

## **The Early 1970's with Durban Moments.**

### **Roots and journeys linking the Christian Institute and wider community to the re-ignition of resistance to apartheid in the early 70's.**

A personal reflection by activist and campaigner, Horst Kleinschmidt, prepared  
in Jan/Feb 2013.

13,890 words

[This paper relies on source material of the time but the author wants it to be known that he is neither a historian nor an academic in the field of church history.]

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## ACRONYMS

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| BC       | Black Consciousness                                |
| BCP      | Black Community Programmes                         |
| BPC      | Black People's Convention                          |
| CI       | Christian Institute of South Africa                |
| DRC      | Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa              |
| Nats     | Short for the National Party                       |
| NUSAS    | National Union of South African Students           |
| PP       | Progressive Party                                  |
| PSC      | Programme for Social Change                        |
| RDM      | Rand Daily Mail                                    |
| SACC     | South African Council of Churches                  |
| SACBC    | South African Catholic Bishops Conference          |
| SAIRR    | South African Institute of Race Relations          |
| SASO     | South African Student Organisation                 |
| SPRO-CAS | Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society |
| SRC      | Student Representative Council                     |
| TECON    | Theatre Company (Durban)                           |
| UP       | United Party                                       |
| WCC      | World Council of Churches                          |
| WCP      | White Community Programme                          |
| WFC      | Wilgerspruit Fellowship Centre                     |

In 1972 Bennie Khoapa, director of the SPRO-CAS Black Community Programmes edited a publication, *Black Viewpoint*<sup>1</sup>. In the introduction he wrote: "For the New Black, this is a preparatory stage. The means are not now available for entering the final road. Our task therefore is to prepare for ten, fifteen and forty years. The only question now is whether black people are made of the stuff as histories are made of, and black people must answer that question in the presence of the world and in the presence of the black living, the black dead and the black unborn". Courageous and prophetic, Khoapa located Black Consciousness in a wider context.

## **1. Setting the Scene: The Churches and the liberation struggle.**

The Churches in South Africa had not been part of the resistance to apartheid in the 1950's and early 1960's. The organisations they might have allied themselves to had been outlawed, its leaders imprisoned and exiled when the churches finally showed qualified and limited signs of opposition in the 1970's. And when initially they did take action, solidarity with others was in general, not what they had in mind. First stirrings in the churches came after the Sharpeville shootings of 1960. Even then it was the impulse from abroad, from the World Council of Churches that brought South African Church leaders to sit around the table and collectively condemn apartheid.

In the prior period there were clergymen who were exceptions, who rejected apartheid and stood with the broader anti-apartheid forces, amongst them Trevor Huddleston, Joost de Blank, Ambrose Reeves and some others. Beyers Naude, already in middle age, was not amongst them.

After Sharpville Beyers Naudé, then a moderator<sup>2</sup> of the Dutch Reformed Church helped to organize a consultation between the WCC and South African church delegates in Cottesloe, a Johannesburg suburb. The consultation's resolutions rejected race as the basis of exclusion from churches and affirmed the right of all people to own land and have a say in how they are governed. The implications of such language were revolutionary indeed, if acted upon. The DRC delegates

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<sup>1</sup> Black Viewpoint became a banned book when Bennie Khoapa was banned on 31.10.1973 and it became illegal to distribute or possess his writings.

<sup>2</sup> Moderator might be compared to the role of Bishop in other denominations.

withdrew their support of the Cottesloe resolutions after Prime Minister Verwoerd had forced them to repudiate the consultation. The DRC also resigned its membership of the World Council of Churches. Beyers Naudé was the exception and remained the lone DRC leader to reject any theological basis for apartheid. This happened when the ANC, PAC and a swathe of other organisations were already banned and driven underground.

Besides holding senior office in his church at that time Beyers was also a senior member of the secret Afrikaner organisation, the Broederbond. Sharpeville and the encouragement from the European ecumenical movement moved Beyers to break with his church (and the Broederbond) and in 1963 he established the Christian Institute. In the beginning the CI modus operandi was mostly to conduct bible study in small groups of members from all denominations who had individually joined the CI. Membership of the CI did not mean that they resigned from their churches. They were searching for biblical answers to reject apartheid.

In the early 1970's when a broader church-based opposition emerged, the churches remained distant from anything that spelt underground or illegality and on the ideological side this meant distance, or outright hostility to socialism or communism.

David Walsh, in his book *Church versus State in South Africa – The case of the Christian Institute*<sup>3</sup> writes: By the mid-twentieth century, the white-controlled churches of South Africa had been very largely absorbed into the country's cultural and legal patterns of racial discrimination. Although there were exceptions to this passivity, it was only after ... the massacre at Sharpeville in 1960, that major and sustained church-state confrontation developed". What Walsh observes is how the white leadership of the huge number of Christian denominations in South Africa were middle class and underpinning colonialism and apartheid.

When the member churches of the SACC with sections of the Catholic Church showed stirrings, they rowed their own boat into conflict with apartheid whilst the three Afrikaans Reformed churches remained loyal to Afrikaner political power till the end.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Setting my own scene.**

Sheer luck or coincidence took me as a rooky student at Wits in the late 1960's, into the heart of the place where the next impulse of struggle would emanate

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<sup>3</sup> Walsh, Peter (1983): *Church versus State in South Africa – the Case of the Christian Institute*, published by C. Hurst and Co, London (ISBN 0-905838-81-5 and Orbis Books, USA (ISBN 0-88344-097-0)

<sup>4</sup> Toward the end of apartheid church leaders were often seen leading protests with leaders of other religions, with the UDF, etc. The 1989 march in Cape Town where 30,000 people participated, witnessed an integrated front between church and civil society and testifies to solidarity by the churches with other organisations during the last years of apartheid.

from. My background was rooted in a white right wing, lower middle class home. Slowly I navigated my boat out of apartheid and into the heart of the struggle.

In 1968 I attended the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) annual congress, held at Wits that year. Amongst the 120 or so delegates and observers were a handful of Black students.

On the last evening of the Congress the University Student Representative Council (SRC) hosted a gala dinner for all delegates. I sat at the tail end of the large u-shaped table in the Wits refectory. The event was noisy and filled with bonhomie, we who saw ourselves as brave warriors against apartheid. Opposite me sat one of the very few black students. The table was wide and the noise level such that I hardly spoke to him. At the end of the dinner our host asked us to stand and sing a throaty, *Die Stem van Suid Afrika*, - after all, we did not want to be accused of being unpatriotic. The man opposite me did not stand up. When we all sat down, he stood up and our host, knowing much more than I did at the time, did nothing to stop him. Alone, with maybe with a few other voices, his fist held up high, he sang *Nkosi sikelele' iAfrika*. His voice was strong and the song beautiful. It was the first time I heard this song. Whispers around the table informed me that it was illegal to sing it. I was none-the-less deeply impressed. I walked round the table after he sat down and properly introduced myself. He held out his hand and said his name was Steve Biko. We 'clicked' and he invited me to come to Durban so we could talk more. Over the coming year I spent many weekends at the Alan Taylor residence where black medical students were accommodated. There I met Stan Sabelo Ntwasa from Galeshewe Township outside Kimberley. Tall and gangly Stan was an adherent of the thoughts of Robert Sobukwe, who was banished, after his pro-longed imprisonment on Robben Island, to Galeshwe. And I met Goolam 'Jes' Abram, a no-nonsense guy who spoke his mind forcefully. And Ben Ngubane who I thought, was expounding an ANC position<sup>5</sup>. And there was Steve, not yet ready but experimenting with his articulation of Black Consciousness.

In Durban I also met Strini and Sam Moodley and others who had formed themselves into what they called TECON Players, a theatre company. Their intention was to communicate and educate through cabaret, political thought – a way of beating censorship and the banning of printed texts. I frequently attended performances at M L Sultan College and elsewhere to see a show called Black on White – its contents regularly changing to interpret the latest happenings in the world where Prime Minister, John Balthazar Vorster held sway<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Ngubane became a prominent Inkhatha Freedom Party leader, served as a Cabinet Minister in a national unity Cabinet and is currently Chairperson of the board of the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

<sup>6</sup> The last time I attended a TECON show Strini requested I move from the hall into the seclusion of the projection room to watch the performance. The audience he said, were BC adherents who might take exception at my presence. The logic of our friendship versus his sense of BC clearly sat uncomfortably together. Although we kept seeing each other for a while after that, our relationship broke down, irreparably, when I associated myself with the ANC, in exile, in 1976.

