t help them either. People didn’t understand that the alternative were Nuremburg type trials. The TRC was also a process to ensure that the country knows its history. O’Malley: Black people look at the TRC, how stories are being told without real remorse even if the truth is disclosed. Then they say: “Surely, something isn’t right here.”

LW: I understand that reaction. That is exactly what Cheryl Carolus, deputy secretary general of the ANC, said about the TRC. She says that she had expected more from my submission to the TRC on 15 October 1997. She also said that people were beginning to think that the TRC was a commission for human rights violators and not for the victims of human rights violations. She was concerned that the truth may not emerge. I am not sure exactly what Carolus wanted from me, because I answered the questions that were posed to me. What she probably wanted to know was never asked of me. And on many of the things she probably wanted to know, I simply didn’t want the answers. Tom Mantlata – member of the TRC and later a colleague at the Human Rights Commission – told me how he had met people during the TRC sessions who said: “Where are the white people? We thought we were going to meet white people here and be reconciled with them, now there are no white people in sight.”

O’Malley: White people have now had enough of this; they don’t even want to watch TV anymore?

LW: There are people who say that. My dominee, Piet Stofberg, however, believes that it was important for people to go to the TRC and explain what we thought and to apologise for the injustices. I believe we now don’t have to argue anymore – atrocities did happen. We now know of the atrocities of the past.

O’Malley: Bosnia is a good example. Serbs were always presented as the bad people, but conveniently they forget that the Croats, during World War Two were the agents of Hitler. Serbs were executed in great numbers. This was never resolved and had bottled up for 40 years.

LW: There you have it!

O’Malley: There is the collective reaction from the National Party that they didn’t know and if they knew, they would never have justified it. But now, when something goes wrong, the NP attacks the ANC and says: “You are the ministers; you should know what is happening in your departments.” That is wicked double standards.

LW: That is so. But that is politics. If the ANC were in opposition, they would have done exactly the same. Can you imagine the ANC in opposition in the Eastern Cape and the pensions not being paid out?

1/2/2000

O’Malley: You were the chairman of the JMS. That was the equivalent of a parallel state. That was the power of the securocrats and you were a key figure. You were a somebody and not just another body. You were in charge of the whole business. You then went to the TRC and apologised. In the eyes of some you are regarded as a hero of sorts. Desmond Tutu in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness* refers to you in glowing terms. There is a contradiction in your

statement “I didn’t know” and the power you had to find out and to know. Surely you must have known. Is that a fair question?

LW: Let us talk about the “royal we”. The research department of the TRC came to see me to have an “off the record” discussion. They recorded the discussion. After the discussion they asked if I would be prepared to repeat in public what I have said in private. I agreed. When I made my submission to the TRC, I couldn’t remember if I had spoken of “we” or “I” during the off record discussion. I decided on “we” because that is how most of us now felt about these matters. After listening to Pik Botha, Adriaan Vlok and Roelf Meyer’s sub missions. I decided that we were not on the same page. I decided there and then that I don’t have to sail under the “we/us” banner anymore. I am not bound by caucus decisions or previously agreed words anymore – I can talk freely. A feeling of liberation took hold of me. When I started to give evidence I asked that my written submission that I had handed out before the time be amended – the “we” must be deleted and replaced with “I”. I felt good about it and felt that if there was going to repercussions about that, so be it! I continued and said that I had sat in parliament when Helen Suzman had told us that the police thought they were above the law and guilty of gruesome illegal acts. I heckled and howled! I said that she was talking rubbish. “We are in charge. We run this country. It is not true that anybody is acting outside the ambit of the law.” I angrily replied in parliament. I had heard these rumours – formal and informal – and took it with a pinch of salt. We didn’t pay any attention to it.

O’Malley: Leon, you were the chairman. You were the chairman of this whole business.

LW: Let me tell you of what I was the chairman of. I was the chairman of the Joint Management System (JMS). I was not the chairman of the police or the defence force or national intelligence. The police, the defence force and national intelligence reported to their line function ministers and not to me.

O’Malley: You did a great job in the late 1980’s: to suppress and detain people – that was the order of the day!

LW: I never had power to detain anybody.

O’Malley: But the JMS and securocrats had more power than ever before.

LW: That is true. Representatives of all the relevant government departments served on the JMS. The purpose was to co-ordinate government activities, but not to give government departments instructions. The final decision and responsibility rested with the department and the relevant minister. The decision to blow up Khotso-house was never taken at the JMS. That is the reason why I didn’t apply for amnesty for that or anything else.

O’Malley: But the SCC was a super-cabinet. They took decisions that were accepted by cabinet without a squeak.

LW: I never was chairman of the SCC. PW was the chairman. Let me give you an example of how it worked. There was an influx of refugees from Mozambique. Different government departments were involved: home affairs, foreign affairs, labour, welfare, education, and the police just to mention a few. It was my responsibility, together with all those departments, to develop a co-ordinated (strategy) plan on how to deal with the situation. That plan was then presented to the SCC and if accepted there, they would then take it to cabinet.

O’Malley: It is then rubberstamped by the cabinet?

LW: I wouldn’t say that, but given the discussions that went into that document, as well as the seniority of those that serve on the SCC, I concede it would be very difficult to veto it at that stage.

O'Malley: Something else. Because of his experience in Rwanda and Bosnia I asked judge Goldstone what makes ordinary people bump off each other. His answer was short and sweet: "Fear." What did white South Africans fear? In some ways the "total onslaught" became a substitute for apartheid: a new ideology! Here are South Africans, people like you, filled with trepidation for Russian expansionism?

