

Interview: Beyers Naude

Q ...7 and half..

A Yes, it was subsequently made known and that there was such a letter and that it was written to me and that it was received in the office, but I had no awareness of that whatsoever.

Q You never saw such a letter?

A No.

Q So you are saying it was a very easy smear...to make it...

A It could have been; there could have been such a letter of course. I am not (Ja) contesting that.

Q But that the linking of anyone who was a traitor

A Oh, there is no doubt about that; if they ^{could} have achieved that.. You know it is the same, it is only now worse with for instance this funeral in Cradock with the Communist flag which appeared there behind and with the tremendous reaction and not only on the part of Afrikaans but also English speaking people, there. In pointing to that by saying there is the clear proof of the way in which this man is either consciously or unconsciously identifying himself with communism, or ^{allowing/ ?} aligning himself / to be identified.

Q I was going to ask you about that, maybe we could jump ahead and deal with it. How did you feel at the funeral? Graaf Rinet is not too far from Cradock. (NQ) So you knew that area, you know how in some ways sheltered it is, were you quite shocked to see the flag or do you...?

A I didn't notice the flag at all. I had no awareness of the flag.

Q Really?

A No, not at all because it appeared behind us. I never saw it when I came onto these stands. I just delivered my message and I climbed down. And I sat down. And I only then that night, you know, saw for instance the procession of ministers, that there was that flag behind them and in the procession. I had no awareness that there was such a flag. I don't know when it was unfurled and I didn't know when it was simply again rolled up.

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Q Well, things have moved so fast in this country. A few years ago you wouldn't have had ANC flags. I mean they are everywhere, it seems to be just so common, it is not even commented on. Again, from your feelings of knowing that area of the country, and knowing this wasn't Soweto, how did you feel about that flag appearing there? Not your personal views but in terms of what it represents for the country? It seems people, people I've interviewed, that it wasn't a **gent provocateurs**; it seems that it was, that the people there have become so alienated from the opposite of what that flag represents that they have gravitated there to a certain extent; or to a certain degree that are not rejecting it. That is what it seems; that I have heard from interviews.

Did you have thoughts about that, manipulation of the flag versus the reality of whatever?

A Well, you see the problem that we are facing as a white community in SA is this: That the vast majority of whites in this country forget that under the old Suppression of Communism Act any person who was seen to be aiding the black community, even in legitimate ways, in achieving the political aspirations was either smeared a communist or he was acted against by bannings or otherwise under the Suppression of Communism Act.

The result was that many of you, in the black community, sort of had associated communism with something that must be very good and positive. Because they argued, quite logically, rationally, that all the people who are striving to assist us in our struggle for liberation are named or dubbed or smeared communist in SA. If that is the case then this must be, we don't know what communism is, the vast majority of blacks in any-case have had no educational instruction, no objective, for instance, education with regard to Marxism or Communism as the case may be. Except the underground literature, coz all the other is banned.

But therefore I think I believe that the majority of them have simply concluded that therefore it must be something good. It must be something sympathetic to our cause and also because those who are either members or supporters of the ANC know that the SACP was the only group which identified itself officially with the goals and aims of the ANC. And I point it out time and again that between the period of 1912 and 1960 when the ANC was a fully legal organisation, political organisation, as I know, there was not a single church or Christian body in the

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A country which officially gave expression of its support to the ANC. There may have been but I have made numerous enquiries of church and other bodies, to hear whether there was any positive pronouncement, I am not talking about individual priests or ministers who supported Luthuli or befriended him or were close friends with him, I am talking about an official pronouncement, resolution by a senate or a conference or by a church or other body as far as I know, nothing of that kind was forthcoming.

The only body which gave support, official support, to your ANC was the SACP which associated themselves with the ANC. And I wonder, I have often times wondered, to what degree the white community in SA have ever considered the implications of that lack of support and of the therefore, this close link and association with the Communist Party. But the vast majority of whites in SA, either they were never interested in or they are just not prepared to accept; but I, at the same time I constantly remind myself that equally as I was ignorant, living for many, many years, ignorant of for eg. the existence, the goals, the aims, the stand of the ANC of ...Luthuli. I am quite convinced that there are still a substantial section of your white community in SA but especially the Afrikaners, who have no objective proper knowledge, assessment and understanding of the body for instance, like the ANC or for that matter the PAC.