Falling in love with a Durban girl, across the colour bar, added lustre to a new and exciting world that was shut to me only a short while earlier. Durban was filled with promise and I wanted to be part of it. Shebeens and a tiny number of eateries in the Indian part of Durban and Verulam sustained us with food and drink. The small flat of Strini and Sam's in Beatrice Street, an enclave in middle Durban, not yet cleansed for whites in terms of the Group Areas Act. Here was the epicentre where meetings were held, documents written, meals cooked and the midnight oil burnt.

In 1970 I was Vice President of NUSAS and was part of an effort to reposition NUSAS in a political landscape that was changing rapidly. After my term of office my then wife, Ilona and I expressed the desire to actively get involved in the struggle against apartheid and Beyers Naude was looking for people ready to commit themselves beyond the usual pious statements condemning the system that ruled South Africa. In April 1972 Beyers, head of the Christian Institute (CI) offered both of us employment. We were unlikely recruits. Ilona came from a Jewish home in Bloemfontein. I came from a long line of German Christian missionaries sent to the Northern Cape and Namibia. We both considered ourselves agnostics. Beyers defended our appointment to CI members with the words: In this time of crises in South Africa I look for people whose values approximate my understanding of universal but also Christian values and at this moment these two represent what is closest to my own Christian principles. He added that he was saddened that so few Christians were willing to join him in actively opposing apartheid. In all the years of working with Beyers he never asked that we join his faith; we had great respect for those who believed and who worked at the CI and they in turn had respect for our agnosticism. We were to work for a unit called SPRO-CAS 2, under the joint guidance of the the CI and the SACC at their offices in Braamfontein, Johannesburg.

Ilona and I took to the road to Johannesburg on Easter Weekend days after Cape Town Magistrate W. A. King acquitted me of a contravention under the Suppression of Communism Act<sup>7</sup>. Judge King was a lenient judge. In his verdict he said he accepted my evidence. I had argued that I should not be held responsible for unsolicited books sent to me via the post; that I had not yet looked at the material and thus did not know that the material the SB found in our flat was in fact banned.

The banned literature had been found when the SB's raided our Milnerton flat at 5.15 on the morning of 24 October 1971. One of the documents found was a copy of *African Communist* the mouthpiece of the South African Communist Party. On the same morning homes all over South Africa had been raided. It seemed the SB's had obtained an address list and found the person who sent us the illegal literature. This was also the night that Ahmed Timol was detained and on 27<sup>th</sup> October, so the SBs claimed, he had jumped to his death from the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of John Vorster Square. The inquest never established whether he had been tortured to death or if, as a means to get him to speak, he had been suspended

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<sup>7</sup> Cape Times of 16 March 1972, Argus of 15 March 1972 and *Die Burger* of 16.2.72.

from the window by his interrogator – and was dropped, by accident or intentionally.

In 1975 when I was myself detained I was initially taken to the same 10<sup>th</sup> floor before being taken to a prison in Pretoria. When the police vehicle in which I was transferred to Pretoria filled up with fuel in the yard below John Vorster Square, my to-be interrogators told me that Timol was impaled on one of the petrol pumps when he “jumped”, as they put it<sup>8</sup>.

### **3. The Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPRO-CAS)**

The CI and the South African Council of Churches<sup>9</sup> (SACC) had jointly sponsored SPRO-CAS (Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society). SPRO-CAS was a follow-up to the 1968 *Message to the People of South Africa* – a warning by an assembly of essentially white church leaders that apartheid as an authoritarian and racially repressive and unjust system would cause ever growing conflict. The follow-up to the *message* was to appoint a number of commissions to study and then publish papers on how, from a progressive Christian viewpoint, apartheid impacted on society in general, on the economy, the judiciary, education, health, the church etc. The series was concluded with a summary book in which the head of SPRO-CAS, Peter Randall, took stock of what had been achieved. To draw clear lessons from the studies was no easy task. On the one hand there were contributors who were radical, such as Rick Turner, whilst there were others whose vision for a future South Africa was gradualist, anti the franchise for all, and anti working class organisation and assertion. Knowledge of the banned, underground or exiled ANC or PAC was beyond the consideration or scope of the investigation.

SPRO-CAS 2 was a follow-up, a way to translate the academic and printed recommendations of the SPRO-CAS 1 into action. The idea behind SPRO-CAS 2 was to educate, ‘conscientise’ and to radicalise civil society so they would take an active stand against apartheid. But SPRO-CAS 2 faced considerable challenges. One challenge came from the conservative member churches of the SACC who opposed the new plan advocated by the SACC’s small leadership group. As a result Phase 2 became more associated with the CI but in the end was never disowned by the SACC. Because the CI was an individual membership organisation as opposed to the SACC, which had to answer to affiliated member churches, the CI was agile in a way the SACC could not be. Even in the CI, Beyers had to douse several veld-fires when CI members thought we in SPRO-CAS 2 had gone too far.

A second and much bigger challenge came from the unfolding Black Consciousness (BC) thrust. Their demand for black people to withdraw from the

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<sup>8</sup> In *Death of an Idealist*, Beverley Naidoo writes how Rob Adam during his detention sits in a police car at the same pumps and realizes who betrayed him. Amongst a group of SB’s hanging around in the vehicle yard, he spotted a man he had trusted as a close confidant till then.

<sup>9</sup> The SACC broadly represented most Christian denominations but excluded the Afrikaans Reformed Churches. The Catholic Church also was not a member but not for reasons of disagreement with the SACC over its anti-apartheid stance.

few mixed-race, 'non-racial' organisations that still existed in South Africa, created, as it was intended, a crisis in the liberal, and de facto white run organisations, such as NUSAS and the CI. Many liberal whites called Steve Biko and his associates 'black racists' or accused BC of being complicit in the *separate development ideology* of apartheid. Beyers and the leadership of NUSAS I had come from did not see it that way. We saw the reasons why the traditional modus of the liberal organisations had become unacceptable to black people. If Steve and BC had a case for withdrawing from the liberal organisations then white folk who opposed apartheid needed to acknowledge that there was good reason for criticism and thus that we had to ask ourselves fundamental questions and take a fresh look at our organisations, if our response to apartheid was to be credible and to have impact. We had to question in which way our contribution to a free and open society would be part of the emerging much bigger national effort for liberation. The spotlight had fallen on the divide between pontificating about the wrongs apartheid created versus a more radical activism. Specifically we realised that verbal condemnation was the stance of privileged well-to-do people, unwilling to entertain material discomfort as a consequence of their stance. The decision of the South African Liberal Party to disband in 1968 when it became illegal to have black and white as members of the same political party, was an example to us, of a mistaken, white, cop out.

### **3.1. SPRO-CAS 2: Left turn.**

Writing in the SPRO-CAS publication *A Taste of Power*, Peter Randall and others who came from liberal backgrounds, now embraced the need for what was called *radical* change in respect of power and land in South Africa.

It is worth pondering what 'radical' meant to us in this period. Firstly it signified a distancing from the rump of those who said they were 'liberal' in persuasion. It was also that we wanted activism where liberals, in general, believed in the power of persuasion. We wanted our actions to demonstrate empathy and solidarity with the majority; we wanted to entertain the same risks that black people who wanted change had accepted as necessary. Most importantly though, radical was as yet devoid of a political plan and of a concept of what a future dispensation might look like. To all intents it was but a variant of the 'liberal ideology'. Radical was not socialist although that resonated with several individuals. At the heart of it the new radicalism amongst this small group of whites was a response to the BC radicalism, which in turn lacked a clear or agreed or comprehensive political philosophy. BC too was in pursuit of 'radical' change but its proponents often come from distinctly aspirant middle-class backgrounds, notably the clerical proponents of BC. An absence of knowledge about the earlier Congress (ANC, SACP and SACTU) and PAC movements, of their ideological foundations, about their accumulated experience, is evident in this period of new uprising. The earlier generation from whom to learn were in prison, banned or banished or in exile. They had been dealt a deathly blow and a new generation struggled to build on previous political traditions.

To make these points is not to condemn the new radicals, black or white. They played their role in bringing apartheid to its knees and for many it represented a



transit station before they linked up with the underground movements. These radicals also played an important role to bring disaffection and ultimately even forms of rebellion in a sector of society that was less disposed to change by virtue of their class position, whether black or white.

