

# THE BATTLE FOR TUYNHUYNS AND ALL THAT

Latterly the South African body politic has exuded a pungent Muscovite smell. What a supreme irony. Has not the Nationalist ruling elite forever trumpeted its fears about communism, and gone to extraordinary lengths supposedly to prevent the citizenry, the disenfranchised masses especially, from being captivated by its heady fragrance? Instead, it is precisely the rulers themselves who have unwittingly fallen prey to it. How so, you rightly enquire? The answer lies in the character of authoritarian government, endured by South Africa and the Soviet Union alike. Let me dwell for the moment on several key aspects.

Since 1917, Soviet leaders upon taking office have savoured a rather daunting prospect: either die in harness, or be deposed by comrades. Actually Khrushchev alone experienced an enforced retirement. The rest withered away at the Kremlin. (In fact, a few remained General Secretary until several weeks after their demise.) South Africa's National Party has monopolised government these past forty years. And the infighting within the higher echelons is as telling as the CPSU has witnessed. For the Prime Ministers, death or defeat settled their fate, the plot or **die plaas**. The battle for Tuynhuys can be vicious and unrelenting. Ask Mr P.W. Botha, the creator of the all-powerful Presidency.

Botha, we learnt, suddenly fell ill this January. His condition was evidently serious. Attempts to maintain a Kremlesque public facade disguised little. The ageing, raging bull became fully exposed. His deteriorating political performance was instantly compounded by failing health. The combination proved irresistible. Cabinet colleagues materialised into rivals and heirs apparent – and leapt for the jugular. The embittered President lunged in retaliation. A bloody conflict ensued. Botha relinquished his leadership of the National Party, hoping that his apparently snap decision would open the way ahead for his anointed successor, Barend du Plessis. The strategy proved more successful than many pundits would have predicted. Still, it didn't quite work, and the obvious strongman in the wings, F.W. de Klerk, emerged victorious. Wounded, the vindictive Botha clung onto his executive position. As a last desperate wild gesture he entertained Nelson Mandela to tea at Tuynhuys. How incredible. Mandela, the perpetual ogre, vilified for his convictions, was used as the tangible instrument of Botha's revenge against his erstwhile henchmen. The manoeuvre confused everyone, appeased no-one. At a stroke the National Party was rocked back onto its heels, forced to defend the indefensible.

Estranged, the President was forced into calling an election. To the wilderness he would go – reluctantly – his political ego battered and bruised, his pride, his vanity, ignominiously and irredeemably stripped away. Brooding,

he watched from afar as his conqueror skipped hither and thither to capitals abroad, giving advance notice of the dawning era. Again Botha could not resist the impulse to strike out. Three weeks before polling day, he let word slip that he, the President, would decide whether to grant de Klerk permission or not to consort with Kenneth Kaunda in Lusaka. With that final, despairing idiosyncratic swipe at the Party that made him and broke him, Botha lurched off the political state, leaving an awkward legacy in his wake. Khrushchev would have commiserated.

Good fortune, Machiavelli reminded his Prince, is an indispensable commodity in political life. Mikhail Gorbachev has reaped its benefits. No incumbent at the helm of the Communist Party has consolidated his hold so swiftly, so surely. Rumours to the contrary are ill-founded, in my view. Within a year of assuming control in March, 1985, Gorbachev had imposed his stamp, because the conditions were right. The gerontocracy disappeared naturally with increasing rapidity, thus creating timely vacancies in the Politburo and the Central Committee. The next five yearly Party Congress was just around the corner, beginning in February, 1986, giving Gorbachev an immediate opportunity to impose his authority on CPSU ideology and policy. The outcome has reverberated worldwide. The overall policy is **perestroika**, 'restructuring'; the style of implementation is **glasnost**, or 'openness'. Here are two Russian terms already transformed miraculously into common transnational/coinage.

