

"STAYING WITHIN HEARING DISTANCE": MAX DU PREEZ, SCHALK PIENAAR AND THE AFRIKAANS PRESS IN THE APARTHEID ERA

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The need for absolute goodies and absolute baddies runs deep in us, but it drags history into propaganda and denies the humanity of the dead their sins, their virtues, their efforts, their failures. To preserve complexity, and not flatten it under the weight of anachronistic moralizing, is part of the historian's task.

R Hughes, **Culture of complaint: The fraying of America** (New York, 1993), p. 120.

1. INTRODUCTION

Max du Preez, the abrasive former editor of the **Vrye Weekblad**, is not known for pulling his punches. This is evident in his memoirs **Pale native** in which he castigates the Afrikaans press, especially the editors of the Nasionale Pers for their alleged lapdog attitude towards the National Party (NP). Du Preez accuses these editors of knowingly allowing the government to mislead their readers about the inequities of apartheid. He also holds them responsible for the shock and horror Afrikaners felt when the real face of the successive apartheid governments was revealed before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).²

The alleged servility of the Nasionale Pers editors stands in sharp contrast to Du Preez's own turbulent career. In 1978, as a young parliamentary reporter for Nasionale Pers, he became disgusted with the NP leadership. For the first time he realized that the leaders of Afrikaner nationalism were not honest, straightforward and God-fearing men, but bloated, self-important, corrupt and incompetent charlatans. His disillusionment led to the founding of the independent **Vrye Weekblad** in 1988, which in Du Preez's own words, had to be a kick-ass publication which would investigate the brutalities of apartheid without fear or prejudice.³ Despite the unwelcome attentions of apartheid's securocrats, thuggish white rightists and perennial financial worries, the **Vrye Weekblad** lived up to its credo by exposing state-run death squads and other dirty deeds by the apartheid

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² M du Preez, **Pale native: Memoirs of a renegade reporter** (Cape Town, 2003), p. 63, 208.

³ **Ibid.**, pp. 73, 172.

government. Ultimately the weekly played an important role in the dismantling of apartheid, and in preparing Afrikaners for the new South Africa.

Du Preez is thus contemptuous of the attitude of former Nasionale Pers apartheid era editors that they were on the side of the righteous because they had opposed the white right. One of the targets of his ire is Schalk Pienaar, the former 'verligte' (enlightened) founding editor of the Sunday newspaper **Die Beeld** (1965) and later the daily **Beeld** (1974), where he was young Max's editor. Du Preez was initially excited about working with a journalistic legend who had iconic status as the bravest and most reformist of all senior Afrikaans journalists, but was disappointed to discover that Pienaar was past his best. By then Pienaar, after battling cancer for years, was a tired old man. Although his cancer was in remission he was emaciated and simply did not have the energy left for the demanding task of running a daily paper.⁴ Du Preez also took exception to Pienaar's sensationalistic Sunday paper approach with its emphasis on crime and sex.⁵

In a review of my biography on Pienaar, **Voorloper: Die lewe van Schalk Pienaar**⁶ in **Die Burger** of 3 February 2003, Du Preez argued that Pienaar's reputation as a reformer was inflated as he had believed in grand apartheid, and waged war against all liberals and other opponents of the NP government. Du Preez accused Pienaar of a vicious campaign against the Afrikaner rebel theologian Beyers Naudé. Moreover, he emphasised that Pienaar did nothing more than opposing ultra-conservative whites and petty apartheid regulations such as separate benches, toilets, lifts and beaches. Du Preez felt that even Pienaar's clashes with the then all powerful Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd were nothing but minor squabbles on petty aspects that ignored the essence of apartheid. As such they were nothing more than interesting anecdotes. The crucial evidence for Du Preez to reject his former editor's status as reformer, is the DF Malan medal, then the NP's highest honour, which PW Botha awarded Pienaar in 1978. He concluded that Pienaar was only a reformist inside Afrikaner nationalism and did very little to help the country make progress on the road to an open and just democracy.⁷

Du Preez's review led to some debate in **Die Burger** and Leopold Scholtz, assistant editor of the paper, accused him of having judged Pienaar without recognizing the

⁴ H van Deventer, **Kroniek van 'n koerantman. 'n Persoonlike perspektief op die jare na '80** (Cape Town, 1998), pp. 7-9; H van Deventer, **In kamera** (Pretoria, 2003), p. 55; Correspondence with J H Grosskopf, 3 January 1998.

⁵ Telephone interview, Max du Preez, 13 August 1999.

⁶ Tafelberg Publishers, Cape Town, 2002.

⁷ It was published under the heading "Voorloper op 'n smal paadjie".

political reality of his time. Scholtz emphasized that for Pienaar to have influence he had to remain within hearing distance of his people.⁸

In his retort Du Preez accepted the argument of "remaining within hearing distance" as a legitimate one, but felt that this did not mean that Afrikaners should not have been confronted with the reality of their society. In his opinion Pienaar failed to do so:

In the last years of PW Botha and FW de Klerk, Afrikaners suddenly realised that the world was a very different place to the one their leaders had painted for so long. After 1994, especially with the revelations before the Truth Commission, the most popular Afrikaans tune was: We did not know. Well, if they did not know, it was because opinion formers and journalists like Pienaar did not tell them - they were too busy 'staying within hearing distance'. They supported the pass laws, the large-scale violation of human rights and the homelands policies: policies for which the National Party and most Afrikaners humbly asked for forgiveness after 1994.⁹

This article will analyse the various accusations levelled by Du Preez, and will argue that Pienaar, whilst supporting grand apartheid, and remaining loyal to the NP, encouraged soul-searching amongst Afrikaners about the party's treatment of the black majority, and urged Afrikaners to adapt to a modern and changing world if they wanted to survive in Africa. In doing so Pienaar helped to pave the way for Afrikaners to accept FW de Klerk's speech of 2 February 1990.