LW: I was never afraid that the Russian tanks would roll down the streets of Pretoria. But I was afraid of the limpet mines exploding in the fast food restaurants. I was afraid for the sake of my children and for the sake other children who loved to frequent those places. It was the physical violence that terrified me. I, of course, knew of the Russian support for the struggle; yet it was not the physical violence but the ideology that scared me – the centrally controlled autocracy with *inter alia* no religious freedom – that drove one to oppose Russian communism.

O'Malley: When you had those information sessions about the total onslaught, did you think; "Oh God, here we go again"?

LW: Information sessions about the total onslaught showed that the conflict now had a domestic dimension. There is much more to it than a scrap between us and the Russians from a far away land. It was between us and our own people here on our soil. A good example: a black man – with Russian weapons – was arrested in my hometown Krugersdorp. I have often used this example to show how preoccupied we were with colour-race, as well as with the Russians. My argument was that the Russian soldier – who armed this black man – after having stayed in South Africa for five years could become a citizen – and have the vote for the South African parliament. The black man that arrested and disarmed this man has no political rights in South Africa. In fact, according to thousands of white voters, he will never be a South Africa citizen. Lastly: the securocrats that you speak so slickly about knew that the final solution was not in the lap of the security forces, it rested with the politicians – what was required was a political solution.

O'Malley: All these things were entwined.

LW: Of course! The Russian threat, the internal uprisings as well as racial prejudice were all tangled.

CHAPTER 26

NO FINISH LINE: RECONCILIATION AND RACISM

"That era was theatre. That was not reality." That is how Priscilla Clapp – American diplomat at the American Embassy in Pretoria during the negotiations – described the situation to me. After four elections anyone can see that we have been overtaken by Clapp's 'reality'.

In a leading article on 22 March 2010 – one day after the 50th anniversary of Sharpeville, the editor of *The Herald*, one of the oldest newspapers in the country (it was established 1845) asks: "Has South Africa created a society worthy of its sacrifice?"

Nompumelelo Sibalukhulu from the Institute of Security Studies (ISS) says: "Rich and poor citizens are in agreement with each other – the ANC-government is not keeping their part of the agreement." A friend – still in government service – writes to me: "Is it not ironic, half a century after Sharpeville and at the beginning of a new era, South Africa remembers the words of Alan

Paton: “Cry the beloved country”. The rights embedded in our Constitution and the rule of law are cut into slices on a daily basis.”

In the present era, we are continuously stumbling over our past. Every year on 16 December on Reconciliation day, journalists ask: Where do we stand with reconciliation? Are we now reconciled with one another? We whinge and whine about important issues such as racism, poverty and crime that affect us all. We lament that we still have a long road to travel.

One of the greatest mistakes we made was to believe that after the TRC process, reconciliation would have enough momentum to care for itself. There was simply too much anger and mistrust.

When FW de Klerk and the National Party walked out of the GNU and the ANC government of Thabo Mbeki suffered from negotiation fatigue and his attitude of “We know everything and can handle all the challenges this country face.” as well as the Democratic Alliance of Tony Leon’s “Hit back” campaign gave reconciliation a body blow. The spirit of Mandela and Tutu that the world so much admired became nothing but a lame duck.

Reconciliation is an undertaking to accept each other’s good faith; to understand that reconciliation and transformation are two sides of the same coin. Reconciliation is justice for me and for you. It means that differences will be resolved through discussion. It also means to listen and try and understand the other side of the argument without agreeing with it. And that those that hold opposing views will seek ways to move forward together – in harmony – in spite of the differences. I have made peace with the fact that South Africa will not soon, if ever, be a big first world industrial country. We will, however, have to rise above the traditional dividing lines if we want to be a global player.

To grumble is not the prerogative of white people only. Other South- Africans also grumble but for different reasons and in different ways: vigilante groups violently take on criminals, and the front pages of our newspapers show armed young people , protesting against corruption and poor service delivery. This makes me very concerned.

One of the great challenges of our time is the growing number of people that are losing hope of a better life. Without water or shelter, school or clinic, their patience is wearing thin. They are the ones that will storm the seats of power and throw the Constitution in the fire – not the passive sluggards that have made moaning and groaning an occupation.

Crude racism – the cold implementation of apartheid – was inhumane. That I know now. There was no respect for human beings and it made of us what we didn’t want to be. Unfortunately these patterns of violence and disregard for human beings are being repeated by different sides of the old divide.

In *Why Race Matters in South Africa*, Michael MacDonald describes a scene in 1960 in Alexandra, Johannesburg: Mark Mathabane, who later became known for his book *Kaffir Boy*, explains how his father aged before his eyes when the police dragged him (naked) from underneath his bed during a raid for the dompass (pass books). When the policeman asked for his dompass, he lightly bumped-bumped his privates parts with his baton; the other policemen in

the room laughed. His mother was saved any humiliation, because they didn't find her, in a small cupboard, scantily dressed in her underclothes.

When I read this I was beside myself. How would I have felt if that was my father? How would my parents have felt if our family was subjected to such humiliation? Without any reason I immediately thought of the South African war and the evils committed during that war. The racial superiority of Milner and the atrocities committed against the women and children made me furious. Afrikaners know how it feels to be humiliated by others. When the roles changed we did exactly what was done to us. We did not hesitate to humiliate others.

Do those in authority realise how criminals wipe out good racial relations when they humiliate and butcher their victims?

When a friend, with tears in his eyes, told me what happened to his loved ones during a criminal attack I – for a moment – became an irrational racist. Anger bubbled up at the mere thought that his might happen to my family. Thankfully I know that this wickedness cannot be attributed to all South Africans. Just as sure as the behaviour of that policeman with his truncheon, cannot be attributed to all policemen.

When someone like Essop Pahad – former minister in the office of President Thabo Mbeki – very superficially says white people who complain about affirmative action but don't attend national festivities, are racists, he is doing nobody any favour.

It is not easy to harness this demon. I battle to bury my own racial prejudices. Of this I am not proud. That my earlier bias sometime overpowers me is a great disappointment.