What price 'Pretoriastroika'? The parallels between de Klerk and Gorbachev are meaningful. Recall that the wily old bird, Andrei Gromyko, in officially proposing Gorbachev for the General Secretaryship, commended him with a truly Machiavellian sentiment, saying that he had a nice smile, but had 'teeth of steel'. I suspect that Mr de Klerk's dentures are equally pleasing – and equally formidable. **Fortuna** has gestured in his direction too. The enfranchised minority could pass their verdict immediately in the not so general election.

6th September was an unprecedented occasion in South African political history. Representatives were to be returned simultaneously to the three racially-based chambers of Parliament, with a separate voters roll for each. Because the course of political events is dictated by the House of Assembly, the preserve of 'Whites', media attention focused virtually exclusively on it. This was where the real scrap lay. The upshot? Voters deserted the National Party, either opting for the reactionary Conservative Party, or for the newly minted Democratic Party, the most liberal on offer. Still, the National Party retained an overall majority of seats in the House, though less commanding than previously, with 93 out of 165, and a by-election to follow. The Conservative Party consolidated

its hold on the runner-up spot, gaining 17 seats, amounting to 39 all in all. The Democratic Party, an amalgam of the Progressive Federal Party, the Independent Party, and the New Democratic Movement, improved on its collective showing, rising from 21 to 33 seats.

Expert opinion bandied about in the aftermath suggested that the Nationalists had lost face considerably. The NP loss **was** marked. It's undeniable. Nevertheless, a broader perspective lends a somewhat different insight, prompting me to conclude that the National Party performed very creditably in highly adverse circumstances. Allow me to elucidate. There was blood on the carpet. The battle for Tuynhuys threw into sharp relief enmities between political generations, the old and the new, and revived regional tensions between the North and the South. Secondly, the changing of the guard signalled a deeper irrevocable current that had now taken sway of the Party. The Nationalists are no longer embodied in a party of conviction, proclaiming indelible truths and committed to conveying the faithful to the promised land. Instead, the National Party idiom has become impeccably conservative. Afloat on the boundless ocean of politics the Party drifts with no end in mind or in sight, concentrating solely on keeping an even keel in the prevailing seas. Such uncertainty and calls for patience are hard messages to sell at the hustings.

Added to this, the National Party has forsaken the mantle of Afrikaner purity; its exclusivity has become the property of the Conservative Party, which is more reactionary in outlook than conservative. The perfidies of the wealthy and the corrupt provided ammunition for the Nationalists decades ago. Now it is the Conservatives who rail most effectively against these scourges. And who do they accuse? Why, the National Party of course. The fatcats in Pretoria have betrayed ordinary Afrikaner folk, so the forsaken have a new political umbrella under which to shelter. Giving substance to such misgivings is easy enough. Hitherto, **die volk** was told insistently, preserving so-called group rights entailed thwarting the black majority at home and maintaining a cordon sanitaire around South Africa's borders. But what is happening? The Nationalist government is entertaining Public Enemy Number One to rooibos tea and goodness knows what else, while at the same time helping the last domino of white rule to fall in the neighbouring states by **toenadering** with the United Nations in Windhoek. The National Party is soft on security! And whilst the corrupt line their pockets White salaried workers (and not they alone) have to contend with burgeoning prices and diminishing job opportunities. In short, the National Party had little to crow about at the polls.

Pushing the Nationalists even further on the defensive on the campaign trail was the reality of the opposition in full flight, outflanking it to the right as well as to the left. Not only could the Conservative Party feed off the weaknesses of the N.P., but it also had the whole revanchist turf to itself, dealing fairly cursorily with rival claimants, the Herstigte Nasionale Party, and the thuggish Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging. On the left, the Democratic Party had all the allure of novelty, a fresh image and fresh faces, presenting the 'rainbow coalition' of white South Africa in pragmatist mould.

