

PC 1011114
- back to see
what is still needed

NOTES ON THE AUTO BIOGRAPHY OF ERNEST WENTZEL

-- 8.38 The Liberal Party met with the ANC in April or May 1959 at Wentzel's flat to discuss support for the ANC to boycott campaign. The plan was to boycott potatoes, sardines, cigarettes and pickles -- brand names are in the bio. There was a heated discussion especially about the ANC's organizational ability and actual strength on the Witwatersrand. Wentzel and Cooper were particularly aggressive. Cooper then got involved in an unpleasant quarrel with Sisulu about whether the program was in fact ~~the~~ the baby of the white members of COD. The ANC ~~be~~ maintained ^{with} merely tagging along and doing what they were told. Sisulu then said that the trouble with the Liberal Party was that they saw white Communists everywhere and that liberals were in reality racists because they were not prepared to concede that Africans could think and manage a political campaign on their own. The ANC members, however, were somewhat defensive when asked about what research they had done on each of the companies to be boycotted and whether Africans actually used their products and what the consequences of a boycott would be. As a result the relations between the ANC and liberals from that point on were worse in the Transvaal than elsewhere.

-- 9.11 liberals did not join ^{at} the initial meeting to set up COD because Isacowitz who had experience of communist tactics noticed that at the first meeting the CP was using its usual dispersed member tactic to control the outcome of the meeting.

-- 13.4 Jock Isacowitz's experiences in the Springbok Legion and the ruthless behavior of the Communists.

-- 13.5 ^{The} this story of the so-called Human Rights Welfare Committee.. It was controlled by Helen Joseph who dictated everything to Lillian Ngoyi. The committee had few resources and ~~when~~ ^{when} the Liberal Party ^{offered} ~~of~~ to look after these banished families through its many branches throughout South Africa this was initially appreciated, apparently, by Joseph ^{about} the lists of banishees was never provided. The Congress movement was not willing to have any ^{but} ~~political~~ ^{outside} influence or political contract with these people

-- 37.4. The story of Bishop Reeves Civil Rights Committee. It met probably six times. Its major contribution was the book Poverty Wages by Alex Hepple. Wentzel recalls that on March 26, 1960 when Chief Luthuli had burnt his pass to ANC representatives came to visit the Bishop and "were elated" -- they were Dr Conco and Duma Nokwe.

* -- 18.14 Prison experiences after the 1960 Emergency. There were 35 male detainees, ~~as~~ about 18/20 were Communists. There were four ex-Communists who still appear to be Marxists. Leading Communists ^{are} mentioned. Wentzel was detained on 30th March 1960. He notes that on the first few days a number of the Communists ^{seem} ~~to~~ be confident that the State of Emergency meant that "it was likely that the government's control of the country would be severely shaken. In a sense they thought the Revolution was coming". The Communists were very conciliatory when issues involving a united front came up. In Pretoria where they had an

exercise yard for large periods and lived in one very large bungalow conditions became more relaxed and as the atmosphere of crisis diminished relations between the two groups became more normal that is suspicious and antagonistic. For example, the anti Communist speech that John Brink brought into a play and Wentzel's vigorous defense of liberal policy with respect to nationalization and the land question. Wentzel called the Freedom Charter, "a totally meaningless document". Also when the detainees organized a Hunger Strike, the liberals did not join in because they regarded ^{it} as a stunt. There was a conflict also on how summaries of the news were presented every evening e.g. the way the cancellation of General Eisenhower's visit to Japan was covered. There was even a conflict around May Day ^{when} ~~went~~ in response to the Communists singing Songs like the Red Flag Wentzel sang a rude parody. By the end of their stay in jail liberals were all living together in a separate through much to the discontent of th of e Communists. Note that Monty Berman became very friendly ^{with} ~~was~~ John Lang at this point and "seemed to be establishing some common ideological ground"

^{w.}
-- SAP report [^] Was released on the 19th August 1964.

* -- letter 18/6/62 to Vigne which criticizes the New African particularly ^{an} editorial in which Vigne calls for a United Front.***This Is Important to get at Vigne views.

-- letter to Leftwich 19/6/62 -- Leftwich is showing signs of tension and pressure plus ^{a tribute} attribute to his ability.