Nothing that had happened in the previous years had prepared me for this debate about racism. During a visit to Eastern-Europe I discover that it is not possible to bump into a communist to talk about the old days. In South Africa the chances are slim that you will find a racist. There is a joke doing the rounds that you have a bigger chance to win the Lotto than to find a former supporter of the old apartheid regime. Ariel Dorfman – Chilean writer and human rights activist – asks in his play *Death of a Maiden*: “How does one remember the past without becoming its prisoner?” One does not have to live in the past but you can't live without the past.

I have often been ashamed of myself. I am not brave enough to claim that I am not a racist because I grapple with my prejudices every day.

At dusk I watch the pedestrians closely. I relax when I see people that look like me – people who are of the same colour. To my astonishment a colleague – advocate Pansy Tlakula – is hijacked in the parking area of a hotel in Johannesburg by “my people”. I came to realise that criminals are everywhere and that they don't look alike.

In 2009 – after I had travelled some distance demolishing my prejudices – I am standing in the early morning darkness on a street corner in America waiting for a pick-up lift. I hear male voices walking in my direction. When I realise they are black I become very concerned about the laptop hanging on my shoulder. What will happen if I lose all the valuable information and hard

work stored in it? It is too late to hide the laptop in the shrubs behind me. As the men approach me I hear them laugh about something. I take the gap and make a friendly comment about their boisterous laughter. As they walk past me, we are all laughing. Once on my own again – with the sun beginning to break through the darkness – I think about my unease and shake my head in disbelief. You fool: you once again allowed the criminals in South Africa to get the upper hand and fuel your prejudice.

The first step towards greater racial reconciliation is to acknowledge that the demon is in our midst. The world is contaminated by racism. We are not the only ones that suffer from it. Marty Sen, Nobel Prize Laureate for his books about welfare economy, writes that when he first came from India to study in Cambridge in 1953, his landlady warned him to clean the bath nicely. She was afraid that his hue would stain the bath.

There is greater colour and race awareness than before. This is true in South Africa but certainly also in the world. That is so because of globalisation, better communication and greater sensitivity that 80% of the world population are of colour. In South Africa colour sensitivity is kept alive by the appointment of judges, the way sports teams are chosen, staff appointed and when government contracts are considered. We want to move away from this chapter where race is the determining factor but in this in-between phase we still struggle to come to grips with our abnormal past.

Not every South African you meet is a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. Hugh Masekela, internationally renowned jazz personality talks to a small circle of friends in Krugersdorp and expresses his surprise that South Africans – black and white – still do not know how to speak with one another. Everyone is very apologetic: our children will get it right because they don't have the barriers we had to contend with; children now go to school together and have opportunities to mix that we never had, are the excuses tendered.

To me this is nothing but shirking our responsibility, coming from a generation that has to set the pace to bridge the divides of the past. To the contrary; they are passive and in a very subtle way and sometimes not so subtle instil their old fears and prejudices in their children.

When Baleka Mbete – former speaker of parliament – sees this ugly racial demon raise its head in her house, she asked her children where it comes from. They speak in derogatory terms about white people. “You are generalising when you speak like that.” She reprimands them, “Joe Slovo was a white man.” Her words run like water from a ducks back and does not have the desired result as they rejoin: “But Joe Slovo was not a white man!”

This colour-blind argument I have listened to before; I grapple to come to grips with that. After a while I worked through it and realised that it is possible to leave your flock without relinquishing who you are and then later return – wiser!

The problem of who you are, who you were and who you want to be in a racial context can be approached from different angles. In his book *The Other* Ryszard Kapuściński says that when you look at somebody else, a stranger, you first see the colour of the other person, then the nationality and then religion. In discussions with black Americans, they lament that “the other” is

always approached from a white perspective. White is the norm and from that vantage-point, you look at “the other”. But from “the other” vantage-point white is not the norm. That only means one thing – white is not the whole thing. As Melissa Steyn puts it in the title of her book: *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used To be: white identity in a changing South Africa*.

When you meet “the other” you have three choices: you make war– and then there are no winners, because you lose your humanity; or you fence yourself in – and that is not always possible; or you begin a dialogue. Dialogue is of course the best, but that is never easy.

Business consultant Alida de Wet found during the research for her doctoral thesis that racial prejudice is a deep emotional phenomenon and that can override the emotional balance. It cannot be resolved with superficial chit-chats. It must be addressed at a very deep emotional level, in a safe group situation, where honest eye-to-eye; human-to-human meetings happen.

Until we learn how to live with our pasts and face our prejudices head-on we will not be able to see the future – and the “other” – clearly because our glasses are polished by our pasts.

CHAPTER 27

RACISM: IN YOUR FACE

I love watch how racism makes its presence felt. To watch passively can be daunting, because things can go terribly wrong – there always is the possibility of violence.

At the magistrates court in Germiston I am waiting – as you always do at a court – and observing what is happening around me. I am watching two aunties – not one of them young –squaring up like two bantam cocks, scratching in the sand. Both these aunties for a moment pause, rethinking what they are about to say; as if they realise what they want to say will not be acceptable.

The one has just washed the floor before the entrance of the hall from where the public is served. The other one wants to enter that area because she wants to be first in the queue when the doors open. The one says: “I have just cleaned that floor, it is still wet. If you step onto it now you will undo all my hard word. Step aside and stay out.” The other one says: “My goodness! Why did you not clean the floor earlier? I am in a hurry and want to be first in the queue. I have a lot to do and can't waste my time here.” And so it continues. I chuckle. On the surface this is a battle of words, but in fact this is power struggle: the body language –arms swinging, eyes scorching – tell you that this is South Africa and this is a struggle between races and classes.