2. PIENAAR'S JOURNALISTIC CAREER

Pienaar was born on 28 July 1916. After studying at the University of Stellenbosch, and a short stay at Oxford, he joined **Die Burger**, South Africa's leading Afrikaans newspaper and mouthpiece for the NP, in 1937.¹⁰ Pienaar was dedicated to the Afrikaner cause and the furtherance of its culture and ideals. He was also a natural journalist and in September 1946 became the editor of **Die Oosterlig** in Port Elizabeth. He was recalled to **Die Burger** after seven months to be with Piet Cillié, a close friend, one of Phil Weber's assistant editors. In 1954 Weber vacated the editorship to move into management. Cillié was appointed as his successor with Pienaar as his assistant. In 1965 Pienaar became the editor of the new Sunday newspaper of Nasionale Pers, **Die Beeld**, in Johannesburg.

⁸ "Schalk Pienaar is onhistories bekyk", **Die Burger**, 17 February 2003.

⁹ Du Preez, p. 65.

¹⁰ For the history of **Die Burger** see CFJ Muller, **Sonop in die suide: Geboorte en groei van die Nasionale Pers 1915-1948** (Cape Town, 1990).

HF Verwoerd, as Prime Minister and especially as chairman of Afrikaanse Pers that owned the Sunday paper **Dagbreek**, the direct competitor of **Die Beeld**, made no secret of his enmity to Pienaar and the new paper. Subsequently the Transvaal NP mobilized to organize a boycott of the paper.¹¹ Pienaar, however, was not intimidated and from the first issue of **Die Beeld** flayed what he regarded as sour old ideas and injustices in Afrikanerdom. He despised the attachment of so many Afrikaners to worn out and dated ideas and saw it as the duty of his newspaper to yank them out of the past and to prepare them for the future. If the Afrikaner 'volk' wanted to survive it had to be open-minded, innovative and dynamic. Especially in his signed column "Politieke Beeld", Pienaar focussed on the task of preparing the 'volk' for more changes and encouraging Premier John Vorster, Verwoerd's successor in 1966, to bring these about. **Die Beeld** started to give extensive publicity to cases of racism and discrimination which Pienaar regarded as indefensible. This was a break with the past as the Afrikaans press had previously practised sunshine journalism in which negative aspects of apartheid were ignored. By 1970 Pienaar's health was in a perilous state after a heart attack and an operation to remove a malignant tumour from his palate. This forced him into early retirement.

Pienaar was a brilliant editor. Starting from scratch he turned **Die Beeld** into one of South Africa's finest newspapers. In 1970 **Die Beeld** and its rival, **Dagbreek**, merged to form a new paper, **Rapport**. Although retired, Pienaar continued with a column, called "Politieke Rapport", in which he criticised the 'volk's' life of luxury and indifference to injustices. In the process he became one of the most astute political commentators in South Africa, and the most quoted.

When Nasionale Pers started a new daily, **Beeld**, in Johannesburg in September 1974, Pienaar was appointed editor. While continuing his column for **Rapport**, he revived "Politieke Beeld" for the new paper. From day one **Beeld** encouraged reform and exposed what it regarded as unacceptable discrimination. The arrival of **Beeld** had a dramatic effect on Afrikaans newspapers in the north, especially **Die Transvaler**, its direct competitor for the Afrikaans morning market. To get a big name to counter that of Pienaar, Perskor (Afrikaanse Pers and Voortrekkerpers had merged as Perskor) recruited Wimpie de Klerk, a prominent 'verligte', as its editor. De Klerk changed **Die Transvaler** into a more enlightened paper and loosened the ties with the NP.¹²

¹¹ Cape Town Archive, Nasionale Pers archive, AL21 File 4/1/13, Ton Vosloo's report of a meeting of NP organizers, 2 October 1965.

¹² D Richard, **Moedswillig die uwe: Perspersoonlikhede in die noorde** (Johannesburg, 1985), pp.161-4.

Pienaar retired with immediate effect on 8 January 1975. On 12 October 1978 he succumbed to cancer.¹³ Pienaar's successors at **Beeld** continued with his journalistic approach and forced Afrikaners to face uncomfortable truths. The reputations of modern day publications of *Nasionale Pers*, correctly lauded by Du Preez as progressive and innovative,¹⁴ are based on Pienaar's legacy.

3. PIENAAR AND THE REFORM OF APARTHEID

Pienaar was a supporter of the broad principles of apartheid, but also one of its severest critics. As early as 1948 he developed doubts about aspects of apartheid. In 1949, as part of a three months of long leave, Pienaar visited central and east Africa where he witnessed the stirrings of emerging African nationalism.¹⁵ The visit was a turning point for him as he became more critical of the NP and its policy of white 'baasskap' (to be the boss, to dominate). Although he rejected any political integration with the black majority as it would mean the death of the white minority, he became increasingly uneasy about the numerous negative and oppressive aspects of apartheid. He felt that crude white domination negated the Afrikaners' own struggle for freedom. Pienaar despaired at the thought that Afrikaner nationalists who had a history of struggle against injustice and humiliation themselves could be so insensitive to the aspirations of black nationalists.¹⁶ Pointing out that NP leaders always preached that the past should be remembered he asked Afrikaners to look around them and ask why blacks should endure humiliations that Afrikaners had resented in the past. Pienaar hammered on the fact that there was no possible solution for South Africa's problems if whites did not improve their attitude towards blacks.¹⁷