Despite its own tangible vulnerabilities, despite the compelling opposition parties on both sides, the National Party triumphed, firmly ensconced, with exclusive power over the executive, and dominant in the tricameral parliament, the National government has the means to dictate its political future. Hapless, Conservatives and Democrats can only react to Nationalist initiatives. Extrapolating from the recent election results one cannot foresee the situation altering substantially next time round, unless, that is, the political climate is wholly different from how it appears at the moment. Translating votes into seats is always extremely taxing for weaker placed political parties in the simple plurality system practised here. Moreover, the delimitation of constituencies is another variable to be considered; ultimately, the decision to carry out redrawing the political map is in the government's hands, and thus, inevitably, is a further liability to be borne by the parties out of office. Putting all these imponderables aside, what can be discerned from the statistics revealed on 6th September?

The NP and the CP are in serious competition for approximately 21 seats, 13 of which are presently retained by the Conservatives. The Democratic Party scored exclusively in the metropolitan areas of the Cape, Transvaal and Natal. Possibly seven other NP seats are properly within reach, the bulk in the urban Eastern Cape. Were all this to come to pass, the worst case scenario for the National Party would be 78 seats; the CP, 48; and 40 for the Democrats. A hung parliament is, then, a slender prospect. And it's all very well arguing that the Nationalists and the Democrats together constitute a resounding majority for political reform, for the converse is as true. Recompose the National Party of old, today's NPs and the CP, and one soon reaches the sober understanding that there is a potential, and probably real, preponderance of political neanderthals among the White electorate.

Now that his party has maintained its parliamentary ascendancy and subsequently elevated him to the Presidency, Mr de Klerk has been able to sink his ISCOR teeth into the body politic. Like Gorbachev, de Klerk's image as leader marks a stark contrast with his grey, austere predecessors. Like the incoming Gorbachev, too, de Klerk is bald, fifty and self-assured. Representative of a younger generation of politicians, F.W. de Klerk is less shackled by the myths and folk memories that bound together Malan, Stijdom, Verwoerd, Vorster and Botha. The anglo-Boer War and the depression of the 1930s were before his time. But the rise of the National Party would surely have been central to family conversation, particularly as his father was a prominent Nationalist figure. Unlike Nationalists of yore, President de Klerk has embraced the world, not shrunk from it into a purely tribal preserve. By South African standards he appears cosmopolitan, certainly comfortable with the English language. All this is not to suggest, however, that he has deserted his Afrikaner roots. Not so. It's just that he is typical of the university educated, urban sophisticates that approach government in a visionary, quinessentially technocratic manner.

Able to make a modest quantum leap into the future the National Party under de Klerk's guidance is better prepared to compete for the middle-ground of White voters, although ever tenuously hamstrung by the right-

ward drift to the Conservative Party that this causes. The Democratic Party, in order always to surpass the threshold of credibility likewise has to garner support from the mass of the electorate located at the centre of the spectrum. Something akin to the United States phenomenon could emerge. Signs of this happening have occurred. Nationalists are in the Gobbledegook fold. You can't comprehend them in either tongue; Heunis-speak has proved pernicious and pervasive. The Democrats are the Gobblededumb Party. They're dangerously vacuous; the three co-leaders babble blandly and variously.

The Democratic Party is invidiously placed. Bereft of bargaining power it will have to behave like a pressure group in the parliamentary arena, forcing the government to account for its policies, and trying to goad it to pursue political reforms vigorously. The role is admittedly limited, yet cannot surely be forsaken, since Nationalist decision-makers are far too untrammelled as it is in wielding their authority. But the NP could readily nullify the effectiveness of the Democrats by slowly appropriating parts of its policy platform. The erstwhile United Party and its surviving rump, the New Republic Party, both suffered this fate, being consigned eventually to the political graveyard.