The one wants to command and demands and the other one will have none of that; to her, this is the new South Africa where everyone is equal. The one still wants to be a boss; she is white and was born a boss – here directives should be obeyed by the other without questioning it. The other one is now also a boss – boss of her territory – the floor she has just mopped – boss of her broom and her cleaning equipment.

During my struggles to overcome my old prejudices I have learned a few lessons that help me understand people better: I learn to ask people about their names, to try and address them in their own language, to be interested in them and their well-being. The results of these lessons surpass

my wildest expectation. There are moments when you have to make yourself the clown of the situation.

I have urgent business at the licensing department in Mogale City. I arrive as they are about to close their doors to end the day. I dash! The glass door is closed in my face. I drop on my knees and lift my hands as if in prayer. Onlookers in the vicinity plead that the door be opened for me. The door is opened; I thank the lady and stand at the back of the queue.

The people at the back of the queue are difficult – they have been waiting for a very long time to be served. They are convinced “these people” (“the other”) are doing this on purpose “to demonstrate who is now the boss in this licensing department.” I am waiting my turn patiently in order that my small matter will be attended to soon and that I won’t have to return the following day. I listen to the mumbling and grumbling in front of me. When it is the turn of a grandmother, her daughter and her grandchild they just rip into the official and complain about the poor service. The official on the receiving end of this verbal assault sulks.

I decide to take up the challenge: can I change this depressing atmosphere and make my interaction with this young lady a pleasant one for both of us?

I greet her in Tswana; I ask her what her name is and address her as such – that is how far my Tswana can take me. Her frosty, matter-of-fact, attitude changes there and then. I explain my problem; ask if she is tired and if she enjoys her work: “This is a terrible place to work. The people are very rude. That is the reason why I am studying B.Com at UNISA and will leave this place the minute I have finished my studies.”

People are proud of their names; they want them to be pronounced and spelt correctly. It is something very personal. In the musical *Ghoema* of David Kramer and Taliep Petersen people sing about their arrival in the Cape and how they received new names: “*Hierdie nuwe naam, dit maak my skaam, waar ek van kom is ek bekwaam. Hier op die plaas is my naam Klaas. Elke vrou word ’n meid genoem en elke man ’n jong of klong . . .*” (This new name, makes me ashamed, where I come from I am something. Here on the farm they call me Klaas and every woman is called a servant girl and every man a servant boy ...”)

Bernard Lategan – founding director of the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS) – writes on 24 October 2009 in *By* (a supplement on Saturdays to *Die Burger* and *Beeld*) how important it is to develop common values where we all work and live in this country. One of the basic things we still ignore is to make the effort to learn the names of people and to pronounce it correctly. People don’t want to be addressed as “Hi you” or “driver”. They want to be acknowledged as an individual, and human being.

Through the years this approach to learn the names of people and what it means has served me well. I always ask – in restaurants, petrol stations and in shopping malls: “What is your name? What does your name mean?”

My loyal personal assistant at the Human Rights Commission, Lindiwe Zulu, returns to work after maternity leave. I ask her what the name of the newborn is: “Banele” she says. “Well what

does it mean?” It means “Enough”. Very surprised I ask, “Why do you give the child that name?” “This is now ‘enough’ because I had twins before him.” That opened the door for great discussions about the twins, and Banele and certainly contributed to a wonderful working relationship.

What constitutes racism? Who can be a racist? To be labelled a racist – anywhere in the world – is to be declared a hermit. Can a liberal English speaker, who never voted for the NP or the CP, be a racist? Is it possible for a black South African who his whole life was a victim of racism be a racist?

Barney Pityana, in 1996, found himself in deep water when he dared to call Judge Dennis Davis a racist during a TV-program. Pityana later explained to me that he had to do it to stop Davis in his tracks and save the credibility of the Commission because Davis had taken a superior attitude towards the Afrikaners on the Commission.

My school friend Hennie Heymans told me how he had felt the brunt of English racial superiority when he was investigating crime in Durban. The complainant, an English speaker, ordered him to the back door when he knocked on the front door to take a statement from him.

The same Heymans told me how foolish the NP statutory racism worked in practise. Also in Durban, he and a colleague, in the mid-sixties had to travel by bus to investigate a crime – there was not a police vehicle available to use. When the bus stopped, the bus driver refused his colleague – a black person – to mount. They had to wait for the next bus – it was the bus for black people – that allowed them both to get on.

Inbred racism is in our midst: the Indian and Coloured communities, who also were victims of racism, often make themselves guilty of racist language in discussions. Those who believe black people can’t be racist will have to think again. Mohammed Ali, in his book *Think only Whites are racist? Think again!* Tells his readers that one of the most unsettling discoveries for him about racism was that each racial group makes themselves guilty of it.

Academics argue that race classification will remain relevant in the near future because being colour blind is to take no notice of the social reality. They concede that affirmative action contributes to racial awareness but believe that is less dangerous than to ignore it. And so South Africa continues to recycle racial awareness and prejudice!

If anybody had told me in the 1980’s that members of the inclusive, non-racial UDF would 25 years later also milk this racial cow, I would not have believed it. Race has now become a commodity – the new beneficiaries of race classification accept it with glee and the former beneficiaries of it baulk at it. A racial-possessed government in the 1980’s created a future without any hope for South Africa’s black and white youth.

In the middle-1980s – when compulsory military service for white young men was a fact of everyday life – a few young boys more or less 12 years old, came to see me. My son Willem was part of this deputation – they were all children of senior government officials or of politicians loyal to the government. “Tell us, oom, is it true that you don’t have to go to the army if you are

married?” asks the leader of the pact. I beat around the bush because I don’t know what this is all about. Suddenly, it struck me between the eyes – we have not provided these boys with a vision for peace and they do not want to be shot to pieces.