Q Or the UDF?

A Or the UDF. Or AZAPO or any of the political movements. Because they view them with the same deep sense of suspicion, of fear or anger or aggression as the Afrikaners of the previous times, viewed for instance the ANC and PAC. And it is mainly due to the fact of a total lack of personal association, with both leaders and members of the black community on a human level.

Q Did you right away start getting called a communist?

A Very soon, very soon. And it has continued and grown. There was a minister here today, again brought me a pamphlet which is used in that ^{Cradock} picture and everything concerned. Against me. Yes, I can give you a copy, well the machine doesn't operate. I'll have to get that later on because I need that to work on it tonight.



Q Saying you are a communist?

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A Well, I have not even ^{had} time to read it. You can, I will let you have the copy and you can see how it is being used.

Q Gees. And when did that..I am sorry that I always ask for these incidents but I find that it humanise s it a bit more than just talking I think, I think, I believe..but in terms of what actually happened can you remember when you were first called a ..can you remember an incident in the early days that you were called a communist? Was it after Cottlesloe.

A It was right after Cottlesloe. The anonymous calls came. All the virulent denouncements came because..and it was all these two terms were always used sy nonomously by the majority of people: Communist and ka~~f~~ir boetie.

In the minds of the people who talked and who attacked me and swore at me, it was both that, communist and ka~~f~~ir bo~~e~~tie.

Q Ok, that is a really important aspect I would like to ask you about, which I think is the c^onx of it is that linkage that non racialism is seen as communism. It is linked. I mean what is it? This is what I am trying to talk about, blacks and whites and the non ra^ocial future that people see. Why is it that non racialism, I mean ⁱⁿ no other country would non racialⁱsm be synonemous with communism. Although I... always hate to make SA an exception because I think it is part of what is going on in the rest of the world, so maybe I shouldn't say that..

What I am saying is why..did you begin to thnk about why simply contact between the races should have such connotations of a very much different political ph ilosophy? Now what is it about the contact between races that seems to be the beginning of this terrible sequeⁿce of events which leads to the Soviet Union or something?

A I may be wrong. I can't prove it is you know, factually but I think that in the Afrikaner thinking the Afrikaners, ⁱⁿ his conception of what was happening; the government propaganda skilfully exploited two fears of the Afrikaner people: THE fear of the black, the African, because of his predominance of numbers and his totally different culture, and the fear of communism. And that they felt that ^{if} they could link these two together in the minds of the people it would have a devastating political affect for them and make it impossible for anybody who took



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A a stand against racism in the country, to be accepted by the white community.

I am saying I can't prove this but this is just my impression. I think psychologically and strategically this would be the natural argument which your propagandists for the National Party policy would have used. To say, "If we can link this fear of the blacks and the fear of communism into one then it becomes such a major threat in the free hearts and minds of the Afrikaner people especially, that anybody who in some or other way was seen to be supporting the cause of your black community was thereby immediately dubbed or termed or smeared a communist." So that the possibility of his ideas becoming acceptable to the Afrikans community would, right at the outset, be cut at the roots.

Q Ok, to move, again bearing this in mind, it won't come out for two or three years, I am interested in the nonracialism aspect and then through your exposure to blacks, through the years and especially in Christian Institute and after did you gain a sense that ok, communism wasn't on the agenda, but that there was a political basis to it as well. Just to explain one of my theses is that in SA even very, very moderate liberals, unlike maybe other parts of the world, are even saying publically now over the past ~~two~~ years that they are not wedded to the free enterprise system; that they can see that blacks actually want economic change; it is not just civil rights and it is not just what Andy Young was saying and all that.

When did that begin to emerge to you? That you crossed the road of the non racial aspect but that blacks weren't just saying that's fine you can live in the Northern suburbs and I can live in Soweto and we can have parties together, but they are saying we are talking about a real change in the economic system; to different degrees, I am not saying which one seems to be. I mean some people don't see a big change and others a bigger change coming.

A That was only when Peter Randall started this SP^{RO} CAS project. The study project on Christianity and apartheid society where he dealt with the whole economic approach, with economic injustice and it was only then that, with the material forthcoming, that I and my reading this, and the book of Rick Turner's, for instance, 'The Eye of the Needle' for the first time, the fuller perspective of African thought.

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A perception, began to dawn upon me. Not before that.