As an editor Pienaar initiated a process of persuasion to convince fellow Afrikaners that to ensure the 'volk's' future, apartheid had to mean more than racially segregated toilets, post office counters and cheap black labour. To ensure the freedom of the Afrikaner it had to ensure freedom for blacks and this could only be found in a compromise between 'baasskap' and a common society. He thus supported Verwoerd's Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959. The Act presented guidelines for the development of self-government for eight separate black ethnic groups. It further provided for the possible development of the ethnic units, the so-

¹³ For more detail on Pienaar's career see FA Mouton, "Reform from within: Schalk Pienaar, the Afrikaans press and apartheid", *Historia* 45 (1), May 2002, pp. 148-76.

¹⁴ *Die Burger*, 3 February 2003.

¹⁵ S Pienaar, *Getuie van groot tye* (Cape Town, 1978), p. 35.

¹⁶ *Rapport*, 24 November 1974.

¹⁷ *Rapport*, 24 November 1974.

called homelands, into independent states. Pienaar sincerely believed that independent homelands were the solution to South Africa's racial question.¹⁸

As an answer to the future of the urban blacks, coloureds and Asians Pienaar in the early 1970s supported a plan initiated by the Western Cape Broederbond, of which he was a member. It was namely to reconstitute the Senate to turn it into a body where urban blacks, coloureds, Indians and whites could meet and consult. If the Senate could not be reformed into such a body, a third consultative parliamentary chamber had to be formed.¹⁹ To Pienaar's regret the possibility of such a third chamber was swept from the table without any real discussion.²⁰ To confidants he admitted that what he really wanted was the coloureds in parliament on a common voters roll.²¹ Premier Vorster suspected this and challenged him about it in 1974. Pienaar admitted that he had wanted this in the past, but at that stage he supported the party's policy.²² The bottom line for Pienaar was that in the ruling NP in the 1970s the notion of coloureds in the House of Assembly was simply not practical politics.

It was Pienaar's desire to ensure a moral foundation for the principles of separate development, especially after South Africa had been rocked by the bloody events at Sharpeville and Langa in March 1960, that motivated his journalism. Although he remained blind to the built-in injustice of the homelands system, his quest for a moral foundation started the process of Afrikanerdom questioning apartheid.

At **Die Burger** Cillié and Pienaar started to address what they saw as the damaging influences of negative aspects of apartheid. In carefully worded editorials and in Cillié and Pienaar's column "Uit my politieke pen" (From my political pen), under the pseudonym of 'Dawie', they started a campaign against petty regulations that controlled every aspect of black lives. They felt that this type of petty apartheid was senseless and that it undermined what they saw as the separate freedoms of grand apartheid. As editor of **Die Beeld** Pienaar continued his campaign against petty apartheid with vigour. The newspaper, for example, reflected his unhappiness about the Immorality Act. He regarded the use of sexual police-traps as evil and argued that it was not the duty of the police to get involved with the sexual activities of

¹⁸ S Pienaar, "Safeguarding the nations of South Africa", in **South Africa: Two views of separate development** (London, 1960), p. 11.

¹⁹ **Rapport**, 3 October 1971; BM Schoeman, **Die Broederbond in die Afrikaner-politiek** (Pretoria, 1982), p.102.

²⁰ **Rapport**, 3 September 1972.

²¹ Interview with Piet "Weskus" Marais, 26 April 1999.

²² University of Stellenbosch, JS Gericke Library special collections, Pienaar collection, Pienaar to Vorster, 3 September 1974.

consenting adults in private, even if these were across the colour line.²³ Pienaar was sympathetic to those whose love crossed the colour line and this sympathy was reflected in **Die Beeld**. Police excesses were also given publicity.²⁴

Pienaar did his utmost to prick the Afrikaners' conscience with regard to racial discrimination. Convincing whites of the necessity to adapt apartheid was an extremely difficult task. In the 1960s and 1970s South Africa was at the crest of the golden age of apartheid with the economy booming and white living standards rising. With black resistance crushed, white dominance seemed secure.²⁵ For the overwhelming majority of whites, South Africa was the country of sunshine, rugby and 'braaivleis'. Any internal changes, however trivial, that could possibly affect their way of living, were opposed with vigour. Although Pienaar's rejection of beach and elevator apartheid²⁶ seems absurd and unheroic in the new millennium, this was not the case in the 1960s and 1970s. A large section of the white population vehemently disagreed and saw elevator apartheid as an important pillar of white survival in South Africa. On 1 December 1968, for example, **Die Beeld** reported the arrest of a white man for beating to death a black man he had found using a white reserved elevator.

Getting whites to change their attitudes towards blacks and treating them as fellow human beings, Pienaar warned that by treating blacks badly and damaging their pride, whites were acting as recruiting agents for armed resistance.²⁷ He also focused on conditions which could create a revolutionary climate. In his "Politieke Rapport" on 22 September 1974 under the heading "Hulle is die weerloses" (They are the defenceless ones) he was indignant about an affluent South Africa in which the rich got richer and the poor poorer, with especially the blacks being the most defenceless. In biblical terms he warned his fellow Afrikaners:

When you look at what shoots up in this country in the way of palaces and at the hovels that exist, then you ask yourself if the vengeance of the eternal God can be kept at bay... (translated)

Pienaar's criticism of discrimination was, as Du Preez points out, limited to petty apartheid. Although unhappy with the abuse of power he did not realize that in order to implement grand apartheid the apartheid state had to become autocratic to

²³ **Rapport**, 1 December 1974.