In South Africa our children grew up with the idea that there will always be conflict and military service. None of these boys had to do military service – they were rescued from border wars; violence in the townships were not part of their lives as was the case with their older brothers. But their fear for the future was as real for them as it were for their older brothers. The one had to face military service and the other affirmative action.

Recently a friend, well-known for his positive and constructive role in our society tells me about his twelve year old son’s email communication with his cousin who now lives in Europe. Thanks to this cyberspace communication and further research of countries with similar problems as ours, he announces to his very upset his farther “there is no future for me in this country.”

Again this body blow; as in the 1980’s – this time it really hurts. We made peace in this country, but many young people, who in the past would have been cannon fodder, now don’t feel as if they own a piece of this peace.

When we had military conscription for young men, everyone – parents, family, school, university, the church and government – contributed to create a positive feeling of patriotism towards military service. The message they all communicated was clear: this is the price we have to pay if we want to keep the communist bear and black majority rule at arm’s length. This is not the case with affirmative action. Parents encourage their children to study European languages in an effort to escape the claws of affirmative action monster. Between 59 000 Afrikaans speaking learners disappeared out of the system between 1993 and 2003 – presumably to English medium and private schools – probably preparing them to later leave the country.

The more I listen to these debates about affirmative action, the more I realise that the people holding opposing views are talking past one another – they listen but they don’t hear; they seldom convince each other: “We were prejudiced; an injustice was done to us – that now has to be corrected” the one side proclaims. The others argue, “But we are now all equal and yet you discriminate against me because I am white.”

The scars of racism are there to be seen and there seldom is the maturity to laugh at ourselves. Whenever a racial issue is at stake, temperatures rise. When people manage to talk their differences can be resolved.

While serving in the Human Rights Commission a mayor and a police officer in one of our big cities had a standoff in public. The one accused the other of racism. Both filed complaints with the Commission. This certainly was not a matter to be resolved in a court of law. I was asked to mediate. We met in the City hall. I read them the riot act and told them that their conduct does not behove people who hold high office. Neither of them had conducted himself in the spirit of the Constitution. They should be setting an example to the public and here they are, at loggerheads in public.

After my stern words the mayor took the bait: “Will you please recuse yourself because I think we must talk?” My young colleague and I wait in the passage. He looks at me with big eyes and cannot believe that I granted the mayor his wish: “How could you have allowed that? Did you not see that they hate each other? Did you notice that the policeman was armed? What will happen if he shoots the mayor?”

“Well, we will then know that this matter cannot be resolved through mediation,” I answer, pretending to be very sure of myself. After what seemed like a lifetime the two appear, this time all smiles. “We want to thank you that you came here and forced us to talk. It was a big misunderstanding.”

Not all matters can be resolved through dialogue.

When the HRC received complaints from the Black Lawyers Association and the Association for Black Accountants against the *Sunday Times* and the *Mail & Guardian* alleging that they had committed human rights violations, the HRC decided to broaden the investigation and investigate the media as a whole. Everyone – across language and colour barriers – objected: “This is the end of media freedom.”

After the inquiry was completed the media made a complete somersault. *Die Burger's* spokesperson, Bun Booyens, congratulated the Commission with the report and said that they accepted all the recommendations. One of the findings was that the media to some extent was racist; even those newspapers that focussed on black readers. The recommendations were that journalists should have greater exposure to cultural diversity of our society and that new journalists should be trained in what the Constitution and the chapter on human rights require from all of us, including journalists.

The editor of *Business Day* – one of the biggest critics of the inquiry – wrote five years later: “With hindsight, it was a beneficial process. Editors, particularly white ones, were forced to pay attention to aspects of their work which, while apparently bland on the surface, could be hurtful to black colleagues and a black market. While many were defensive and sometimes combative in testimony to the commission, the fact is that real lessons were learnt on all sides of the media education – journalists, readers and advertisers.”

I now know and more than ever before appreciate that old truism: “You must be the change you want to see in the world.”

CHAPTER 28

PEACE: AFRIKANERS UNFINISHED BUSINESS

When Hendrik Biebow publicly declared almost 300 years ago: “Ek ben een Afrikaander!” (I am an Afrikaner) he definitely could not have foreseen that years later people would still be arguing what he had in mind.

Hermann Giliomee says in his book *The Afrikaners* that historians still can't say with certainty what Biebow had in mind. Did he mean he was an African? Or did he mean that Afrikaners

from European descent had certain rights that the immigration magistrate, Johannes Starrenberg, must respect? I was never interested in these questions and also the later “who is and Afrikaner?” debates. I am an African from the Afrikaner-camp. My forefather, Johannes Wessel(s), settled in South Africa in 1660. My European baggage was never too heavy for me to carry; it never made me stumble.

A visit to Northern-Ireland in 2003 made me think about this Afrikaner thing and my status as someone who lives in Africa. When I arrived at the airport in Belfast I tried to identify the people that would attend the conference. Those from Africa and Asia were easy to identify. When I finally got my baggage, those attending the conference had left in small groups and I had to make it to the conference hotel on my own. That didn't bother me. We were strangers to each other and after all, I looked like one of the locals and not like a colleague from Africa.

During the week-long conference, about global human rights issues, those attending from North- and South-America, Eastern and Western-Europe, Asia and Africa got to know each other rather well. To my surprise someone ask if I really was from South Africa. I explained that I had no other loyalty and that my ancestors had lived in Africa for centuries. Another wanted to know how many persons serving on the Human Rights Commission were white. This question caught me off-balance. At the Commission we had learned to look at the individual and not at the person's tint. My CV reflects my involvement in the PW Botha- and FW de Klerk administrations, peace and constitutional negotiations and as a commissioner at the South Africa Human Rights Commission. One participant remarks jealously that in her country they are not so forgiving. This statement leads to long informal discussions about the South African constitutional and reconciliation processes. These were interesting discussions with outsiders not interested in the shortcomings of our negotiations or the numerous obstacles we still had to overcome. To them, something remarkable had happened on the southern tip of Africa that gripped the imagination. The discussions around the negotiating table were important to them and that is what they wanted to talk about.