MEMOIRS

-- 8 Duncan, the Cape Liberals and Ngubane supported the PAC. Other liberals regarded it as a racist organization ~~and~~ rejected it because it opposed the ANC. Others liked its anti-Communism or supported it because it used black racialism to smash white racist. The PAC had attacked the ANC for its stunt mentality, the grandiose claims it made for its campaigns and its lack of organizational drive. Now the ANC accused the PAC of the same thing. Sharpeville happened on March 21st 1960. A "model" village near Vereeniging, thirty miles from Johannesburg. Crowd size was probably about 10,000. The wire mesh fence around the police station was about 4 ft. high. The police were drawn from various police stations and ill-equipped to deal with the situation. However, the mood of the crowd was anything but aggressive -- at one point they helped the police to push a stalled Saracen until it was started again. ^{what} ~~Some~~ in the crowd actually brought a case of cold drinks and offered it to the constables who refuse ^{it}. Col Spiegler/Spengler? Tried to arrest a PAC leader, a scuffle took place, the policeman tripped with the PAC leader falling on him and then either a stone or stones were thrown, then there was a shot and shooting then went on even though the offices screamed for the firing to stop, ^{the} discipline had disintegrated. Seventy percent of the ^{ones} ~~of~~ were in the back. There were 67 dead and 180 wounded. Wentzel then took over 100 statements from the wounded who were incredibly stoic accepting their suffering

-- 18 ^{the} Monday after was a national stay -- at -- home strike which he says was very effective particularly ^{after} as Luthuli burnt his own pass. This was at liberal John Brinks house.

* -- 20. " The political temperature kept rising ^{and} many of the left felt that the day of change was about to come. ^{the} Transvaal Liberal Party ^{had} its annual Congress over the weekend of 27 to 28 March. There was a great turnout and an excited atmosphere -- indignation about Sharpeville and exhilarated at the feeling that a great and historical change was upon us." The police announced a temporary suspension of the pass laws -- their only retreat since 1948. A section of the party lobbied frantically to get the party into open support with the ANC campaign .

A -- 24 "There was an air of great events about -- to -- be about the Communists..... They were elated. They felt this was the beginning of the end of white rule and they were exhilarated to be participants"

-- 36 anecdotes. "Get over there, that yard is only for gentlemen's" -- -- "the trouble with you rich from Houghton is that all your used to is frogs eggs and kippers."

-- 37 -- activities that they carried out, including a part of "A Midsummer Night's Dream I". Included a Choir, Talks, Cricket.

* * -- 38/39 -- He learns that Communists are different from one another. His surprise ^{at} their romantics ^{is}. He is impressed by the sense they had that the future belonged to them and the sense of being part of a worldwide brotherhood which gave them strength and allowed them to submit to group discipline -- within those limits the Coral had argued possessed like the liberals the origin of their political beliefs with compassion for others he believed not it also led to an exaggerated sense of the importance and need for constant victories in order to be stop reinforcing.

-- 43 -- Berman becomes extremely ill with a bleeding ulcer and no help was provided during the night.

-- 44 -- ^{were a period of} "The 1970s ^{or use} the disillusion for the liberals of the 1950s and 1960s." It was caused by a feeling of impotence, "increasingly, we looked upon ourselves historically as having a past but no present and future". The liberals ^{had} was a program of conciliation but in the '70s neither side had any used for these ideas. In the 1950s and '60s he says, their involvement was one of belief and later only became an involvement of duty.

-- 45 -- the ambiguous benefits of de-colonization

-- 48 physical conditions ^{were an} ~~were in~~ exercise yard and a monitor's section with two large rooms which had a kitchen, a bathroom and a lavatory. They were allowed to order food from the office's canteen.

Berman was an excellent chef.

-- 51 Wentzel's quarrel with Slovo about the Freedom Charter and the issue of nationalization. Pen sketches of the Communists. The quarrel around the hunger strike.

-- 55 -- they were released on 1.7.1960 ? See S A P report.

-- 60 post Sharpeville seemed to be a liberal hour. Liberal predictions seem to have come true. The stock exchange crashed. The authority of the government was in low ebb. The pass laws had been abandoned. "It did seem as if white rule was ^{shaken} taken to its core". But the question was, as Vic Goldberg put it "Who is going to take the rifle away from the Afrikaner,". In the event the Afrikaners built up more power.