Q Did you meet Rick Turner?

A I met him once yes. (So did..) Possibly twice but we didn't have any indepth discussion. I met him more through his books than personally.

Q And were you quite influenced by his books?

A Oh, yes, certainly. Well, only one book which I read: 'The Eye of the Needle'.

Q And that was an enlightening experience just seeing what blacks were thinking...see, I think that is also what is interesting coz a lot of liberals, at a certain point they decide that that's what they... like I interviewed Helen Suzman and I don't think she is someone who continues to explore. So I am interested in asking that about yourself. So was it a learning experience to be involved with SPROCAS?

A Oh yes, no doubt about it. It was painful in that sense that I had to revise my own traditional views and Afrikaner views, you know which I had held time and again; faced with specific facts, with arguements, with attitudes of people, with debates which I had therefore with blacks. But I think in my case there was an openness, if you don't mind me saying so: there was an openness on my part; of willing to learn. Realising that wherever prejudice played any meaningful or significant role, that it simply blinds you to the truth and that therefore I had constantly to reassess both facts and attitudes in order to ask myself to what degree am I willing to remain open to this learning process. Both theologically and economically, socially and personally, on a personal level.

Q You spoke of Turner's book: Were there any blacks or blacks writing that made you, that were a part of that openness, that made you reconsider your views through the 70s?

A Very little that I can remember. There were here and there theological material which were written but I never asked myself whether this in fact was written by a black or a coloured or an Indian as the case may be. I was interested in the content thereof.

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Q Had you been someone before who felt that the free enterprise system was unshakeable, that it was here to stay, it wasn't going to be changing or did you actually come to question or to see that blacks were questioning that changing? Or was that part of what you are saying was a change?

A Well, I never questioned or doubted the legitimacy, validity and the necessity for the capitalist system: It was only at a much later stage that I began to ask in the concept of justice, economic justice, as I then discovered it also, though my re-reading especially of the whole New Testament and Christian concept of justice, that I then began to question the accepted conditional concepts of economic justice as expressed for instance in the capitalist system.

So there again it was the basic, the deepest motivation there for my questioning, was the theological one. It was not a political one.

Q Did you feel that in your banning years, even though it meant that you didn't have the scope and public image, did you actually learn in that time or was that a time when you just were cut off? What I am asking is you were banned but within the limits of your banning order not disobeying it in any way, one at a time it seems like there were just always tons and tons of cars and people coming to see you, was that a period of learning for you, that banning?

A Oh, yes-no doubt. Both in the people coming to see me. The needs which I discovered; the questions which I asked and they asked; and also in my trying with the little time that I had available to do some in *deep* reading. Also then, more and more, about the whole situation of the country; looking at the political, economic, social, educational systems and asking myself where this was leading us to. To what degree this could ever meet the rising aspirations of your both black, coloured and Indian community. So in that sense I certainly tried to the best of my ability, and with the very, I would say brevity of time, to read as much as possible, in order to inform myself. Realising that in any case the apartheid system was going to crack and go and crumble at some stage and then asking myself what is going to replace it.

What kind of political and economic, social and educational system do

we need which is more just, which is more human, which is certainly

helpful towards creating a just society, than this apartheid system.

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Q And did you learn from specific blacks who came? I mean was it a learning experience in terms of people you saw?

A I wouldn't say that because here and there, but the majority of blacks who came were normally blacks with either personal needs, with financial needs, with family needs, as the case may be. There was very little opportunity for any indepth discussion on any of the either political or social or economic issues.

Q But did that keep you a bit in touch with what was happening in the townships or how did you keep in touch?

A Well, only in that sense that I tried to select a few people from the different sectors of the black, coloured and indian community. Just asked them please to drop in at some stage just to share with me your insights, your feelings, your understanding of what is happening. And in that sense tried to assess what was happening.

Q For whites and for blacks there are different perceptions of what could happen to you if you take a stand and Aggett's death was really important in making clear to whites that they weren't immune. Before your banning had you thought about detention and banning? Had you thought of it really, you and your wife come to grips with it, in terms of it being a reality or did it come as a surprise that it could happen to you?

A Oh no, well it naturally when it did, when it came it came as a shock. But it did not come as a surprise because I had already told my wife in June of that year that I sensed that there was definitely something building up against..by the government against the Christian Institute. That I think we should prepare ourselves for a possible banning order against me.