The thrust, maybe epicentre, of white radicalisation in this period could be found in the short-lived University Christian Movement, a redefined NUSAS and in the Christian Institute.

This paper seeks to trace what defined the white, church and middle-class response to Black Consciousness at the time and how, on the margins, this small white and essentially middle class contributed to what is called the 'Durban Moment'.

Like all attempts to ferment change the CI, and by extension SPRO-CAS 2 recognised the need to publish – partly to reach a wider audience, partly to define who we, the new white radicals, were. To do this we analysed and we agitated through discussion papers, study aids, dossiers that showed up the brutality of the system and additionally we held endless meetings and discussions with audiences we wanted to reach. Beyers had motivated for a printing press from the Dutch and German church sponsors of our work. This proved an exceptionally fortuitous investment as many commercial printers refused to print our material because they were intimidated by visits from SB who threatened them if they printed for us. It is little known that in 1976, the Soweto youth, organised under the SSRC, had pamphlets printed at the CI press, sometimes in the dark at night, albeit not always with Beyers' knowledge. According to *The Eye of the Needle* (by Peter Randall), between 1971 and the end of 1973 the CI press, later known as Ravan Press, had produced 125,000 copies of various publications.

### **3.2. The Black Community Programme.**

In light of the new thrust of Black Consciousness, SPRO-CAS 2, the action (or implementation of SPRO-CAS 1) project, was divided into two halves: One known as the Black Community Programmes and the other known as the White Community Programmes. The WCP was later re-named the Programme for Social Change (PSC) whilst the Black programme (BCP) hived off to establish a semi-independent existence outside of SPRO-CAS 2. Bennie Khoapa with Steve Biko as his deputy ran the Black programme<sup>10</sup>. The white Peter Randall supported by myself ran Programme. From time to time the four of us met to discuss our reporting and financial obligations to the CI, the SACC and our overseas donors.

At one joint meeting, held at Diakonia House in Jorrissen Street in Braamfontein, I recall the four of us discussing our views for a future South Africa. The atmosphere was and remained cordial. At the end of an animated engagement Bennie Khoapa and Peter Randall agreed they wanted a social-democrat

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<sup>10</sup> The other staff members of the BCP were Bokwe Mafuna and Sam Moodley.

dispensation while Steve and I opted for a socialist state. Class versus black consciousness were, it seems, not easy bedfellows. During a debate in 1977 Peter and Harry Oppenheimer opposed each other in debate at UCT. Oppenheimer defended capitalism whilst Peter argued the case for socialism. The event was organised by the SSD (Students for Social Democracy). In it Peter defended the position that “only socialism can satisfy South Africa’s future”.

None of us favoured Communism as practised in some parts of the world and the distinction between social democrat and socialist remained ill defined. Knowledge of the South African Communist Party (SACP) was practically non-existent. It was rumoured that the Johannesburg Human Rights Committee included people sympathetic to the SACP.

### **3.3. The White Community Programme.**

As part of the white community programme our aim was to get whites who morally rejected apartheid to take a stand and do something. The philosophy was that if you could get people to feel and experience the repression of the state through activism, you would be willing to commit to, by no means in all cases, to further levels of activism and thus radical change as opposed to talking about change. In my opinion, both NUSAS and the CI (and UCM during its brief existence) produced a fine crop of white activists who played their part in eventually bringing apartheid to its knees. Our ‘converts’ were people who otherwise would have continued to live undisturbed and insular lives in support of the apartheid state, whether directly or indirectly.

### **4. Publishing: the new contents.**

Through six publications I hope to convey the intent and nature of what was part of our publishing programme:

#### **4.1. *The Eye of the Needle* by Rick Turner.**

Knowing how woolly the word ‘radical’ was we wanted to put substance, nay ideology, to what we wanted to say.

The first book we published was by Rick Turner. It served as an important political primer and provided a deeper and philosophical content for many in our generation. *The Eye of the Needle*<sup>11</sup> gave definition and direction to the egalitarian society we felt morally committed to. *The Eye of the Needle* was circulated and read widely even after the book was banned in March 1973.

In Chapter 2 of his book, Turner raises questions about Capitalism and Christianity and how the two are bedfellows despite an inherent contradiction. Here, at the height of apartheid we published these words of Turner’s: “Some people control the means of production. The rest of the population, having no tools or land of their own, have no option but to work for those who have the

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<sup>11</sup> Turner, Richard: *The Eye of the Needle*, published by

tools and the land. And the owners naturally expect to get something out of permitting them to do so ... some of the products of their labour should [thus] be given to the capitalist in return for the 'right' to use the capitalist means of production. To put it another way the worker receives wages that are less than the value of his/her labour ... this is exploitation." And Turner does not mince his words when he aims straight at the exploiting class who did so well under apartheid. "Some capitalists may read these lines, and it is possible that they will not recognise themselves in what I have written..." He goes on, "I may smile at my secretary, donate money to the factory sports club, take an interest in welfare work, and belong to the Progressive Party, and yet still exploit my workers and fit the description made ...".

When he turns to religion he notes that the teachings of all religions support a just and humane world. He quotes from Matthew 22.32: 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living' and then Turner observes that "both the old and the new testament direct us toward other people, not away from them and into the other world". He concludes ... "it must be clear how different the Christian human model is from the capitalist model" and then quotes from Matthew 19, 24-25 that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle, than it is for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God".

What Turner did was to take the debate about the inhumanity of apartheid that preoccupied many who opposed it, and located apartheid inside the broader capitalist model – albeit that apartheid was a particularly crude version of exploitation. In a chapter headed 'The Politics of Socialism' he observes: "wealth is ... power over other people. In capitalist society that power is heavily concentrated in a few hands. Inequality of property and income depend not on innate ability, but largely on prior inequalities of property ownership passed on by inheritance." This he argues is not natural and "the heir is not born with an unbreakable umbilical cord connecting him to property". The socialist ideal he says cannot come about in democratic capitalist societies because they "do not deprive the minority of their control over the means of production". Wealth, he argues, affords the wealthy with immense political power.

For eleven months SPRO-CAS 2 distributed a total of 3,500 copies of this primer, mostly to young white and black trade union activists and to those whose radicalism needed a philosophical foundation. Turner's call was a far cry from the some of the SPRO-CAS 1 recommendations that promoted no more than the legalisation of 'works committees' (instead of trade unions) for black workers, on condition that its members received adequate 'training'.

Turner ends his chapter on socialism with a warning. "When considering the question of an alternative to capitalism we must beware of assuming that the only other possibility is the Soviet model of communism" and he concludes that "the only real alternative is to ensure popular participation, based on workers' control, in a context of political freedom".

Rick Turner did his PhD at the Sorbonne in Paris just prior the 1968 student uprisings when capitalism came under fire all over Europe and when vibrant new Marxist thinking emerged.

Turner's *Eye of the Needle* remains relevant in today's South Africa.

The last time I met Rick was at his home in the suburb of Bellair, Durban in 1975. We sat under a tree in the backyard of his home – a practice observed to escape the bugging devices one assumed had been placed in the rooms of ones home. He was wearing a sage-like long toga. We talked about BC variants and how they might lead to African nationalism or to socialism and how both notions together were not reconcilable. In 1977 Rick was shot and killed by a police agent when responding to a knock on his front door. He died in the arms of his pre-teen daughters. The killer has never been found; unfinished business the Truth and Reconciliation Commission left us with.

#### **4.2. *Black Viewpoint* edited by Steve Biko.**

In 1972 the SPRO-CAS Black Community Programme published *Black Viewpoint* when BCP had already moved to independent offices in Beatrice Street, Durban. The printer remained, for now, the CI in Johannesburg. Steve Biko's editorial remarks address themselves to the black community who he implores to write, so that the majority population of South Africa is not constantly seen and written about by the white minority. His drive is "not that we must therefore castigate white society and its newspapers ... no ... we blacks must on our own develop those agencies [newspapers]". He envisaged regular editions of *Black Viewpoint* in which black authors would be invited to speak.

A young third-year student wrote the most thoughtful piece in *Black Viewpoint*. He was studying at Roma University in Lesotho. His name: Njabulo Ndebele<sup>12</sup>. He describes the different social strata in black society and how the urban Black, both the middle class and the workers need to become the drivers of change. He also draws a fine line between tradition and modernity. Whilst cherishing cultural traditions he does not hesitate to say that tradition is not static but evolves to adapt to new circumstances. The artist he observes "plays music with new musical instruments; he uses paints and the chisel" he writes. "The black man must use new instruments without shame, for science and technology are the rightful inheritance of all men on earth".