-- 61 -- While the liberals never believed they were within striking distance of ending white rule they did believe that that rule -- an anachronism -- was ending but they grossly misjudged the pace at which this would happen. Liberals also saw the LP as an influence on more significant movements. This was particularly true in the Cape where the leadership had developed a significant relationship with PAC. They believed that major changes at the instance of PAC were about to take place and quite naturally that they were placed to play a very important role.

-- 62 -- Paton -- high ^{prestige} ~~press~~ ~~the~~ -- persuasive -- not a manipulator -- a moderate non racialist with no radical ideas for structural change -- nonviolent -- believed in a third force -- 1960 Congress. "We knew the evils of apartheid, but were ~~a~~ so much part of the white ruling class that we could not take revolutionary action against it". Paton had a quality of greatness. "It was not our task to do great things or achieve great results". It was not his task to lead us to do great deeds. "The times were not ripe for radical change".

-- 64 -- Brown. Duncan. Unaware of the impotence of the Liberal Party. Saw world in simplistic terms. Told Macmillan how many aircraft carriers would be needed for military intervention. Provocative work in Basutoland -- if you can hold out for a week etc. He's ~~still~~ ~~see~~ ~~w~~ PAC's being close to power and himself ^{and} in the liberals being carried to power with it. Ngubane. Isacowitz -- controlled the Transvaal party -- former Communist -- Chairman of the Springbok Legion. Very suspicious of the CP and COD. An organization man. South Africa would change as Africa became liberated.

-- 70 -- he is very critical of Vigne and Hjul. Suggests that they were latecomers to the business of radicalism and that their contribution to the party was one of intrigue and lobbying and often not very effective kind.

-- 71 -- liberals were largely a white party but with enough nonwhites to make it nonracial at least at the upper levels. It was moderate and devoted to constitutional change. The first real change came in 1958 on the issue of the boycott [perhaps 1959] ^{with a part} party lost it's more conservative members and groped towards participating in the mainstream of black power

P 88

politics. But as black participation increased -- by 1960 to ~~down~~ with 5 or 6000 i.e. 60 percent of party membership and the party did not accommodate this ^{usably}. The blacks joined because of bread and butter issues but the LP was not fitted to lead a mass movement. The party was weakest in Cape Town where Vigne at one point saw the LP turning itself into a major movement. Paton's relations with the Congress leaders was excellent. Even anti-Communist Duncan supported Mandela in the 1961 stay -- at -- home. In the Transvaal the party until 1960 ^{had} a well developed ^{branch} structure among whites but little support from Africans and none to speak of from Coloreds and Indians. It was radical and articulate. This decline ^{of the} 1960 with the rise of the ^{progress} party and emigration. No party had ever comprise ^{the} wider cross-section of all kinds of South Africans.

-- 94*****see comments on John Harris and his place in the future -- almost envious of the fact that Wentzel had been in jail.

-- in 1961 it did seem as if change was imminent. Wentzel feels that people like Harris, Leftwich and Vigne were obsessed with the urgency of keeping up the pressure on South Africa and "Desperate That All Change Should Not Be in the Hands of the Communists but That Others to Play Their Part As Well" W. believes that Leftwich was Marxist ^{in a} general sense. He was contemptuous of Kennedy called him That tit K. He Was Contemptuous of Peter Brown. Leftwich Changed from being a happy, witty, extrovert and became extreme, indeed. .

NB
Harris
p 95

Puritanical. "Only in an atmosphere ^{of} urgency and of the ^{imminence} evidence of change could this situation ^{have} developed as it did"*****

-- 97 to -- "the ARM members believed in a chain reaction theory of political change. They had the idea that the political temperature was just below the boil. One had only to trigger off a dramatic incident such as a bomb explosion and this would tend to trigger ^{of} action by groups as yet unorganized. This would gather momentum until the momentum of opposition could not be resisted." (SURELY THIS IS MORE TRUE JOHN HARRIS AND THE OTHERS). Of course it underestimated the power, ruthlessness and efficiency of the government and overestimated the temperature.