Q And have you ever discussed with blacks, who have been banned since you have been unbanned and you can meet with people, who have had the same experience as you, have you ever had a chance to speak to a black person that was banned, to share a bit of what it was like?

A Only very shortly, because since my unbanning my life has been so hectic and so full and so occupied by the simply just the one demand being after the other. That I have very little time, leisurely time

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A even to sit down here with a black person or with any other individual in that regard.

Q But do you think it was quite a different existence for you? Do you think it was easier to be a banned white person or a banned black person?

A Oh no, it is always easier to be a banned white person than a banned black person although let me correct myself by saying. My appointment. Can I just answer that then we have to say that in certain respects it is easier for a white. Because he is in a more privileged position. But in other respects it is easier for a black person, because in his society, in his community he is accepted, much more accepted because of his banning than in the white community.

Q Ok, can I just get in what I thought was kind of the culminating questions, the one is that do you, can you just speak about what possible hope there might be for the white community for a non racial future? To what extent do you think it is possible to make inroads into the white community to win over sections of whites? Do you think that... people can talk about a non racial society, you live those ideals but in practice do you see whites being changed in any way? Do you think any of the kind of efforts that are being made to try to reach white people have hope for success, knowing as you do the Afrikaner community and the white English speaking community?

A You mean in sufficient numbers for them to be able to change and thereby positively to make a contribution? I can't see that happening, Julie. There is too much fear. There is too much self interest. There is too much ignorance on the part of the white community of what is happening in the black society to help them to come to a new understanding. It will be a painful process for the white community.

I think they will discover the truth from the one shock after the other as they are discovering it now in what is happening in the country. It could have been avoided if we had had the foresight, the understanding and simply to work this through in a much more open association with the black community. But I am afraid that we simply have to accept the fact that the white community will experience the one shock, the one reaction of anger and bitterness after the other. And therefore, increasing fear. And we see this now.

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A More whites want to leave country, especially now for the first time the white community is experiencing materially the cost of apartheid; the price which is to be paid for apartheid. And they never had, was never any necessity for them to pay the price. The price for apartheid, I mean financially and otherwise, was always paid by either coloureds or Indians or blacks. It is only of late that for the first time the whites are beginning to experience what it means to pay the price for apartheid and that makes them terribly afraid.

Q So if someone were to say to you what is this non racial future you are talking about for us? Is there anything in it for whites? I mean are you doing it all out of religious altruism or do you feel that when SA changes you yourself will benefit?

A I personally don't think I will benefit. I don't prepare myself for that; in fact I'm convinced, if you talk by benefit materially or financially it is going to be no benefit whatever. It is going to be a period of very deep and serious sacrifice but that is the price that we have to pay for this long, old, the system of injustice and oppression that we have devised and that we have imposed.

In my case my reaction is one of a moral conviction, that I believe that it is essential that this should be done. But I am afraid that the vast majority of whites are not prepared to pay that price.

Q In non material terms, do you feel you will have anything to gain? Do you look forward to the day when SA will change? ~~Do~~ Do you feel there's anything....

A It is going to be painful, stormy, difficult and it is certainly not going to be an easy road. It is going to be a road certainly where we will have to face agonising and painful decisions, but I believe that in human terms of building eventually a society where people of different cultures and different backgrounds will slowly but painfully learn to live together. In that respect SA could make a contribution to the challenge which is being presented to the whole world. Because in the real sense of the words SA is a microcosm of some of the major problems and issues facing the whole world and we have got to work it out here.

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Q Can say, even Beyers Naude says at the end of that long road, is there anything that is positive to be said?

A Oh yes, certainly, eventually with a tremendous economic potential, richness and potential of the country. First of all I think there is a possibility of much higher standard of living for everyone. Certainly a lower standard of living for the whites but I don't think their standard of living was a good one: I think it was detrimental to the white community, in many respects.

Secondly I think there will rediscover their humanity, which to a large degree the white community of SA have lost or are in the process of losing.

Thirdly, they will discover that, if they know how to handle it, they will be rid of many of the fears and anxieties which simply kill whites in their responses which they have. And it will, certainly it won't be easy but I am convinced that in the long run we will have a society which will be therefore, more human and more warm and more open than the one that we have built up on the basis of apartheid.

Q Ok, thanks.