Writing this in 1972 he concludes: "It is now for the black man to begin to work. It is work that involves a whole human re-orientation. The blacks must awaken intellectually, spiritually, socially, morally, culturally and in many other ways that make life worth living. If the whites do not want to change their attitudes, let the blacks advance and leave them behind; and when they have been left behind, let them be waited for on the day they realise the value of change. The important thing to realise is that what the blacks are striving for is more valuable than racial hatred. The blacks must know what they want when they cry for freedom.

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<sup>12</sup> Ndebele became a poet of note, was Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town and remains a foremost social commentator.

They should not be in the situation whereby when they get this freedom they do not know what to do with it. The struggle is more than a racial one; it is also a human one; a human struggle involves development in all human activities that are the marks of true civilisation". Madiba could not have said it better!

A new edition of *Black Viewpoint* had to be printed when Bennie Khoapa, one of the contributors to the book was banned. It was a punishable offence to own or distribute a book that contained the writings of a banned person.<sup>13</sup>

### **4.3. Strike! (Jan/Feb 1973) – A Dossier on the Durban strikes.**

This Dossier, tabloid sized and part of a series, captures what the Rand Daily Mail called 'the Great Zulu Strike'<sup>14</sup>. The dossier contains an editorial followed by a collage of the most important articles on the strikes. In an article by John Imrie of the RDM, he notes that around 50,000 strikers had won a wage increase of R2 extra per week. According to newspapers of the day the strikes involved 100 firms in the Durban, Pinetown and Hammersdale area. The largest employer amongst them was the Frame Group that employed about 20,000 workers who had come out on strike.

The Frame Company and its owner come in for the harsh criticism by the press. Imrie of the Rand Daily Mail describes Philip Frame as a textile engineer who immigrated to South Africa from Germany in the 1920's and how he created the largest blanket factory in the world, here in Durban. His market for blankets (and canvass shoes) stretched throughout Southern Africa. " ... Stop any blanket-clad tribesman between Blantyre and Cape Town, twist back one corner of his ngubo and have a look at the label. Chances are it bears a Frame Group brand name". Imrie concludes: "the wealthy Mr Phillip Frame has given scant recognition or reward to the ... Black workers, who made his success possible".

The editorial comment in the SPRO-CAS Dossier takes aim at the 'liberal' and 'English Natal' for being no better than the conservative Afrikaans businesses elsewhere in the country. It sites an article from the Star (14.2.1973) in which affluent, and by implication liberal-minded people, pay their domestic workers abysmal wages. A second example comes from the Afrikaans press who tackled Helen Suzman, the sole MP in Parliament representing liberal opinion. She allegedly served on a company board that owned a hotel in Pretoria where Suzman defends the low wages paid to waiters. She was quoted as saying that 'tips and other benefits' justify the low wages. *Die Vaderland* (7.2 1973) claims that the newspaper's tea ladies earn more than the 'male' waiters in the employ of those who (meaning people like Suzman) call for a better deal for the black workers. Several of the Afrikaans papers of the day agree that black workers should be paid more, blaming the strikes on 'the hypocritical English' employers.

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<sup>13</sup> On 10 October 1973 Peter Randall issued a brief document headed "SPRO-CAS: Some Publishing Problems. In it he elaborates on the multitude of limitations a publisher and printer was subjected to. And he reflects on the pressure of self-censorship that arises in this situation and on the heavy cost implications of having to withdraw and pulp many of the books we published.

<sup>14</sup> Rand Daily Mail, 9 February 1973, article written by John Imrie.

The Afrikaners glee and pointing fingers at the 'English' underscores the sense Afrikaners and the National Party had that they were not yet in the driving seat of the economy despite having political power. The arguments are reminiscent of Black and ANC politicians today who see whites owning the economy to the exclusion of blacks, despite the ANC having political power.

#### **4.4. *Cry Rage* by James Mathews and Gladys Thomas**

A further way in which SPRO-CAS 2 defined its role was to publish works that traditional publishers would not consider for fear of the book being banned thus causing unfavourable stigma rubbing off on the publishing company and additionally causing financial loss when having to pulp books that are subsequently banned.

Therefore a further publication in our series was a volume of poetry by James Mathews and Gladys Thomas called *Cry Rage*. Its distribution lasted less than a year and was banned in March 1973. Despite this, and like with other books, we took delight in surreptitiously continuing with distributing banned copies for the SB's had failed to confiscate all copies at our premises.

James Mathews' outrage was popular for its accessible language to people at mass meetings and easily captured the mood of the times:

*It is said  
that poets write of beauty  
of form, of flowers and of love  
but the words I write  
are of pain and of rage*

*I am no minstrel  
who sings of joy  
mine is lament*

*I wail of a land  
Hideous with open graves  
Waiting for the slaughtered ones*

*Balladeers strum lutes and sing tunes of happy times  
I cannot join in their merriment  
my heart frowned in bitterness  
with the agony of what white man's law has done*

And Gladys Thomas speaks of exile in her poem "Flight". Many people classified 'Coloured' (mixed race), instead of facing the daily indignities apartheid caused them to experience, emigrated to Australia, Canada and elsewhere at this time. The last stanza of "flight" reads:

*Time has come to migrate  
To a land away from here  
A land where the grass is greener  
Where my feathers will not stand out in fear  
I must take flight to where I will be free  
To make my nest in a tree*

*These vultures are my enemy  
Why do they fly so after me  
These vultures they are my enemy*

#### **4.5. *White Liberation* edited by Horst Kleinschmidt.**

In late 1972 I edited a book called *White Liberation*<sup>15</sup>. I quote Stokely Carmichael in it: 'If the white man wants to help, he can go home and free his own people'. This encapsulated the message I wanted to get across to white liberals pre-occupied with doing things 'for black people'. We and Black Consciousness were not un-touched by the international discourse, notably the black power assertion in the USA. The writings of Franz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*) were circulating at this time and we hosted Mrs Fanon in Johannesburg after she had attended the independence celebrations in Mozambique in 1974.

In *White Liberation* I write: "White people, especially white liberals are in a quandary about the meaning of black consciousness or black power. They want to know if this development means a tacit acceptance of apartheid". This book is an attempt to create amongst white people a concept of white consciousness and thus awareness. I argued that white liberals needed to re-examine their innermost motives – the urge to be doing something for someone you considered less than yourself; applying charity when solidarity was required. Paternalism or subliminal racism in these white organisations and personal conduct was, I argued, what needed confronting. The purpose was not to make this into a political credo of some kind, but like black consciousness, it challenged the inner self of people who lacked self-awareness in this regard and thus awareness of how they interacted with black people.

A short while after the publication of *White Liberation*, one of the contributors to the book, Rick Turner, was banned. It thus became illegal to distribute the book. A new edition was printed with blank pages where the Turner chapter had appeared.

#### **4.6. *Pro Veritate* on a 'Confessing Church in South Africa'**

*Pro Veritate* was the monthly publication of the Christian Institute. If one pages through the monthly editions of *Pro Veritate* of the early 1970's, you can see how the tone edges toward growing dissent and a call to action to oppose apartheid. A close associate of Beyers Naude, Prof. Ben Marais says in one edition, "It will be our actions more than our words that will count in this deepening crises". In the October 1972 edition the editorial calls for a confessing community in South Africa. This is a call modelled on the Confessing Church in Germany, an association of some 3000 clergy who opposed Hitler and the Third Reich. Although I was not part of the discussions, in this period Eberhard Beethge, the biographer of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a leading member of the German Confessing Church who was executed for his attempt to assassinate Hitler, visited the South Africa to discuss the German experience and how a confessing church or

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<sup>15</sup> Edited by Kleinschmidt, Horst (1972) published by SPRO-CAS and printed by Ravan Press (ISBN 0-86975-019-4)

community might take shape in South Africa. Bonhoeffer's Christian motivation to use violence in the face of tyranny in ultimately exceptional circumstances was palpably the issue in front of those he met. He spent much time with Beyers. Beyers and others felt that they needed to understand how theological consideration and probing could lead a Christian believer to break the law and ultimately even engage in acts of violence. Whether Beyers remained an unambiguous pacifist or not is not discussed here. Suggestions that Beyer's garage in Greenside, Johannesburg, served as a secret bomb factory in the 1980's are however completely untrue. For several reasons a Confessing Church was never established in South Africa. In essence it seems there was, after consideration, sufficient resistance building up amongst the leadership in most denominations. They chose to take on the struggle from within the church structures<sup>16</sup>.