-- after 1958 there was the discussion of the franchise question leading to the adoption in 1961 of universal suffrage. Economic questions had not been significant. However the party took ^{the} a radical line on the redistribution of land. In order to try and keep in touch with the radicals one had to deal with the issue of economic justice and the out^{rage} of poverty in South Africa. ^{By} 1963 Leftwich wanted a Marxist program. Wentzel tried to ^{two} appease the radicals by proposing a socialist program -- the debate was divisive and W. realize^d that his proposals would not satisfy Leftwich. However Paton supported a socialist bias in policy.

Xx

-- 101 -- Rosemary flees to Swaziland. She had made a fiery speech at the previous Transvaal Congress. W. Tried to Persuade Harris to Leave but Harris looked at him with some distaste.

-- 108 -- Wentzel's arrest and contact with Viktor-Swanepoel and v der Merwe -- very threatening. This was a very bad period for Wentzel and he movingly describes the effects of solitary confinement. See especially pages 110 to 114, particularly the latter on the effects of

not knowing day from night plus the periodic bursts of debilitating anxiety and then the ultimate devastation of facing a petition for removal of his children. See up to Page 119. He was in jail for more than ten days but not that many more. "It gave me and insight into power, fully used an ivory coiled from it".

-- 109 -- Dennis Capatos was assaulted by the police.

-- 121 John Harris was a sickening site -- swollen ^{face} ~~place~~ where his jaw had been broken -- spirit was smashed -- frightened -- kept saying -- don't let them hang me Ruth. v attacker was van der Merwe. A Certain Colonel ? Promised him that if he made a confession and forgot about the assault he would not be given the death penalty.!!

Wentzel claims that one point which did not come out and which in so many ways destroyed the Harris version was that the catch of the suitcase was wired so that it would have exploded if opened. [THIS SEEMS TO ME TO HAVE BEEN HIGHLY UNLIKELY -- WHY WOULD THE STATE NOT USES KIND OF EVIDENCE.]

124 -- did Harris believe that the police would stick largely to Queensbury rules. ^{Did he think} ~~Nothing~~ because he was an intelligent, former radio quiz kids that he could simply refuse to answer or could outwit his less talented interrogators.? Did it not occur to him that the police might assault him and smash ^{him} ~~and~~ thereby. His letter to the prime minister clearly showed a detachment from reality, ~~that~~ ^{wasn't} inevitable that the ARM gradually turned from its low impact program of explosives to discussion of more action such as a bomb on a Boeing to Durban??? A bomb in a parking garage -- ^(this was true.) ~~(this was true.)~~ ^{New to me}

W. -- He Believed That South Africa Was on the Brink of Change and Simply Had to Be Pushed for That Change to Be Caused.. Rivonia was just as similar -- more grandiose but no less ridiculous. Lilyleaf was ten miles from Johannesburg and ? Was 20 miles from Johannesburg near Krugersdorp.

125 -- Leftwich in 1964 was under severe emotional stress. W. wrote to him and Paton spoke them. Did Adrian suspect his own unfitness for the task he had set for himself himself but felt all the more driven by these suspicions? Was the ARM peopled largely by the whites who felt a crushing sense of being burdened by being white and privileged.? Did Rhoda Prager prey on unhappy people?

-- 126 once Harris was alone in supreme control with explosives ^{Here} ~~they~~ can be no question that this fulfilled a deeply felt desire ^{for} for prominence, for leadership for That sense of destiny which obsessed him." The very aloneness which would've deterred most people was in fact "the very spur which drove Harris on" he planned a simplistic scheme in keeping with his character -- he had a believe that all situations could be analyzed out and the development predicted. Could he have believed that he alone could set off the events leading to the fall of the Nationalists? He never talked about the effect of the bomb to Wentzel. W. says he was an insensitive ^{man} ~~as~~ perhaps ^{as} the result of a lack of imagination.

-128 "I do not believe that Harris would have willingly harmed anyone who was made real to him. But that he quite willingly ^{set} ~~sent~~ ^{out} ~~of~~ harm the abstract notion of a white crowd on a white station, that would be different". Why place the bomb in the station if one did not want to hurt anybody.