In holding out the prospect of a more inclusive polity the Democratic Party has striven to forge links with the extra-parliamentary opposition, notably the United Democratic Front, and then its reincarnation, the Mass Democratic Movement. Again the connection is important in that it undoubtedly helps to break down the political ghettos in which all South Africans hibernate. These good intentions have currently fallen on stony ground. Advocating non-racialism, the Democrats found themselves with aspiring candidates for the House of Delegates, the chamber destined for 'Asian' representation. However, the UDF and the MDM reject the tricameral configuration with undiluted contempt, especially the Houses of Delegates and Representatives, the latter being the sanctuary of supposed 'Coloureds'. So whichever way the Democratic Party turns some friends become foes.

My feeling is that the Democratic Party right now serves a valuable catalytic role, dancing between polar forces, and trying to keep valuable principles on the South African political agenda. But a healthy life looks remote. Either votes might be enticed elsewhere should there be the same kind of election in five years time, in which case the DP will slide downhill from an early, modest peak. Or if Afrikaner Nationalism and African Nationalism seek one another out, the small players might find themselves redundant. Were this so, the DP could foreseeably end up as no more than a marginal fringe grouping.

Reverting to the present, though, the newly sworn-in de Klerk has launched his Presidency with panache. His Cabinet appointments were shrewd. The powerful players, du Plessis at Finance, General Malan at Defence, and Pik Botha at Foreign Affairs, remain in place. Constitutional Development and Administration has gone to the intellectually inclined Dr Gerrit Viljoen, a highly significant office. The businessmen have joined the Cabinet ranks, as has the first woman, Dr Rina Venter, in charge of the Health and Population Development portfolio. A cautious note was struck in the redeployment of Adriaan Vlok, the

Minister of Law and Order, and Kobie Coetsee, heading Justice, the two who administer the persisting state of emergency. The overall blend of the Cabinet is a mixture of experience and promise.

De Klerk has operated speedily on both the foreign and the domestic fronts, treating them as one, in fact. Namibia edges towards independence. (With elections under United Nations scrutiny due to be staged this coming November.) South Africa's next batch of foreign debt has been renegotiated successfully, although the burden on the local citizenry will indeed be onerous.

The master stroke was unveiled on the night of 10th October, when six senior African National Congress political prisoners were released from incarceration. Walter Sisulu, Wilton Mkwayi, Raymond Mhlaba, Ahmed Kathrada and Andrew Mlangeni walked to freedom – relatively speaking. So did the Pan African Congress' Japhta Masemola. Thus the scene is set tentatively for Nelson Mandela's twenty-fifth year in prison to be his last.

This spectacular gesture allowed Mrs Thatcher to fight her fellow Commonwealth Prime Ministers doggedly in Kuala Lumpur, resisting their collective efforts to impose more stringent sanctions against South Africa. The political capital de Klerk has thereby accrued is telling. But it is at home where the onus is on his Presidency to meet the expectations generated by the manoeuvres carried out to date. Dr Viljoen's task is to hit on a mechanism for drawing the disenfranchised Blacks into a rapprochement with the ruling elite. A fourth parliamentary chamber? The idea is grotesque. The existing track-record hardly inspires confidence. The House of Representatives behaves erratically at best, sporadically combining business and pleasure on the beach. Seemingly, the House of Delegates is sprinkled with buffoons and rascals. What of the 'homelands'? What of local government in the racially confined Black townships? Any South African administration will ultimately be judged on how it grasps the nettle of participation by Blacks in the South African body politic.

The state in South Africa is far from weak; it is far from truly crisis-ridden. The regime is under constant strain, susceptible to pressures from within and without, but is far from collapse. Stories of its imminent demise can be attributed to the hyperbole of the moment. The initiative to promote structural change lies with the Nationalist government. Its control over the past twenty years or more has been increasingly corporatist in nature. Like Gorbachev's strategy, de Klerk can regulate pressure on the system by releasing pressure and thereafter accommodating its effects. The Brazilians have managed this **abertura democratica** with reasonable success during the last ten years. But what is unique about the South African case is the extreme exclusivity of its polity. It would be ludicrous to expect the Nationalist government to be altruistic; it will not abdicate its command. That option is precluded, although, of course, it is precisely this that the ANC and the MDM demand, and why they exert unrelenting pressure on the prevailing order. A corporatist grip permits the Nationalist government to clutch onto the reins of power, giving some slack when absolutely necessary, but never allowing the horses of opposition