## **5. The appointment of a secret Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations - the 'Schlebusch Commission'.**

### **5.1. The Commission and its *modus operandi*.**

From mid 1973 onwards the energies of the Christian Institute were sapped on one single issue. The reason for this was the following: On the 14<sup>th</sup> July 1972 Prime Minister John Vorster's office gazetted the appointment of his infamous 'Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations'<sup>17</sup>. It followed a speech he made in Parliament on 4<sup>th</sup> February of the same year in which he quoted none other than Winston Churchill to seek justification for his intended witch-hunt of certain groups and organisations. Churchill, some twenty years earlier, he said, had spoken of the '*modus operandi* of the Communists in using the banner of freedom to establish a Communist state', Vorster was quoted as saying in *Die Transvaler* of 5 February 1972.

The organisations Vorster took aim at were NUSAS, the South African Institute of Race Relations, the University Christian Movement, the Christian Institute of Southern Africa and 'any related organisations, bodies, committees or groups of persons'. Vorster had persuaded the white opposition party, the United Party, to provide four of its MPs to serve and augment a group of six National Party MPs to sit behind closed doors and listen to what the SB apparatus thought the MP's should know about our organisations and us. Without a specific accusation or charge and without a legal representative, individuals from the organisations would be subpoenaed to appear, one by one, in front of this secret tribunal and be obliged to respond to whatever they were confronted with. The purpose was to get Parliament to support yet more administrative steps against organisations

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<sup>16</sup> The concept of a Confessing Community (Beleidende Kring) was pursued for several years. Its mouthpiece was a magazine known as *Dunamis*. Although it pursued the debate why Christians could not support apartheid, it did not, to my knowledge become an organized structure whose members undertook sabotage or acts of violence against the state.

<sup>17</sup> Government Notice 1238, Department of the Prime Minister, 14 July 1972: 'Appointment of Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organizations'.



and individuals and thus circumventing the role an independent judiciary might have played.

Our outcry against the secret tribunal was met with justifications from parliamentarians that said it all. Vorster was quoted as saying: 'It is unfair to burden the courts with responsibility for security'. The Commission Chairperson, Alwyn Schlebusch justified the banning of students (who had at an earlier stage agreed to testify) when he said that they were banned because 'the students threatened to break the law'. And Vorster added: The bannings are 'preventative not punitive'. And the Minister Justice argued that to charge anyone 'would give [them] a platform'. Owen Horwood, the under-qualified Economics Minister said that trials would 'expose the whole security system', whilst Member of Parliament L. Nel claimed that there was 'no time to get the necessary proof for trial'.

Shortly after Vorster's announcement five senior CI leaders composed a document titled *Divine or Civil Disobedience*<sup>18</sup>. It provides the theological reasons for the refusal to testify before the Schlebusch Commission. It expounds the view that it would be "a positive Christian action for people to refuse to cooperate with a Government in a matter which can be proved to be unchristian". For Ilona and I the motive to defy was based on the need to defend democratic principles, something the others agreed with but they wanted the additional Christian justification.

In the face of this abrogation of the rule of law and basic democratic principles we decided that we would refuse to testify. Our resolve had been strengthened because when our turn (that of the CI) came to testify, the first round of NUSAS hearings had been completed and the Commission had found that action needed to be taken against NUSAS. As a result on 27 February 1973, eight NUSAS leaders were banned (effectively house arrested) for five years. I was surprised, even somewhat embarrassed, not to have been amongst them.

The Wilgerspruit Fellowship Centre whose sponsor was the SACC also came under the spotlight of the Schlebusch Commission. When its report was tabled in Parliament, Prime Minister Vorster described the WFC as "a den of iniquity", alleging interracial and sexual happenings his Government frowned on. The center's aim was to make, especially white South Africans, confront their prejudices through a programme known as 'group-dynamics'. Eoin O'Leary, an Irish citizen was deported following the report. On 30 November 1973, he, his wife Joan and daughter Sioban left South Africa to make their home elsewhere.

Unrelated to the Schlebusch Inquiry at this time eight Black Consciousness leaders were also banned during this time. We knew them all. We felt we were a community under siege.

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<sup>18</sup> *Divine or Civil Disobedience* was printed by Ravan Press. It has no date and no ISBN number. Its signatories are Beyers Naude, Brian Brown, Oshadi Phakathi, Roelf Meyer and Theo Kotze.

## 5.2. Writing to my mother that her daughter-in-law and I intend to go to jail rather than pay a fine.

My mother lived in Windhoek, the then South West Africa. She handed me all letters I ever wrote to my parents when she moved into frail care at the age of 94.

“Dear mother, I think you know that I am standing trial on 15 November (1973). [It is] the same [court] matter as Ilona’s ... we refused to testify before the Schlegelbusch Commission. In all, eleven of us are due to be sentenced in a week ... amongst them are four pastors, including Beyers Naude – so we are in good company ... we have to assume that we will be found guilty and we will then refuse to pay a fine ... I am unimportant [in the pending trials] – the others are the big guys (*Die grossen Macher*).

“The reason we have chosen this course of action [is that] the Commission ... functions according to most undemocratic principles”. I then explain how a judicial commission should function and that what was happening “is most irregular for a democracy (sic) unless there is a state of emergency and as we all know there is no state of emergency and they should not get away with saying that we live in dangerous times. That’s just a convenient excuse that stops all debate. So we have decided not to retreat one further step in the face of these authoritarian measures perpetrated by this reckless, dangerous and peace-endangering Government ... In court we will make these points [to the judge] and if [he] has a conscience at all he has to agree with us. Of course our protest is symbolic and that is why we cannot pay an admission of guilt [fine]. This decision is not easy for us and we often feel rather threatened, but thanks to the extraordinary support and encouragement of countless [people] here and in Europe we have [found] the courage ... [to do what is right] that which accords with all history of civilisation. Often people do not have the courage to defend non-material values ... Only through a just [action such as this] do we evoke an understanding from our fellow citizens ... if we are prepared to sacrifice ... we will gain the ability to be happy and content and to live a rich life ... especially in this time of boundless materialism ... [and] capitalism, lives such as ours need to be lived. We owe it to future generations ... in the last instance you may consider [this motivation] to be a Christian one [but] for me this is not a requirement ... it is simply [to be] human. I fight hatred with understanding and fear with courage”.

“ ... I think, through this mother, that you will gain an insight into my world ... I hope my thoughts [and motivations] do not demand too big a leap [such that you are unable to follow what I say], and [lastly I hope] that my written German is not too poor”.

“I want to add one other matter. I do not take offence [when you wrote] that you wished I had a normal job ... I am sorry if this has distressed you for some time ... and I may not have provided you with satisfactory answers, but maybe [this letter] helps you understand. Of course I hope always to have your support in

what I do ... and if people ask you silly things about us I do not expect you to defend what it is that we are doing ... your son, Horst.”

Three months earlier the Rand Daily Mail had published a wide-ranging article on both Ilona and myself<sup>19</sup>. In it the Kleinschmidt family secret gets aired publically for the first time. Marshall Lee, the journalist, wrote: “Oh he’s Teutonic alright and very South-West Aryan (despite his claim for Baster blood). After all he can remember when he was just so high going off to an Adolf Hitler birthday celebration with his fascist papa. And that was even after the holocaust had died”. The article then traces Ilonas lineage, coming from a conservative Bloemfontein Jewish home: “More than just Jewish, she was an ardent little Zionist when she was 18 writing inspiring Zionist essays ...”

A week after the article appeared I received a call from my cousin Alfred. We had lost touch ever since my involvement in politics. He told me that he was upset that I was dragging the family name through the mud, especially by making allegations about us having dark-skinned forebears. We argued but he ended the conversation by saying that if the upset I had caused, in any way impacted on his pregnant wife or the unborn child, he would hold me responsible. We never met or spoke again.