-- 129 ^The defence at the trial was an insanity. This was the manic depressive psychotic defence, namely, that he was in a state of ^{manic elation} ~~many~~ ~~enelation~~ and not responsible for his actions. True he had a history of psychological disorder including manic depressive psychosis on both sides of the family. He was immature in his assessment of human behavior, attempting to reduce it in all situations to a kind of ^{game of} ~~chess~~. This was the defence that Harris wanted since it at least gave him some hope and in the witness box he could simulate from one of his friends Robin F. who was a manic depressive.

-- 132 the death sentence had a cathartic effect on John. Death was what he had feared, ~~that~~ ^{Now} that it faced him he could face it. His courage grew and he became the comfort of those around. See his letters which were ^{up of} ~~up~~ comfort to others ~~not~~ ^{for} himself. Too bad that he was not seen as a freedom fighter but rather as a white deranged boy who was going to hang ^{up} ~~in~~ that was that. It was difficult to get any kind of Dr. to see John but one finally did. His spirits never seems to falter. W. saw him on the day before his execution. He cried a bit. He said the priest who was visiting him had told him that the ^{peace} ~~piece~~ of Lord would descend upon him but that he did not accept that it was the peace of the Lord but he did say that he felt at ^{peace} ~~piece~~ and was able to face the execution.

-- 134 he died bravely. The priest ^{who} ~~was~~ ^{with} ~~in~~ ^{him} said that he had shaken hands with all those present and said he bore them no ill will. He was determined to keep control of his senses to the very ^{end} ~~hand~~ and sang "we shall overcome" as he was executed.

-- 135 the government was determined not to tolerate any challenge to its power and thus any kind of politics ^{was} ~~is~~ now ended. Liberals had nothing to offer as a mechanism for change and recoiled from actions which were directed at change because they believe they would not work

-- 137 comments on Leftwich and Lloyd.

-- 138 analysis of John Lang. Fat -- striking face -- Oscar Wilde -- distinguished family -- roistering turn the phrase acquired at sea during W.W II. Intelligent -- ⁱⁿ ~~is~~ capable of sustained work -- ~~mind~~ bubble with ideas. A royalist who was violently antirepublican. Berman -- also tall -- an actor with a trace of the feminine in his walk and gesture. -- a splendid cook and chatterer.

* * -- the ARM was a concoction of romanticism and guilt with a smattering of sloganizing and leftist arrogance. For some there was a need to set themselves apart from others -- a puritanism of being one of the elect. They understood neither the blacks nor the whites. They misread the

mood of the blacks ^{and} of the power of the whites.

-- 141 did the ARM destroy the Liberal Party? W. says no. It was slow steady pace of the ^{bannings} ~~bands~~ ^{particular} ~~likely~~ at the level just below the national leadership which was essential to the organization. To this the party had no answer it did not see itself as a vehicle of dramatic change nor did it believe it ^{could} ~~challenged~~ the power of the state. They wanted change ^{but} ~~we~~ did not see themselves as ^{creating} ~~using~~ it.

-- 143 what did the LP then achieve ~~and~~. We created a living nonracial party in a racist society. Our vision of the new South Africa was a reality in the party. [There follows a section on Jock Isacowitz. His model for the future had been shaped by the coalition which had forced Leopold from the throne in Belgium in 1945. He saw the party as a white group acceptable to whites but with an ~~entire~~ ^{entire} to blacks. "A party rejected today ^{but tuned} ~~the cheering~~ to tomorrow" but a minor league party. The party would be a place where whites could turn when the time came..]

-- initially the party had been reluctant to recruit black members because Congress felt that it was a wrongful intrusion into the black field. But by the early '60s the party was changing and becoming ~~to~~ ^{to} one of young white intellectuals with ^{us} fairly substantial black membership both urban and rural -- there was an emphasis on trade unions , on economics, on agricultural policy and on the redistribution of wealth. In part this was helped by money from John Lang. He gave about 200 pounds per month to the Transvaal, enough for office rental and salaries for five organizers plus a motorscooter plus wages for Pretoria and an office in Springs. This was not caused by black radical pressure but rather found in the response of the white radicals to the increase in black membership. At the 1961 Transvaal Congress more than half the delicate black. 1961 to 1963 were hey- day years of the Transvaal party. For instance on the surface black liberals played a major role up to a certain point in the All -- in -- African Convention. The government recognized this and there was a steady stream of bannings.