During my conference presentation I explained how the Human Rights Commission formally and judicially conducts investigations but always reap the most successful results when we resolve problems through informal dialogue. The Israeli delegate thereafter quietly approached me and asked: “Against the background of my country, this negotiation and dialogue phenomenon you keep on referring to, that has become so typical South African, does it have a Christian foundation?”

“No! The negotiations and dialogue as we practice it in South Africa, is an African phenomenon with a South African tang. The idea of *indaba* (let us talk) was typically African long before eye-to-eye negotiations had started in South Africa,” I tell her.

In Belfast, the Africans often sat together. We laugh in the same manner—from the pits of our stomachs, in contrast to the British 'stiff upper-lip' smiles. And, when far off, we smile about the same things, such as the endless reports on the embarrassments of the British royal family. During the conference we talk the same language about poverty and adult illiteracy in the rural areas. Discussion about a wide range of subjects followed. The delegate from Malawi thanked me for my remarks about the Commission's socio-economic reports and how often we measured

the progressive realisation of socio-economic rights, “because,” she said, “these people do not listen to me when I speak on this subject”. My respected friend from Ghana then recounted how he had burst out in tears, openly, upon visiting Robben Island. His emotions had been stirred not only by Nelson Mandela’s wasted years on the island, but also because of the many Africans elsewhere on the continent who had not been able to overcome similar circumstances. This reminded me of a conversation I had had in deep Africa years ago when the particular person had remarked: “You Afrikaners are special Africans. You lock up Mandela and later release him, knowing full well that he will campaign against you politically and that it will result in your loss of power.” In contrast, my Ghanaian friend remarked that for him, personally, it was a South African miracle that Mandela could walk out of jail after so many years, healthy in body and spirit, and become head of state.

At the end of the conference we part as friends. The Africans say goodbye with the honest wish to meet again, well-knowing that we share much more than just the same continent. We also know that we share a past and a future. Being an African means so much more than enjoying Africa’s natural beauty. You also have to be able to identify with the people of the continent. You have to understand, or at least try to understand, the challenges and obstacles facing the continent.

At some stage, the delegate from New Zealand referred to a part of that country’s population as “people of European extraction”. This statement irritated me. Our own South African history with its entrances and park benches for “Europeans” and “non-Europeans” recalls bad memories. In the face of Europe’s isolation policy towards South Africa, but especially as a result of the bitter Dutch and British attitudes, I have no interest in being a European. After all, Africa is where the future is at.

While waiting for my connection at Heathrow Airport in London, I had heard more Afrikaans being spoken than in Johannesburg’s central business district. During this short visit to the British shores, I had run into Afrikaners everywhere; in the pubs, on the trains, wherever I went. Even with their South African accents they were like fish in water—the old colonial reserve and apartheid stumbling blocks do not exist any longer. They look exactly like the locals. One is happy for them, for the opportunity to have adventure in Britain and to be paid in British pounds for their contributions. However, the question is: will we ever again hear them and their Afrikaans within the business districts of South Africa’s cities and rural towns? Or will their talents be lost to us forever?

After much soul searching I have to admit to being something of a Euro-African out of the Afrikaner walk of life. To me, this Euro label feels like disloyalty against Africa. But, on that day in Belfast when my colleagues turned their backs on me because I looked like a local, the Euro point was brought home to me. However, it was only the later interaction between me and my Afro friends and colleagues that proved without any doubt that skin pigmentation does not have to be an impossible stumbling block if you want to be an African. It is your heartbeat and the colour of your blood which counts. It makes matters more difficult to be a Euro-African in South Africa, but by no means impossible. At best, it is a point of departure and not the final destination—even though we Euro-Africans are far removed from the peaks of our potential. The fact that we still are so close to our polarised past can sometimes be troublesome. Tragic incidents, on both sides of the cutting edge, often force us to step back. The urge to turn your back on the past and to look forward only, also does not help. Therefore, until such time as we

make peace with the old truism that the past is never over, we will move forward at a snail's pace only. Inability to look the past and the resulting sensitivities in the face, is delaying the relaxed acceptance of the diversity of our society.

The colour of my skin is not unimportant. On official forms assessing equitable employment practices it is regularly required to denote who is White, Coloured, Indian or African. It irks me to be defined and classified in this way and to see how we revert to the racial brush to define one another.

My roots are in South Africa and Africa feeds my spirit. Until fairly recently Africa had been a closed book to me—our aircraft were not even allowed to fly over Africa. Now our people race and chase all over Africa in their 4x4s. Unknown “dark” Africa, which used to house the “terrorists”, has changed. We have changed too, and so have I.

If this had not been the case, my anguished vision which rose from my years of involvement in the Afrikaanse Studentebond (Afrikaans Student Union -1972/1973), the carefree years as a National Party backbencher (1974), first in the Provincial Council of the Transvaal and later in the House of Assembly (1978) under the staunch leadership of Administrator Sybrand van Niekerk and, later, Prime Minister John Vorster, I would have stumbled. I do not deny this past—this is the road which I took.

I am what I am—a Euro-African with a National Party and apartheid past. There does not seem to be many of us left, because everyone now claims that deep down they had been closet freedom fighters and that they simply had had no inkling of all the atrocities and the evils. However, with all this baggage I wish to live in harmony with my environment as a complete South African. And this is possible! Armed with this disposition and the knowledge of who I am and where I have come from, I look backwards—as well as into the future.

One of the last South Africans with whom I have a discussion before my departure to Ghana in 2004, asks: “Are they fighting over there?”