²⁴ **Die Beeld**, 27 November 1968, 5 October 1969, 15 February 1970.

²⁵ D O'Meara, **Forty lost years: The apartheid state and the politics of the National Party, 1948-1994** (Randburg, 1996), p. 170.

²⁶ **Die Beeld**, 17 and 24 November 1968.

²⁷ **Rapport**, 6 May 1973, 24 November 1974.

enforce it on the reluctant black majority. Pienaar was thus blind to some evils done in the name of apartheid,²⁸ and he never envisaged a South Africa with a black government. Yet, through Pienaar's editorship of **Die Beeld** and **Beeld**, the Afrikaans press developed a social conscience. Previously Afrikaans newspapers only looked inward, they had no interest in the suffering, indignities and poverty of blacks or brutal and insensitive behaviour by whites, especially the police. This was an important shift of emphasis which had a definite effect on the Afrikaner way of thinking as it encouraged soul-searching about apartheid, and prepared the way to accept change. This change in attitude played a crucial role for De Klerk's actions of 2 February 1990. To deny Pienaar any credit for the progress to an open and just democracy, would be the same as to reject the reforms of Nikita Khrushchev and Mikhail Gorbachev for not being motivated by liberal-democratic ideals, but by their desire to create a more efficient and humane communist system in the Soviet Union.

4. 'MINOR SQUABBLES?': PIENAAR VERSUS VERWOERD

As mentioned earlier, Afrikanerdom in the 1960s and 1970s was extremely conservative and conformist and not ready for an open dialogue about apartheid's shortcomings. Pienaar's attitude to petty apartheid led to a direct conflict with premier Hendrik Verwoerd. Verwoerd was an icy person who would destroy any opposition with the impersonality of crushing an ant underfoot.²⁹ Although Pienaar respected Verwoerd's intellect he did not admire him as a person or his dogmatic views as he found him too rigid, too logical and lacking in humanity.³⁰ After Sharpeville **Die Burger** initiated a debate on the future of the coloureds as the homelands policy could not be applied to them and that coloureds, and not white representatives, should represent the coloured community in parliament.³¹ Verwoerd was offended and made it clear that he would never allow direct coloured representation in parliament. He thought that it would be the thin end of the wedge that could only lead to black domination, and he squashed the debate in January 1961.³² Pienaar thereafter regarded Verwoerd as a danger to Afrikaners and believed that his stifling of any debate contributed to a dangerous complacency and intellectual laziness amongst Afrikaners. This created a false sense of security that exorcised any doubts

²⁸ **Die Beeld**, 17 August 1969.

²⁹ PJ Cillie, **Tydgenote** (Cape Town, 1980), p. 24.

³⁰ Interviews with Louis Louw, 2 April 1999 and H J Grosskopf, 5 April 1999.

³¹ L Louw (ed.), **Dawie 1946-1964** (Cape Town, 1965), pp. 182-3.

³² For more detail on this clash see JC Steyn, **Penvegter: Piet Cillie van Die Burger** (Cape Town, 2002).

about the future. Pienaar thought that nothing could be more dangerous for the survival of the Afrikaner in a changing and hostile world.³³

He also believed that Verwoerd was fundamentally dishonest. The official line of the NP was that urban blacks were temporary sojourners and with the development of the homelands, the majority of them would stream back to their traditional homelands by 1978. Pienaar knew that this was not possible and in his "Dawie" of 8 May 1965 he warned that the belief in 1978 as a turning point was dead and that the party had to face the reality that the homeland policy could not be applied to urban blacks. An upset Verwoerd rejected this outright and flayed Pienaar in the NP parliamentary caucus.³⁴

By 1966 Verwoerd had moulded South Africa in his image. Afrikanerdom followed him blindly. After South Africa had become a republic in 1961, and after a failed attempt on his life, Verwoerd's position was strengthened by popular hero-worship and enthusiasm amongst Afrikaners. A personality cult started to develop. Henry Kenney correctly points out in his study of Verwoerd, **Architect of apartheid: HF Verwoerd - an appraisal**,³⁵ that he had become one prophet who was honoured in his own country and in his own lifetime. Complete subservience became a hallmark of Afrikanerdom. Pienaar was deeply worried by this, and eager to break the lethal stranglehold Verwoerd had on Afrikanerdom. Amongst his editorial staff he was outspoken about the fact that Verwoerd was leading South Africa into an abyss.³⁶ It took moral courage to oppose Verwoerd, for example, when NP van Wyk Louw's play "Die pluimsaad waai ver", commissioned for the fifth anniversary of the Republic on 31 May 1966, was criticised by the premier. Verwoerd felt that Louw should not dare to reflect that not all the Afrikaners in the struggle against the British had been heroes. In his festival speech he said that writers had to praise the achievements of the Afrikaner and not raise doubts. Pienaar, in "Politieke Beeld" of 26 June 1966, defended the play and encouraged Afrikaners to see it as it would make them think.³⁷ It took even more courage to express opposition to the growing extremism of segregatory measures. Pienaar persisted that it was unthinkable and unjust to racially segregate beaches and mountains.³⁸

Pienaar's criticism enraged Verwoerd. According to Jaap Marais, an ultra-conservative NP MP, Verwoerd indicated that he was only waiting for the right moment

³³ Pienaar, **Getuie van groot tye**, pp. 49-50, 60; **Die Beeld**, 11 September 1966.