### **5.3. The Beyers Naude Trial.**

Ilona’s trial was the first of the ‘Schlebusch trials’ to be concluded but it was not the big show-down trial the state as much as the CI was expecting. On 13 November 1973 Beyers Naude’s trial commenced<sup>20 21</sup>. Advocate Johan Kriegler, a fellow Afrikaner who shared Beyers’ views, represented him. Together they planned for a show trial in which his testimony would put not just the Commission but apartheid and the ruling party in the dock, accusing the apartheid and its advocates of the crises that was engulfing South Africa. In his defence Beyers read out the comprehensive statement he had put before the Schlebusch Commission when he told them the reasons for refusing to testify. He had objected that the work of the commission took place in secret and that everyone who testified was sworn to silence. He explained how this commission deviated from normal procedure as might be expected in a democracy where the rule of law prevailed. And he stated how it was a right and a duty to oppose an un-Christian Government, the more so as they claimed to be acting out of Christian conviction. Beyers also told the court that the commission could not be objective and how both the Nationalist and the United Party had shown great prejudice (in the form of public statements) against the organisations now being investigated. There were times he argued, when it was the duty of Christians to disobey a country’s laws and this was one such instance. He said this had not lead him to the ‘other’ long-standing Christian viewpoint, that which said Christians had a right to resort to violence when all other avenues failed. “Our

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<sup>19</sup> Marshall Lee, Rand Daily Mail, Inside Mail, 25 August 1973.

<sup>20</sup> For newspaper cuttings of his testimony see SPRO-CAS Dossier 5, issued 15 November 1973.

<sup>21</sup> Edited by the International Commission of Jurists, Geneva (Niall Macdermot), *The Trial of Beyers Naude – Christian witness and the rule of law*, Search Press Limited, London. ISBN 0 85532 355 8.

hope in Christ is that the Government and the commission would take the whole situation in review. For that we wait upon the Lord in prayer”, he said. Beyers’ concern was that the prosecution would not accuse him of having chosen the Bonhoeffer option, the theological view to violently overthrow tyrannical rule.

Over the following days he traced in detail the stages of his life and what had brought him to this point of defiance. His lead role in the Dutch Reformed Church and his 23 years as a member of the Broederbond showed that his motivations now were not arrived at lightly, he said. In his testimony he read out his last sermon at his congregation at Aasvoelkop in Johannesburg ten years earlier, when dramatically he took off his clerical toga as he announced his resignation as a cleric of his church.

At length he explained what the ecumenical movement globally was and how it influenced his thinking. Its pursuit of greater understanding, not only between Christian confessions, but also between faiths and its demand for toleration of the ‘other’ was what he associated himself with. It was the opposite of what his Church, his people and their political rulers had chosen. They had chosen isolation rather than reconciliation and understanding. He spoke of the impact of Sharpsville and then the Cottesloe consultation that had impelled him to take a stand, a stand he was now defending. He objected to the accusation that opposition to apartheid meant that he therefore did the work of communists. As a Christian he said, he rejected communism.

Under cross-examination Beyers’ was questioned whether he supported the ‘black power’ movement that was emerging. The prosecution argued that BC was pursuing the violent overthrow of the Government. Operating in the aboveground and legal terrain, Beyers denied that they were seeking the violent removal of apartheid but warned that they had been given little choice given the actions the government was using to silence them.

On 28 May 1975 the Commission, no longer chaired by Alwyn Schlebusch but by Louis le Grange, finally issued its report on the Christian Institute. In it the Institute is accused of supporting ‘violent change’, in particular Beyers Naude is accused and found guilty of wanting to achieve his objectives “regardless of the possibility that their actions might lead to the violent overthrow of the authority of the state”. On 30 May 1975 the Government declared (this was by now widely expected), that the Christian Institute was from now an ‘Affected Organisation’ in terms of the Affected Organisations Act of 1974. In terms of the declaration the Christian Institute was no longer allowed to receive funds from abroad. More was to come.

Beyers’ trial and the trials of several others had gone on appeal and eventually they were given suspended sentences. The Government had suffered severe national and international public relations damage because of the negative publicity the Commission and then the trials had attracted. The prospect of Beyers becoming a martyr, who had gone to jail because of his convictions, was not the outcome the Commission and Vorster and his cabinet wanted. A different

course had to be devised. For two years the Government licked its wounds but then it pounced once more.

In my own case<sup>22</sup> the charge I faced for refusing to testify before the Commission was eventually ruled a “mistrial” as my defence pointed out technical errors the prosecution had committed. Other than Ilona no one was placed in the situation of not paying the fine and thus serving the mandatory 25 days in prison. Like in Ilona’s case the appeals against the convictions were lodged, but the state wanted to avoid a repetition of what Ilona had done: presenting herself at a prison rather than pay and admission of guilt (see below).

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 1977 the Christian Institute together with all the Black Consciousness organisations, was banned. Additionally the office bearers of the organisations were individually banned for an initial period of five years. The brunt of the repression during this time was not felt so much by the CI but by the BC organisations and the budding trade union movement and their officials and representatives. They additionally suffered repeated and long periods of detention without trial and when eventually charged were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

For further reading on Beyers Naude see:

1. Editors Charles Villa-Vicencio and John W. de Gruchy: *Resistance and Hope – South African essays in honour of Beyers Naude*. Published by Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, USA, 1985. ISBN 0-86486-032-3 Southern Africa and ISBN 0-8028-0098-X (elsewhere)
2. Edited by the International Commission of Jurists, Geneva: *The Trial of Beyers Naude – Christian Witness and the Rule of Law*. Search Press London and Ravan Press Johannesburg, 1975. ISBN 0 85532 355 8.
3. Wessler, Rudolf: *Suedafrikas Christen vor Gericht – Der Fall Beyers Naude und das Christliche Institut*. Jugenddienstverlag der VEM, 1977. ISBN 3 7795 7626 0
4. Randall, Peter: *Not without Honour – Tribute to Beyers Naude*, Ravan Press (Pty) Ltd. Johannesburg, 1982. ISBN 086975 138 7

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<sup>22</sup> In September 1972 the opposition to the Schlebusch Commission had not yet reached the defiance that manifested itself in 1973. Reluctantly NUSAS officials, both former and current, did at that time testify before the Commission. I also testified. My diary note on what transpired on the occasion when NUSAS was in the spotlight is instructive. I wrote: ... “Mr le Grange stood up and asked me where I was born, what my parents did, what their political beliefs were, where I went to school, what subjects I did at university. My answers to these questions resulted in him saying that I was [thus] of Afrikaans/German origin. As far as I can remember there were no further questions from the Nats [National Party], possibly one or two polite ones, but up to that point I did not have to defend myself or argue my point of view”. The UP, it turned out asked the more incisive questions. Waiting outside afterwards for a friend who also gave testimony I note that Mr le Grange and Mr Murray came up to me. “[They] were very friendly and talked about SWA beer and about cars and tyres. Mr Marais Steyn [United Party] was friendly too and said that if I was interested in politics I should not stay with the Progs [Progressive Party] or with the Christian Institute, meaning SPRO-CAS.” – Copy of document is in the authors private collection of Schlebusch material.

5. L.D Hansen, Editor, *The Legacy of Beyers Naude – Beyers Naude Centre Series on Public Theology*, Sun Press, Stellenbosch. ISBN 1 919980 98 9.

#### 5.4. The first victim.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1973 Ilona and I drove from our home in Johannesburg to the white women's prison in Pretoria. With a small satchel containing a toothbrush, toothpaste, a comb, and a change of underwear, Ilona was the first in a line of CI staff ready to go to jail for 25 days instead of paying a R50 fine imposed by the court for refusing to testify before the Schlebusch Commission. In silence and with inner trembling, Ilona, 23 was resolute in her stand and wanted to show dramatically the extent to which South Africa once again violated basic democratic standards.<sup>23 24</sup>

At the prison friends awaited us to wish her well during her incarceration as were a bevy of journalists hoping to get a 'last statement' or a tearful hug before she would disappear behind the huge gates. The prison authorities paid little if any attention to us and when it became apparent that they were in fact avoiding us. No, they did not want this white woman come through their doors, even when we urged them to put an end to our anxious wait.

Perplexed we waited. After all, it was the last day on which someone found guilty was allowed to present themselves to a jail failing which the police would come and arrest the offender. We wanted to avoid this.

The commotion outside the prison eventually became too much for the warders holed up in the prison. A uniformed white woman presented herself and announced that 'an unknown Bantu male has come to pay Mrs. Kleinschmidt's fine. We have no reason to detain her in prison'. Consternation! Who had done this? Could it have been Ilona's parents? Maybe Beyers had paid out of guilt that he should take the blame rather than the young SPRO-CAS worker? We checked, but everyone we knew strenuously denied having paid Ilona's fine.