One of the first Ghanaians with whom I speak, asks: “Does everyone in South Africa have guns?” “No, but why do you ask?” “Because here on television we see that even taxi drivers carry fire-arms and sometimes shoot at each other.”

This made me realise how little we as Africans know one another.

In the country of Kwame Nkrumah, foremost fighter against colonialism and leader of a one-party state, Jerry Rawlings, military dictator who led his country to democracy and current president John Kufuor, who in 2000 defeated the ruling party at the polls for the first time in the country's history, I could not help but to think of Paul Kruger's winged words in the 1900s when he was fighting the battle against colonialism: “Africa shall be free.”

He could never have foreseen this circle route, also not that the Afrikaner revolutionary Bram Fischer would have found the inspiration in his words for his struggle against the apartheid government.

In Accra, at the University of Ghana, my friend Prof Kofi Kumado, whom I had met in Belfast for the first time, introduces me as a true son of Africa. This honour gives me unexpected

heartburn, because just prior to my departure I had been part of a committee who, on behalf of the Northwest-University, had to complete the annual Fair Employment Practice forms—those forms deny by definition that I am an African. On the form there was space for four categories only: African, Indian, Coloured and White.

Maybe, one should remember that Albert Nothnagel, a former member of parliament, had said 20 years ago already that Afrikaners were the white children of black Africa. He, too, had said this in another context and could not have foreseen the exact scope of it, even less that it would become true in such a way in Ghana.

A day before my departure for Ghana, I attended the unveiling of the statue of Khosi Mogale, forefather of the Tswana people, in front of the Krugersdorp town hall. The town hall itself is silent witness of the many battles between white political parties in the old days. The British royal house and Oom Paul also had left their traces in the same area. Now Mogale stands there prominently, right in front.

Magaliesburg and the Magalies mountains I had always accepted as a given, never realising that Magalies had been a distortion of Mogale. At school and in the years thereafter I had heard many stories of Oom Paul's visits to Krugersdorp as well as of the British royal houses' visit to the town. The fact that nobody had ever informed me about Khosi Mogale does not mean that he had never existed.

In Accra, looking back on the Mogale function, I came to the realisation that Africa is on our own doorstep, and not elsewhere, outside our borders, as we so much like to imagine.

At the Mogale ceremony one of the speakers had said, smilingly: "We all are Africans, white and black. You want to imagine yourselves to be Europeans, but you are Africans, because the Cradle of Humankind is in Mogale City—we all come from here."

All of us are heaving baggage along. My hostess at the Human Rights Commission in Ghana is Anna Bossman. Her forebear, Willem Bosman, became William Bossman under English influence. We both laugh about our Dutch forebears—and I tell her of the many Herman Charles Bosman stories. In this way, the Dutch built interesting bridges between South Africa and Ghana that is not limited to our legal heritage, Dutch Roman Law.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation processes also echo in Accra. A Commission for National Reconciliation was appointed that had to take a look at human rights violations in the "unconstitutional eras" and delve into the past. It took my breath away to be standing in the old Parliament where Nkrumah and the military leaders had reigned and where the Commission for Reconciliation years later heard evidence from the victims of dictatorships. The contention that we simply should let the past be was proved incorrect in both South Africa and Ghana and also shall be proved wrong in other places. People want to know what had taken place and victims also want to relate their stories.

An Afrikaner's European heritage and appearance is not unimportant, but because his permanent address is in Africa, and specifically in South Africa, it presents no stumbling block. As a matter of fact, elsewhere in Africa it is a recommendation. However, in South Africa it will take some while yet before those Fair Employment Practices forms which irritate me so much are changed.

There are now eleven official languages in South Africa – that accommodates more than 90% of the population. There is a duty on the state to encourage the use of the indigenous languages. All the official languages have parity of esteem; municipalities must take notice of the language preferences of their inhabitants and then develop a fitting language policy. It is therefore possible that the language policy of a province may differ from that of a municipality in that province.

Through legislation national and provincial governments must develop their language policies. Naledi Pandor – former chairperson of the national council of provinces – made a speech at the first multilingual conference in parliament which was enthusiastically received by members of parliament: the promotion of multilingualism has nothing to do with the standing of Afrikaans in the South African community. Any argument for a special status for Afrikaans or any other language will be difficult to justify in South Africa. The undermining of any language – that includes Afrikaans – cannot be justified. One of the popular myths in the South Africa language debate is that multilingualism centres around the bilingual paradigm – Afrikaans vs. English. English and Afrikaans have been at each other for more than a century and during all of this the black indigenous languages have been trampled on and reduced to an inferior position.

Neatly crafted formulations in the Constitution, without the respect and use by the population, make it a static document. There must be a desire to give effect to the constitutional provisional provisions. It seems there isn't such a drive when it comes to the languages clauses – language mention eight times – in the Constitution. Those in authority don't regard that as a priority. The challenges regarding poverty, job creation, housing, integration of government structures, and the establishing of provincial and local government structures make that there isn't a special focus on language provisions. The loss of the privileged position of Afrikaans and Afrikaners does not weigh as heavily as the other issues the authorities face.

After 20 years, in 1994, I resigned from the Afrikaner- Broederbond. There are no ill feelings between me and the *broers* (brothers) about my resignation. After the democratic elections I find it boring to be an Afrikaner among other Afrikaners. I want to be an Afrikaner among “the other” – a kind of Afrikaner diplomat. The goodwill I receive is overwhelming and the effort minimal – you must just leave your paternalistic attitude at home.

I listen to a group of men talking about rugby, the latest golf equipment and “my daughter who tells me how much she enjoys living in Melbourne – it is just like the old South Africa.”