³⁴ Pienaar, **Getuie van groot tye**, p. 63.

³⁵ Johannesburg, 1980.

³⁶ Interview with Ton Vosloo, 30 March 1999.

³⁷ JC Steyn, **NP van Wyk Louw: 'n lewensverhaal II** (Cape Town, 1998), pp. 1034-53.

³⁸ **Die Beeld**, 4 September 1966.

to strike back at Pienaar.³⁹ Verwoerd also told Blaar Coetzee, a member of his cabinet, that he would personally dispose of Pienaar.⁴⁰ Marais believed that Verwoerd intended to strike at the politics of Pienaar on the day he was murdered in the House of Assembly.⁴¹

Ultimately Pienaar was fortunate to survive his clash with Verwoerd. The premier believed that any departure from the system of racial separation, however trivial, would endanger the system as a whole and he went to absurd lengths to ensure separation at all levels.⁴² Du Preez is thus confused, because for Verwoerd separate toilets, beaches and elevators were essential parts of apartheid. His differences with Pienaar were much more than minor squabbles, they were about the essence of an open and just society.

5. 'ON THE SIDE OF THE RIGHTEOUS?' OPPOSING ULTRA-CONSERVATIVE WHITES

Pienaar believed the confrontation with ultra-conservatives in the 1960s and 1970s was a struggle that had to be won to ensure the survival of the Afrikaner. The opening shots were fired on Pienaar's arrival in Johannesburg. Apart from Verwoerd there were a number of Transvaal NP MPs to the right of the prime minister who were determined to crush **Die Beeld**. Under the leadership of Albert Hertzog, a member of Verwoerd's cabinet, they ruthlessly hounded any Afrikaner or institution they suspected of liberalism or of disloyalty to the Afrikaner cause. Hertzog believed that Pienaar and **Die Beeld** were part of a liberal master plan to undermine the Afrikaner.⁴³ Even Verwoerd was on occasion suspected of being too far to the left.⁴⁴ This ultra-right conservative group was so influential that Verwoerd at the height of his power was wary of them.

Pienaar despised Hertzog and used his paper as a weapon against him in the bitter internal struggle in the NP between the ultra-conservatives, the 'verkramptes' (narrow-minded ones), and those who favoured a more tolerant outward-looking Afrikanerdom, the 'verligtes'.⁴⁵ Pienaar felt that Hertzog and his followers were a malignant group that had to be excised from the NP. He ridiculed and demonised

³⁹ J A Marais, **Die era van Verwoerd** (Pretoria, 1992), pp. 157-8, 159.

⁴⁰ Pienaar, **Getuie van groot tye**, p. 50.

⁴¹ Marais, pp. 157-8.

⁴² H Kenney, **Architect of apartheid** (Johannesburg, 1980), pp. 216-7, 263.

⁴³ University of the Free State, Archive for Contemporary Affairs, Albert Hertzog collection, File 1/320/28/20, undated and unsigned document listing **Die Beeld's** liberal deviations.

⁴⁴ H Serfontein, **Die verkrampte aanslag** (Cape Town, 1970), p. 201.

⁴⁵ For more on this struggle, JA Du Pisani's **John Vorster en die verlig/verkramptryd** (Bloemfontein, 1990), is highly recommended.

their narrow-mindedness and exclusive nationalism as silly, outdated and paranoid. The 'verkrampes' in turn hounded Pienaar as a traitor to the Afrikaner cause, and **Die Beeld** and **Beeld** became lightning rods for their anger and frustration.⁴⁶ The internal differences in the NP reached a climax at the conference of the Transvaal NP in September 1969 when Hertzog and some of his followers were expelled and formed the Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP). **Die Beeld's** ruthless exposure of their activities as well as its prompting that they had no place in a modern society, played a significant role in the party's decision to act against them.

Although the HNP was annihilated in the April 1970 parliamentary election the 'verkrampes' still dominated the Transvaal NP as most of them were not prepared to follow Hertzog into the political wilderness. In the NP parliamentary caucus the leading 'verkrampste', Andries Treurnicht, was a powerful influence. Treurnicht opposed even trifling changes to apartheid rules and dogma, believing that they could only lead to more demands and the eventual collapse of apartheid. The 'verkrampste' presence in the NP, combined with Premier John Vorster's fear of the HNP's growth potential, dampened any initiative for change. Vorster increasingly lost all drive and ideas and was content to tread water and drift with the political tide of relative calm between 1970 and 1974.⁴⁷

To keep the HNP on the run, and to counter any backsliding by the NP, Pienaar used his column in **Rapport** to lambast the ultra-conservatives. He was particularly critical on 17 March 1974 when the NP-dominated city council of Pretoria pandered to the racism of the HNP. Prior to the South African Games in 1973 the city council, at behest of the government, opened some of its parks to all races to prevent any incidents involving foreign black athletes. This was vehemently opposed by the HNP and fearing a loss of votes to the right in the next election the NP councillors decided to return to the old policy. Pienaar criticised this opportunistic behaviour and declared that a loss of six parliamentary seats would have been preferable to being gutless and offensive to blacks.