Ilona at the time of her conviction

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<sup>23</sup> SPRO-CAS dossier titled Schlebusch 6, issued 10 December 1973 contains relevant articles from the English and Afrikaans press of the day. It also includes a sample of the many messages of support the CI and Ilona received from local and foreign supporters of our stand.

<sup>24</sup> In the Rand Daily Mail of 29 November 1973, Ilona is quoted as saying: "I believe my stand was the correct one. If I pay the fine I would be admitting guilt which I don't feel". In the same article I am quoted as saying: "I am very proud of Ilona. I support her fully. Naturally it was a difficult decision to go to jail – but we do not want to dramatize her action. Thousands of people have to go to jail in our country every day for petty pass offences and most of them do not even have the option of paying a fine because they do not have the money".

But the journalists had a hunch. They called the leader of the white opposition party, Sir de Villiers Graaf whose party was deeply divided over its complicity in serving on the Schlebusch Commission. His office denied that they paid but it seemed pretty certain that the R50 admission of guilt was paid from his quarters. He knew that a white woman in prison would attain martyr status, which would further divide his party.

Exhausted and deflated we drove home.

### **5.5. Another type of victim.**

A letter of 10 October 1973 from my mother, living in Windhoek where my father passed away eighteen months earlier, speaks of the difficulties she experienced in her ultra-conservative environment. “[I] followed all the events on the radio and the newspapers. I was of course asked, on occasion whether Ilona Kleinschmidt was a relative. Of course I always affirmed and always added that I was proud of her. Upon that they pulled funny faces as could be expected and no further questions [were being asked].” During this period my uncle Helmut had also died and my mother writes, “[He and aunt Mary] were fairly cross with us in recent times because all sorts of people asking them [questions about us] and this was of course due to your political activity. And because I naturally stood by my son and his wife, I did not go and see them [any longer]”. And then she pours out her grief. “You need to remember that I get drawn into conflict and it is not easy to explain your activity. After all I cannot say that my son is a bad person. And many people think that - because you are against the Government. I wish sometimes that you would follow a proper profession, because I often hear a lot of things ... In the past when your father was still alive we reassured each other, but it did not please us.”

### **5.6. A table of events.**

The tightening noose 1972 - 1975:

14 July 1972 - Prime Minister Vorsters office Gazette's the 'Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations, later referred to as the Schlebusch Commission.

27 February 1973 - 8 NUSAS leaders are banned for 5 years, seemingly as a direct result of the first interim report of the Schlebusch Commission.

March 1973 - H. Kleinschmidt, Jonathan Paton and Tim Dunne resign from the General Purposes Committee of SAIRR for not refusing to testify before the Schlebusch Commission.

16 September 1973 - The SAIRR offices of Clive Nettleton, who also refused to testify, were broken into by what appeared to be a search for documents by the SB.

26 September 1973 - Beyers' passport is withdrawn at airport as he was leaving for Holland. At least another 11 passports were taken in connection with the Schlebusch matter.

26 September 1973 - SB's search the SPRO-CAS offices about a Dossier published which covers a story in which a banned person, Paul Pretorius is quoted.

27 September 1973 SB's raid CI offices and remove CI accounts book for past 3 years.

29 September 1973 - Ilona Kleinschmidt presents herself as the first of the CI staff at a prison to serve her sentence for refusing to testify before the Schelbusch Commission. An anonymous source paid her fine and she is not detained.

26 October 1973 - Ilona Kleinschmidt sentenced under Commission Act to R50 fine or 25 days imprisonment.

13 November 1973 - Beyers Naude trial for refusing to testify starts.

30 November 1973 - Eoin O'Leary deported. Wife and daughter leave with him.

30 November 1973 – SPRO-CAS book *A Taste of Power* by Peter Randall was banned under the Publications and Entertainments Act, 1963 – Undesirable Publications and Objects List A 321.  
7 January 1974 – James Moulder trial for refusing to testify set down  
8 January 1974 – Dot Cleminshaw trial for refusing to testify set down  
9 January 1974 – Horst Kleinschmidt trial for refusing to testify set down  
10 January 1974 – Ds Roelf Meyer trial for refusing to testify set down  
11 January 1974 – Rev Danie van Zyl trial for refusing to testify set down  
14 January 1974 – Rev Theo Kotze trial for refusing to testify set down  
15 January 1974 – Peter Randall trial for refusing to testify set down  
15 January 1974 – Beyers Naude and Peter Randall appear in court for quoting the banned Paul Pretorius in a SPRO-CAS publication.  
16 January 1974 – Rev Brian Brown trial for refusing to testify set down  
21 January 1974 – Clive Nettleton and Dudley Horner trial for refusing to testify set down

## **6. The CI-SPRO-CAS on Foreign Investment.**

### **6.1.**

One morning in 1972 Beyers asked me to join him for a discussion he was having with visitors from France. They were well-known Afrikaans poet Breyten Breytenbach and his Vietnam born wife Yolanda. He had been to the Cape where they attended a gathering of Afrikaans writers known as the *Sestigers*. These were rebellious Afrikaans writers and poets critical of apartheid. Breyten and Yolande wanted to meet Winnie Mandela and I was the contact who knew her and how to get hold of her. I took them to Noord Street in central Johannesburg, opposite the entrance to the railway station for blacks. Here Winnie worked in a sewing machine shop. Winnie was banned and so we had to be careful to speak to her one at a time. Afterwards group photos were taken – photos that haunted me three years later during my interrogation when I was detained.

I also agreed to regularly send cuttings on anything to do with foreign companies operating in South Africa. I would post these to the “Library d’Escalier” in Paris, another fateful connection during my detention.

### **6.2.**

More serious work was done for the United Presbyterian Church in the USA. In December 1973 we submitted a study we did on their behalf titled: “*A people company*” – *Report on an investigation into Standard Telephone and Cables (SA) Ltd, an associate of ITT*. Initially the Presbyterian Church had asked that the SPRO-CAS Black Community Programme do the investigation with us in the White Programme but the banning of Bennie Khoapa, its director stopped this collaboration.

Initially we engaged the management of the company but this lead nowhere when we wanted to speak to the workforce directly. The terse correspondence between the managing director and Spro-Cas is included in the 70-page report. For several months we then visited townships on the East Rand where Standard Telephone and Cables (STC) was based. The Coloured Group Area of Reiger Park the CI staff that lived connected us to speak to people who worked at STC whilst in Vosloorus, an African Group Area, a Catholic priest assisted us. Interviews had to be done anonymously. We also feared that police and SB would hinder us when they found out what we were doing. The company was keen to explain that



it was paying equal wages for equal work something that had little meaning in an apartheid world where no white workers were found on the factory floor and no black managers could be found amongst the white managers.

The company mainly supplied the South African Post Office, including the laying of the telephone cable that linked South Africa to Europe. Their other major client was the Defence Force. It was, we concluded, impossible to delink this or any foreign company from being complicit with apartheid in every way. And, we noted, the low wages in South Africa provided the incentive for companies to make disproportionately high profits here.

The report assisted with the USA Church disinvestment campaign that was gaining momentum over the coming decade.

### **6.3.**

Another report we did – and a pet project for me – was to investigate the working conditions of the black labourers at the German School in Johannesburg. Not surprisingly here black exploitation was no different to any other. The purpose of the report was to inform activist in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) that they demand an end to the Cultural Agreement Germany had with South Africa in terms of which Germany subsidised German schools in South Africa and the then South West Africa. From available information the anti-apartheid campaigners in Germany had no major influence and the agreement was never terminated. In subsequent years Germany made sure the agreement provided benefits on a broad and inclusive basis.

The withdrawal of Beyers' and our passports was seen as punishment and to stop us from and speaking to disinvestment campaigners in Europe and North America. Those campaigners in turn were refused visas to enter South Africa.

## **7. Cosmas Desmond – *The Discarded People* - Natal**

In 1972, having moved to Johannesburg to work for SPRO-CAS, we found accommodation in the house occupied by the former Franciscan monk Cosmas Desmond. He had been banned and house arrested in 1971. Did house arrest stop him from sharing his abode with others? No one knew. Seemingly not even the SB's because we moved in with Cos and got away with it. Sharing a house with him was a subterfuge that provided the means for him meeting people at night because ostensibly they were visiting us. Every time there was a knock on the door he would retreat into the rooms that were 'his' part of the house.

The SBs were parked permanently outside our house. The glow of their cigarette ends being the tell-tale that we were under permanent surveillance. Raids were a frequent occurrence.