I bite my tongue not to say something nasty: I don't want to live in Melbourne or the old South – Africa. What is her experience of the old South Africa? Is it the wealthy suburb with the lush trees, neatly gardens, running water and flushing toilets? Or the suburbs without trees, where people have to walk long distances to a water tap, where there is not a flushing toilet in site, or where you have to prepare for your school exams in an overcrowded classroom – if you are lucky and are not taught in the shade of a tree.

I don't have a problem if people leave this country – that is the nature of globalisation; some also have had bad experiences with crime or professional setbacks because of affirmative action.

In November 2007 on a plane to Perth I was annoyed when a returning emigrant loudly announced: “Welcome in Perth – here are no potholes and no crime.” For this man it was a big joke; it was possible for him to emigrate from South Africa’s woes. For me, his comments were a slap in the face; it was “my potholes” and “my criminals” he was talking about. I don’t feel proud that we haven’t found the solutions for these predicaments. Like millions of South Africans – the greatest part of our nation – I can’t emigrate. We will just have to find solutions for these problems.

I (we) come from a broken past, but I (we) have to build a future on that past – a better future, and not a better past.

CHAPTER 29

EPLILOGUE

Dear David,¹

It was difficult to unsaddle these white horses. The picture you took in 1964 when Carl Otto, Piet Breedt and I were riding the police horses Victor, Tiger and Leo live on. We were escorting Prime Minister Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, when he delivered an important speech at De Wildt.

Neville Dubow, lecturer of the Michaelis Art school in Cape Town, described the photo in *Vrye Weekblad* (26 October 1990) as an icon of those years, because it symbolises institutional power, so typically that period.

The white horses became symbolic of the road I travelled on. White has to do with the white race and peace. I always wanted to be a peacemaker – I am a peacemaker. That is not an easy road to travel on because many people lie in waiting for you – mostly your own people. If you are committed to peace, you saddle untried horses.

Forty years later at Ngcobo in the Eastern Cape, during a visit with the Human Rights Commission, I borrowed a horse from one of the chiefs to ride with the mounted escort. The riders were not so keen to part with their horses because for them it was an honour to be part of the ceremony. After long discussions I was given a white horse to ride. Its name was Terre’Blanche.

Because of the communication challenges – the riders only spoke Xhosa – I could not establish what the name meant to the owner. From the general discussion with the chiefs I had the impression that they had Eugene Terre’Blanche – leader of the AWB – in mind when they gave that horse its name. Unfortunately you were not present to take a photo. My colleague, Pat Lawrence, had to stand in for you. In this picture you can see I have become more hefty but my horse is much thinner than the well-groomed horses that I was riding then. The horses tell the story: rich and poor, progress and power, also about people that battle to make ends meet, in spite of the fact that they share in democratic power.

¹ This is David Goldblatt, the well-known photographer.

It was a long journey from De Wildt to Ngcobo. The two places symbolise the two extremes. When Thabo Mbeki referred to the two worlds in South Africa – the one mostly white and rich and the other mostly black and poor – many called him a racist.

The sad part for me about the De Wildt/Ngcobo story is that the people of De Wildt and Ngcobo still don't know each other. The hardnosed people amongst us – representative of different colours and political persuasions – believe that they can get along without each other. That it is unnecessary to get to know one another. They don't realise that we still depend on each other and that our good and bad fortunes are intertwined.

This iconic photo of you also appeared in your books *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (Murray Crawford, 1975) and *Some Afrikaners Revisited* (Umuzi, 2007). After *Some Afrikaners Revisited* appeared on the bookshelves Kevin Ritchie wrote a friendly article about me in the *Sunday Independent* (4 March 2007) under the heading, "An Afrikaner's long walk to reconciliation".

Annari van der Merwe, from Umuzi, after reading this article, encouraged me to write a book. During a jolly lunch with Annari and me you told us how your camera lens captured the confidence of the Afrikaners as they marched to the seats of power. Then, when they lost power in the 1990's, you observed how their confidence dwindled – to the extent that they almost looked inferior.

Your account brought me around to tell this story. Who were we? Who and what wanted we to be? The thunderstorms of Africa and the wisdom of time overran us. I wanted to ask these questions and pin down possible answers.

Each generation must take responsibility for its time. Mandela, Tutu and De Klerk brought us here; a new generation must now take us further. The road to *vereniging* (unity) winds through *Vereeniging* more than once. If you don't understand that, you can sing "De la Rey, De la Rey" with Bok van Blerk or "Umshini wami" with Jacob Zuma as much as you like – *vereniging* will escape you.

The road to *Vereeniging* – in 1902 as well as 1996 – was long; full of uphill's and downhill's; full of dangerous hair-bend curves. The road to *vereniging* also will be long. I still believe that *vereniging* is achievable but, alas, very different from the dreams I had that day – 10 December 1996 – in Sharpeville, Vereeniging.

Now that I have unsaddled these white horses I have to mention a few things that give me joy. I don't have to try and convince anyone anymore. I follow the public debates and say what I think about them. The days of caucus discipline and echoing the sentiments of big leaders belong to the past.

I was never really concerned that someone might call me a racist – even if that would have been true – but nowadays I am completely removed from that fear. I now know my heart – whenever racial prejudice raises its ugly head, I look the demon in the eye and crush it.

I am no longer disturbed by this “turncoat, sell-out” thing. I understand that the people that still shout “turncoat, sell-out” are exactly the same people that used to shout “*kafferboetie!*” That is no longer acceptable language so they have changed their tune. I now wear this “turncoat, sell-out” label as a badge of honour, because the people that share my values look at the journey of the white horses with appreciation.

It is time to saddle new horses – the colour of the horses is no longer important. I will also not need your camera David, because I plan to stay on the back roads. This is my tribute to your camera. With your camera you captured a moment in my life that otherwise would have been nothing.

Go well,
Leon Wessels
Mogale City (Krugersdorp)