sufficient leeway to wrest control out of the ruling Party's hands. As a matter of governance this entails firm executive control. The character may alter; econocrats may indeed replace securocrats in the inner sanctum. Whoever the functionaries may be, their master will perpetually be the President. Parliament's subordinate role is assured. Political power in the current circumstances rests with the President and the advisors and bodies with whom he chooses to deal.

Van Zyl Slabbert has usefully depicted South African politics under the state of emergency as being in unstable equilibrium. Nowadays, I would say it is in stable disequilibrium. There's always despair; but there's always laughter; and there are delicious moments of euphoria. Life is never, never dull. Untamed, South Africa is inherently ungovernable. That's really no bad thing. But many of us, it is true, would rather be ungoverned by someone else. □

by DORIAN HAARHOFF

# THE METEORITE AT THE END OF THE LENS

Future South African-Namibian Relationships as depicted in two drama scripts.

DULLY: Well, I can't see this meteor  
 JITTERWIT: Have you looked through the telescope?  
 It's a blazing golden ball  
 With a fierce blue circle around it  
 And around that circle, a fierce red bigger circle,  
 And around that one, a fierce purple circle –  
 It's rushing to swallow us up, bigger every minute.  
 (Ted Hughes, **The Tiger's Bones**)

In Ted Hughes' **The Tiger's Bones** the Master and his entourage are convinced that the approaching meteorite seen through their telescope, is about to land on their heads. Dully unscrews the telescope to find a blob of growing penicillin on the lens. Perhaps this image offers an appropriate introduction to an article dealing with perceptions of an independent Namibia's future relationship with the former colonizing power, South Africa. There are many speculations as to the size of the South African meteorite in the Namibian imagination. To what extent will South Africa loom large on the Namibian lens? Will independence remove the fungus and prove its power and influence an illusion? An example of the removable fungus theory was recently reported in **The Namibian**. At an election rally Ms Maria Kapere, Deputy Head of Mobilization in the SWAPO Election Directorate, asserted that "the election in November is the first chance that Namibians have had in their history to rid themselves of South Africa forever" (5 Aug. 1989:5).

What follows is my personal version of a possible future scenario as depicted in two drama texts scripted by me and performed by University of Namibia students. Perceptions are of course by definition subjective and speculative. **Orange** was performed at the Grahamstown fringe and in Windhoek and Swakopmund in 1988; and

**Skeleton** in Pretoria, Grahamstown and Cape Town during 1989. The earlier play was directed by Aldo Behrens, Head of the Department of Drama at the University of Namibia and the latter one by Gerrit Schoonhoven, (**Piekniek by Dingaen**, et al) lecturing in a temporary capacity in the same Department. I am indebted to both these dramatic men for their structural insights.

In each case I produced a script which was discussed and workshopped with frequent consultations with director and cast. If one thinks of a continuum with a fixed, unalterable script at one end and a floating non-formed idea at the other, then the scripts I brought to the first rehearsal were placed thus:

FIXED	Orange	FLOATING
SCRIPT	Skeleton	IDEA

After shuffling sequences, crisping dialogue, attending to rhythms, I rescripted the production product where necessary.

## Issues

**Orange** and **Skeleton** both deal with a number of related issues, one of which is the South African-Namibian connection that I wish to explore. Both plays set in the future 1990's, deal with the colonial past and its present play-out. In the **Orange** scenario, Nango, a returned exile with a D.Cit (Dr. of Citrus), comes home to invent a machine, the **William of Orange**, which affects the current of the Lüderitz coast and produces a high rainfall area. What once was desert is now the fertile SWARANGE plantation, producing oranges juicier than Outspan. The oranges come in three sizes. The largest, the Loftus