With Pienaar as editor of **Beeld** the battle was enthusiastically taken to the 'verkrampes', or (as Ton Vosloo tagged them) the Mampoer triangle, consisting of Piet Meyer of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, Connie Mulder, the conservative and very ambitious leader of the Transvaal NP, and Marius Jooste of Perskor. **Beeld's** unconcealed enmity to this triangle was a high risk strategy which alienated many Afrikaners. The newspaper was seen as a dangerous liberal intruder. This was reflected in a bitter attack by Prof. Attie Pelzer, influential

⁴⁶ Mouton, **Voorloper**, pp. 77-9.

⁴⁷ O'Meara, pp. 195, 205.

cultural leader and Vice-Principal of the University of Pretoria, at a social gathering of the university's history department. He exploded that "(t)he best thing that could happen to Afrikanerdom in general and the National Party in particular is for **Beeld** to close down immediately. Its liberalism is asking us all to kiss the devil. I would rather read an anti-Nat English-language paper for then I know what I am getting. But **Beeld**."⁴⁸

Pienaar was unable to coerce the NP to rid itself of Treurnicht and his followers, but his journalism did much to discredit Treurnicht's ultra-conservative views. To the immense enjoyment of the 'verligtes' he confronted Treurnicht's inflated reputation as a political thinker in a devastating review of his book, **Credo van 'n Afrikaner**,⁴⁹ for **Beeld** on 13 December 1975. Through his writings he boosted the hard-pressed 'verligte' wing of the NP. For them Pienaar's political commentary was bread from heaven as it articulated what many thought, but were too afraid to say. It gave 'verligtes' courage and ammunition to confront the 'verkrampes'.⁵⁰ Moreover, the expulsion of Hertzog and some of his extreme followers meant that the NP had become more flexible and therefore able to reform petty apartheid. Although many of these reforms were insignificant they were of great symbolic value and encouraged further reforms.

With the ultra-conservatives in control of the NP the dramatic events of 2 February 1990 would not have been possible. Serbia, led to ruin and defeat by a recalcitrant and ultra-nationalistic Slobodan Milosovic, serves as an example of what could have happened to South Africa with a Treurnicht or Hertzog as leader.

6. PIENAAR, THE NP AND BEYERS NAUDÉ

Pienaar's loyalty to the NP was forged by his Afrikaner identity, but more importantly by his sincere belief that the NP was the only parliamentary party that could enact reforms to prevent a black uprising. The liberal Progressive Party (PP) with only one member of parliament was irrelevant and he despised the United Party (UP), the official parliamentary opposition, as an opportunistic, 'verkrampte' party, which was intellectually bankrupt.⁵¹ This contributed to Pienaar's ruthless bashing of the UP, PP and other opponents of the NP, especially during elections. Because he was sensitive to accusations that apartheid could not be morally justified he was also impatient with liberals.⁵² Pienaar, however, was never a

⁴⁸ A van Wyk, **The birth of a new Afrikaner** (Cape Town, 1991), p. 26.

⁴⁹ Kaapstad, 1975.

⁵⁰ Interview with Johan Vosloo, 30 March 1999.

⁵¹ **Rapport**, 19 March and 16 April 1972.

⁵² See for example **Die Beeld**, 17 August 1969.

mindless hack, or a lapdog that turned into a Rotweiler during elections, but an independent-minded person determined to use the NP to bring about a more just dispensation.

Pienaar felt that the correct approach of an Afrikaner newspaper to the NP and Afrikaner establishment was a policy of independence in commitment and friendship in tension.⁵³ NP van Wyk Louw defined this stance as loyal resistance.⁵⁴ With this philosophy he became the George Orwell of Afrikaner nationalism.

In the early 1970s Pienaar could see the clouds of a gathering storm of black resistance. His columns took on an urgency and he regularly lashed at the NP for running away from real challenges by focusing on irrelevant issues.⁵⁵ In January 1973, when the country was shaken by massive black strikes in Durban, Pienaar could not conceal his anger with the party for playing sterile white party politics in an ultra-conservative parliamentary atmosphere. He warned that the shadow of violence and armed resistance was creeping nearer. To the standard reaction by the NP that agitators had been responsible for the Durban strikes, Pienaar argued that they had much to agitate against.⁵⁶

The collapse of the Portugese empire in 1974, and the fear that time was running out for Afrikaners, added an edge to Pienaar's warnings. This was reflected in his "Politieke Rapport" of 12 May 1974 under the heading "Dis fiksies wat gek geword het" (fictions gone mad). He flayed the NP for allowing whites to live in a dream-world and gave a list of dangerous fictions that the government propagated. These included the adherence to job reservations despite the fact that these were collapsing in practice; the delusional and foolish idea of a coloured homeland and the notion that by 1978 blacks would be returning to the homelands. He also provocatively asked whether it could be expected from young white conscripts to be killed on the borders in order to protect discrimination that could not be justified.⁵⁷ Pienaar relentlessly forced his fellow Afrikaners to face the negative impact of apartheid. In one column, for example, he painted a grim picture of the forced removals, senseless discrimination and humiliations a young coloured doctor had had to endure.⁵⁸

⁵³ S Pienaar, "Die Afrikaner en sy koerant", **Standpunte** 108, (August 1973), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁴ NP van Wyk Louw, **Lojale verset: Kritiese gedagtes oor ons Afrikaanse kultuurstrewes en ons literêre beweging** (Cape Town, 1939), pp.11-21 and 166-70.

⁵⁵ **Rapport**, 30 July 1972.

⁵⁶ **Rapport**, 21 January, 4 and 11 February, 4 April 1973.

⁵⁷ **Rapport**, 2 June 1974.

⁵⁸ **Rapport**, 16 July 1974.