Cosmas Desmond provides one other leg to what we call the Durban Moment. In the biography of Archbishop Denis Hurley, Paddy Kerney writes: " 'Black spots'

were African settlements, once secured by title deeds, tribal or mission tenure, which were moved from what was described as ‘the white area of South Africa’’. According to apartheid these remaining enclaves of blacks in what was already white South Africa were to be moved and the people dumped in the Bantustans on what was generally unproductive land.

In 1968 Fathers Paschal Rowland and Cosmas Desmond, first tried to prevent and when they failed they highlighted the removal of 12,800 people in Natal from the mission station at Maria Ratschitz and places known as Meran and Wasbank to the infamous Limehill. These remaining black settlements were made to give way to what was viewed as prime farming land for white farmers. Archbishop Hurley got involved in a public altercation with Minister M.C. Botha about this inhumane act. The collective Natal church leadership, the Black Sash, the Christian Institute and others were regularly briefed throughout the horror of this removal. Priests stayed with the communities whilst their removal from their homes was enforced and then provided aid when they erected tents at the place where they were dumped in Limehill. They set up soup kitchens and provided alternative schooling for the children. Most important however was the wave of publicity, locally and internationally they gave to this aspect of apartheid.

After the Limehill matter Cosmas Desmond was employed by the Christian Institute to document the removal of black people all over South Africa. His book *The Discarded People* became internationally known as the key source that highlighted yet another side apartheid. In 1971 Cos was banned and house arrested for five years. Because of the lack of support by his, the Franciscan Order, over his expose of forced removals, Cosmas resigned from the Order.

## **8. Denis Hurley and the South African Catholic Bishops Conference - Durban.**

BC grew fast, maybe fastest within in the major English-language white-lead Christian denominations. There are several reasons for this. These churches had until then, like the DRC, been firmly in the hands of white males clergymen. The fact that they also represented part of the more liberal establishment of South Africa made them vulnerable to the charge of being de facto racist. Couple to this the charge that it was liberals who say “so many things ... to us, about us and for us but very seldom by us”<sup>25</sup> BC viewed the paternalism in these churches as a particular target. A more controversial observation would be that BC had particular appeal to the educated aspirant middle class in black society and the churches were a particularly fruitful area for converts to BC.

Denis Hurley, whose parish in his early years, and later the seat from where he exercised his role, as Archbishop, was located in central Durban was no exception to white church leaders who understood and responded to the BC challenge. A small sprinkling of Black priests had begun to occupy more senior

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<sup>25</sup> Biko, Steve, in *Black Viewpoint* (1972, banned in 1973), published by SPRO-CAS Black Community Programmes, 86 Beatrice Street, Durban. (ISBN 0 8675 015 1)

positions. One of them was Father Smangaliso Mkatshwa who co-authored a challenge to the Catholic Church, released in 1970, headed, 'Our church has let us down' in which they accused their church of treating them like glorified alter boys.

But rather uniquely the Catholic Church not only responded to BC but through Hurley's leadership supported the emerging trade unions and resulting strikes in 1973. In 1971 Archbishop Denis Hurley for the first time met a delegation of some twelve Durban dockworker organisers and shop stewards before the strikes began. They sought his support given his public stance against apartheid. He told them 'I'm fully behind you' and explored ways in which the church could offer them support. The Catholic Church had in place a ready-made group, the Young Christian Workers, headed by Rob Lambert who facilitated co-operation between the trade unions and the Catholic Church. Those links grew over several years with Hurley proclaiming publically 'What you are doing is very important for South Africa'. Hurley's support was based on the encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI, both of which spoke of the rights of workers.

The October 1972 strike demonstrated how collective action, based on democratic action from the shop-floor upwards was a key instrument to challenge the repressive state. In 1973 100,000 workers in Durban went on strike and succeeded in having their wages improved. Hurley met with the strike organisers throughout this period and ensured that support for the workers came also from a church.. Hurley told a meeting at Wits at the time: "When the oppressed speak, it is God [who] speaks".<sup>26</sup>

In 1974 Hurley was instrumental in establishing in the Greater Durban area an ecumenical social justice agency with the name of Diakonia (the Greek word for 'service'). No equivalent was established in other parts of South Africa (despite his recommendations). Hurley wanted something that gave formal shape to what he had supported over previous years that provide 'welfare, development, liberation and ecumenical collaboration ... to meet human need'.<sup>27</sup> Hurley said he saw this as a vehicle that would not do the churches' job in wider society for the Church, but that Diakonia would ensure that the Diakonia mandate became part of church life. He wanted the churches to become conscientised and to become 'involved'.

By 1982 Diakonia had forged strong and functional relations with the Natal trade unions. Most of the support was to provide much-needed funds to unionists and their families. Support was also needed for those who were arrested and detained without charge. Alec Erwin was one of those who frequently visited Hurley and the head of Diakonia, Paddy Kerney. Irvin served as Cabinet Minister in the post 1994 period. Hurley remained steadfast throughout and proclaimed: 'Just listening to them, I feel wholeheartedly on their side'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Kearney, Paddy, *Denis Hurley* page 134.

<sup>27</sup> Kearney, page 141

<sup>28</sup> Kearney, pages 165 -166

## 9. Detentions, torture, Currie's Fountain and the SASO/BPC trial

I frequently visited Hurley during the early 1970's. He was supportive and a good relationship between him and Beyers Naude had developed. The reason for my visits was that he and the many contacts he lead me to in his church were a valuable source of leads and information about people detained and tortured, fleeing police arrest or being harassed. I was collecting this information for the compilation of reports on detentions and torture. For SPRO-CAS the major motivation was to give maximum publicity to the ways in which the police state operated. It was, we said, never to be said again 'but I did not know about it' (*Aber ich habe es ja nicht gewusst*). In general newspapers were fairly timid about investigating where detainees were being held, under what conditions and whether torture took place<sup>29 30 31</sup>. When SPRO-CAS made these allegations newspapers could say, SPRO-CAS alleges that ... The reports provide context about the circumstances that involve the detainees, who they are, how long they have been held 'incommunicado', responses and statements calling for their release, details about interdicts trying to restrain the police from assaulting detainees, charge sheets and ultimately my own detention under the Terrorism Act on 15 September 1975.

It is astounding when going through the lists produced in the SPRO-CAS reports how large a proportion of detainees came from Natal, the reason for my visiting Durban more often than other places. The focus on detentions in Durban took on even greater significance in 1974 when the so-called pro-Frelimo rally was being organised at Currie's Fountain in Durban. This was to celebrate the independence that Mozambique had just won from Portugal. From this wave of detentions resulted the huge and long SASO/BPC trial held in the Supreme Court in Pretoria. Most of the accused came from Durban. At SPRO-CAS we then provided support for the, by now, waiting trial prisoners and their families who had come up from Natal. Many of them stayed with us in our homes. At this point Ilona and I, with two other staff members, Malcolm McCarthy and Beverly Wilkinson lived in a pair of semi-detached houses in Melville, Johannesburg. This became the transit station for mothers with their babies to sleep before we took them to court the next morning.

In Pretoria we had links to the few people of Marabastad before they were moved out under the Group Areas Act. Here were the Naidoo and Sita families who cooked lunch for the trialists and we took it to the court building, known as the Old Synagogue. Sometimes the warders passed the food to the guys waiting in the holding cells under the court for the afternoon session to commence, but very often we also witnessed how pots of hot soup were emptied into the gutter before our eyes. Names?

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<sup>29</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Report on Arrests, Detentions and Trials of Members and Supporters of: SASO, BPC, BAWU, TECON and BCP, issued by the Programme for Social Change (ex White Community Programme) of SPRO-CAS), dated 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1974.

<sup>30</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Report ... Dated 18<sup>th</sup> April 1975.

<sup>31</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Report ... Dated 28<sup>th</sup> October 1975.

Instead of a normal Christmas card in 1973 we printed an alternative card we invited people to send each other. It read: “before celebrating, think of those who have been unjustly arrested and detained incommunicado for their political convictions, also their families who have been left suffering in fear and uncertainty”. It then lists those detained and standing trial.

**Endnote:**

This essay is work in progress. More detail can and will be added. Many assertions and opinions are provocative and may need to be subjected to discussion in a forum or forums. Corrections and suggestions are gladly received. The author can be reached at: [kleinschmidt.horst@gmail.com](mailto:kleinschmidt.horst@gmail.com).

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