"Politieke Beeld" on 24 September 1974 despairingly urged the NP to rid itself of the 'verkrampes' and to move on with reforms. He was especially worried that the party was sliding to the right and confided to PW Botha that there was a new Hertzog movement in the NP.⁵⁹ The NP did not take kindly to these criticisms. Louis le Grange, MP for Potchefstroom and future Minister of Law and Order, publically accused Pienaar of undermining the Afrikaners' morale to fight for their country.⁶⁰ Vorster, who felt that Pienaar wrote increasingly to the left,⁶¹ did not conceal his displeasure about Pienaar's demands for reform. Phil Weber, Pienaar's former editor and mentor, found during an interview with Vorster in 1973 that he did not have a good word to say for Pienaar and his columns in **Rapport**. The Prime Minister was of the opinion that **Rapport** was undermining the NP and he refused to allow the paper in his house.⁶²

Shortly after the launch of **Beeld** in September 1974 Pienaar requested a meeting with Vorster. The Prime Minister was reluctant and only after a long delay grudgingly met with him. The meeting was awkward and Vorster was extremely surly and accused Pienaar of creating many problems for him with his journalism.⁶³

Despite his growing discontentment with the NP, Pienaar remained loyal to the party. He would not break with the NP, as those outside the establishment were powerless to influence the running of the country. He felt that when reformists leave the laager, it reduced them to irrelevant dissidents and left an open field for the Hertzogs and Treurnichts. Beyers Naudé, a university friend⁶⁴ and former Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) cleric who had become an anti-apartheid activist, served as an example of what happened to those who left the laager of Afrikanerdom. Pienaar regarded Naudé's career as a tragedy. By leaving Afrikanerdom, Naudé had become irrelevant and his criticisms meaningless pinpricks.⁶⁵

Vorster once warned Pienaar that he was too sympathetic towards Naudé. Apart from a soft spot for his former friend, Pienaar was also repulsed by the 'verkrampete' hounding of Naudé and his Christian Institute (CI), an independent ecumenical organization founded in 1963 to promote dialogue for reconciliation.⁶⁶ Without

⁵⁹ Pienaar collection, Pienaar to Botha, 3 September 1974.

⁶⁰ **Rapport**, 16 July 1974.

⁶¹ H Davis, **Die politieke en joernalistieke impak van die Sondagkoerant Die Beeld, 1965 tot 1970** (Unpublished MA, University of Stellenbosch, 1983) pp. 125, 143-6.

⁶² University of Stellenbosch, JS Gericke Library special collections, PA Weber collection, File 296.KV.38(23), Notes of Weber's meeting with Vorster, 13 June 1973.

⁶³ Correspondence with H J Grosskopf, 28 April 1997.

⁶⁴ Correspondence with Beyers Naudé, 7 May 1998.

⁶⁵ **Beeld**, 11 October and 21 November 1974.

⁶⁶ Nasionale Pers Archive, AL21, File 4/1/17, PA Weber to SW Pienaar, 25 October 1965.

directly defending Naudé and the CI, **Die Beeld** shed some light on the unsavoury, petty and vindictive persecution they had to endure from the DRC, and this led to Vorster's warning.⁶⁷

In the 1970s, a period of increased external pressure on the apartheid state, Pienaar became more intolerant of those Afrikaners who had left the laager to join outside pressure groups. His anger was specifically aimed at Naudé who was given a hero's welcome in the Netherlands. He believed that by linking up with external pressure groups Naudé had become an obstacle to internal reform.⁶⁸ In "Politieke Beeld" on 15 October 1974 he argued that there was a thin line between criticism and disloyalty, and that Naudé had crossed this line and therefore he lacked patriotism. General Koos de la Rey was for Pienaar a good example of a critical Afrikaner who differed with President Paul Kruger's policies up to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899, but then fought to the bitter end for the Afrikaners and their cause.

To show Naudé the error of his ways, **Beeld** ran three lengthy articles from 19 to 21 November 1974 on the 'verligte' theologian, Ben Marais, who was also hounded and vilified as a traitor, communist and liberal for his opinion that apartheid could not be justified by the Bible. Pienaar emphasised that Marais had never left his church and 'volk' and had never become embittered.

Pienaar's criticisms of Naudé was never part of the apartheid state's hounding of the dissident cleric, but more a sign of his anguish and frustration that reformists had to stay within Afrikanerdom to secure the survival of the Afrikaners. Pienaar stayed in the NP to the bitter end to keep this threat at bay. Pienaar's loyal resistance to the NP, however, came at a great price. The stress undermined his health, while it strained his relations with fellow Afrikaners. Moreover, loyal resistance led to immense inner torment as he knew that many aspects of apartheid could not be justified before God. This led to his hyper-sensitivity to liberal accusations that apartheid was immoral. Yet, after witnessing the bloodshed in the rest of post-colonial Africa, especially the civil war in Nigeria, he saw no alternative but that the NP should improve apartheid by making it more just.

The decision of the Cape NP to award Pienaar the DF Malan medal for his dedication to the party shortly before his death⁶⁹ was not a recognition of servility, but an acknowledgement that the party had to reform and adapt. For Pienaar the medal signified vindication.

⁶⁷ Nasionale Pers Archive, Cape Town, Dirk De Villiers collection, PA Weber to D De Villiers, 13 June 1967.

⁶⁸ **Beeld**, 11 October, 21 and 25 November 1974.

⁶⁹ **Rapport**, 27 August 1978.

7. 'WE DID NOT KNOW': PIENAAR, THE AFRIKANER AND APARTHEID ATROCITIES

In the 1960s black resistance to apartheid was crushed with immense cost to civil liberties. Pienaar was unhappy about the growing disregard of civil liberties and confided in Langdavid de Villiers, a prominent lawyer and personal friend, that he was unhappy with the use of detention without trial.⁷⁰ As editor of **Die Beeld** Pienaar expressed his uneasiness about security legislation. He agreed that, in the interest of national security, extensive powers should be given to the police, but he warned that these powers should not be abused. He urged some reflection on them,⁷¹ for example on the banning of opponents of apartheid without trial which he described as the 'unhappy shadow' of emergency powers.⁷² Pienaar was especially offended and disturbed that the government used modern technology to invade the privacy of citizens. He urged that strict control had to be applied to prevent the security establishment from using technology for its own agenda.⁷³ Pienaar had to be careful how he expressed his opposition to security legislation as it could have undermined his position to bring about gradual reform. To Hennie Serfontein of the **Sunday Times** he confided that he did not write about the treatment of political detainees as this would only alienate Vorster and **Die Beeld's** readership,⁷⁴ who, as the majority of Afrikaners, enthusiastically supported draconian legislation to protect their way of life. To stay within hearing distance of his people, and to have influence, he had to tone down his criticisms.

Pienaar did, however, warn his fellow Afrikaners that South Africa could not be kept safe solely by military means or security legislation. Whilst being circumspect, he continued to warn against the abuses of these types of powers. He, for example, expressed his unhappiness about police brutality in dealing with protesting students⁷⁵ and arresting blacks for pass offences.⁷⁶ He concluded that state security might have been too serious a matter to be left in the hands of the security police.⁷⁷ By 1974, however, Pienaar expressed his dissatisfaction regarding security legislation more forcefully in **Beeld** as he regarded it as unreasonable, for example laws which prevented the press from investigating conditions in prisons which made the

⁷⁰ Interview with Langdavid de Villiers, 8 April 1999.

⁷¹ **Die Beeld**, 7 May 1967.

⁷² **Die Beeld**, 24 April 1966.

⁷³ **Die Beeld**, 23 April 1967.

⁷⁴ Interview with H Serfontein, 23 July 1999; also see H Giliomee, **The Afrikaners: Biography of a people** (Cape Town, 2003), p. 549.

⁷⁵ **Rapport**, 11 June 1972.

⁷⁶ **Beeld**, 24 September 1974.

⁷⁷ **Rapport**, 21 May 1972.

maltreatment of prisoners possible.⁷⁸ In the process he was also critical of attempts by the government to control the press. In his "Politieke Rapport" of 26 November 1974 he bluntly warned that only evil could come out of censorship of the press and he was outraged that André P Brink's novel, **Kennis van die aand**, had been banned.⁷⁹

Du Preez's accusation that Pienaar could have done much more to expose the crimes of apartheid is valid, but his argument, and the denial by many Afrikaners of any knowledge about the evils done in their name by security agents of apartheid, is disingenuous. Already from the 1960s Afrikaners were warned by Pienaar in **Die Beeld, Beeld** and **Rapport** of the inherent dangers of a police state and that the security forces had to be strictly controlled to prevent abuses. But then no one is as deaf as those who do not want to hear.

8. CONCLUSION

Pienaar's quest for justice for all South Africans was fundamentally flawed as apartheid was inherently unjust. South Africa did not belong to the Afrikaners to determine that the black majority only had to be satisfied with 13% of the land. Moreover, Pienaar remained blind to many evils of apartheid. His journalism also did much to justify and bolster the apartheid state.

But to reject Pienaar as a puppet of the NP that misled his fellow Afrikaners who had no role in the democratic transformation of South Africa, does not reflect reality. To understand the collapse of the apartheid state a nuanced approach, based on the philosophy that the world cannot be neatly divided into good and evil, true and false, light and darkness, is needed. A straight line cannot always be drawn between those who opposed and those who collaborated with apartheid. Despite being a supporter of apartheid, Pienaar played a crucial role in convincing his fellow Afrikaners of the need to adapt to a changing world if they wanted to remain in Africa.

Pienaar believed that the survival of Afrikanerdom could only be ensured if Afrikaners were taught to confront conformity, to become introspective and to debate the future of apartheid. As a result he played a crucial role in moving away from the attitude that the Afrikaans press was a willing lapdog of the NP and Afrikaner establishment. In the process the press became more professional, enterprising, mature and independent. A more independent press also forced the arrogant

⁷⁸ **Beeld**, 9 October 1974.

⁷⁹ **Rapport**, 17 February and 7 April 1974.

Afrikaner establishment, in the period preceding 16 June 1976, when all resistance to apartheid was crushed, and when it seemed as if NP rule would last for ever, to face reality and to listen to what it did not want to hear. E Potter, in her study of the South African press, argues that the Afrikaans press became the most powerfully organized opposition force within the government and the NP.⁸⁰ Pienaar, by staying within hearing distance of his people, managed to get many Afrikaners to contemplate the morality of apartheid. His lashing of sour and outdated ideas made Afrikaners more critical of their political, religious and cultural leaders and contributed to a more open society. In the process Pienaar, as a reformist inside Afrikaner nationalism, paved the way for the reforms of PW Botha and FW de Klerk which made the peaceful transfer to a democratic post-apartheid state possible. Du Preez's rejection of Pienaar as a reformer is thus too simplistic as it ignores the complexity and ambiguity of our turbulent past.

⁸⁰ E Potter, **Press as opposition: The political role of South African newspapers** (London, 1975), p. 204.