

VIVA! VIVA!

by DAVID BASCKIN

UIT DIE DIEPTE

IT HAD been a long day. But now, with the success of the case behind him, the Inspector of Police sat back to enjoy a pipe, only to find that his tobacco ration had run out. Damn. First no bread for three months, and now this.

Purging his mind of unfashionable thoughts, he turned his inner attention to a review of the day's events. It had been the little oval tattoo on the prisoner's left buttock that had been the give-away.

For months now, the Inspector plus his elite team of Korean-trained special investigators had been hard on the heels of a dangerous Die Stem singing gang. No matter what the occasion, be it a bridge opening in Umtata, a labour corvee in the Vaal Triangle or a symbolic occupation of the former Stock Exchange in Diagonal Street, from somewhere would come the eerie and gut-churning sound of the old and damned national anthem. On hearing it, the masses would retch, cows spontaneously abort, dogs howl, seeming, by some dark counter-revolutionary process, to instinctively know the tune.

The State responded by suspending the Bill of Rights. With unlimited powers, the Police ranged the country searching for the gang. But nothing came of their enquiries, until, during a routine body search of a routine suspect (his card read: Name: K. Occupation: Cheerleader (retired). Address: Unknown. Next of Kin: Satan) the curious tattoo came to light.

What could it be? Leipzig-trained forensic scientists shook their heads. Cuban cryptologists were puzzled. And then suddenly, out of the blue of our heavens, the truth came to the Inspector on wings of gleaming gold. A rugby ball! The tattoo on the buttock was a rugby ball, the sign of the secret game playing society.

Well, with the evidence staring them all in the face, the suspect broke down. Not only could he sing Die Stem, but with very little provocation volunteered the entire lyrics of Sannie Met Die Rooi Rok Aan. Within hours, the rest of the gang was in custody. Once more, peace and freedom ruled the land.

Tomorrow was going to be a lovely day.

NEXT YEAR IN PRETORIA

AS YOU KNOW, Colonel Ghaddaffi will attend the next All-Islam summit in Djakarta. To salve the weeping wound of home-sickness, he has demanded 1) a site to pitch his tent, and, 2) the personal attentions of a female camel, so that he can be assured of his daily pinta camel milk. But what you don't know, is that in the very near future, the leaders of the tiny Volks Republiek van Oranje will attend the New South African Summit in the former Pretoria. Like Colonel Ghaddaffi in Djakarta, they will be glad to be there. And again like Colonel Ghaddaffi, they will have a few special ethnic requirements of their own. First of these, will be a place to park the ceremonial Casspir. Knowing them, I suspect the site where the statue of Oom Paul once stood, will be acceptable. Next, the right to walk the streets of the Capital, bearing cultural weapons, in this case, the gold-plated Mausers that represent the Oranje struggle against colonialism and imperialism, 1899-1902 AD. Then, the special culinary needs of the Oranje delegates. Made up of ten oxen, metres of wors, a herd of live sheep, litres of mampoer and 'n bietjie vark for vegetables, the Oranjes will request a special dispensation to conduct a mixed braaivleis in public. The event will be guarded by their own men to keep the salivating New South African masses at bay.

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Will ethnic federalism succeed?

and negotiations begin for a redistribution of power to achieve a democratic system, the questions of safeguarding the interests of the former dominant minority and of overcoming a legacy of oppression and deep suspicion become paramount.

The old Ethiopian empire was founded by Amhara conquest. The downfall of Haile Selassie brought about not only the crumbling of the old empire but also the loss of Amhara power. The dominant new forces are principally non-Amharic and are committed to eradicating the power structure built up over the centuries by the Amhara. The Amharic community — like the Afrikaners in South Africa — are naturally anxious

about their future in the new society, while the formerly oppressed communities remain suspicious of the rearguard actions which the Amharas might be expected to adopt to prevent the total loss of their power.

As in South Africa, old attitudes die hard. There is a hard core of Amharas who find it difficult to reconcile themselves to being ruled over by those they have been accustomed to regard as inferiors. One still comes across Amharas in the south who speak contemptuously of giving votes to Oromos as being comparable to 'giving votes to old socks.' Little credit is given to the EPRDF for the tolerance and statesmanship shown by its leaders in not grabbing power.

The crucial question is whether the policy of ethnic federalism will succeed. Building on a base of ethnic autonomy is a better guarantee that a system of national parties will evolve, thus holding out the promise of a multi-party democracy. Success is by no means assured, but at least this courageous and novel experiment in dealing with the realities of ethnic conflict offers a way forward which might in future also serve as a model for other developing nations, as well as for the older established democracies which are increasingly coming under the strain of ethnic/regional pressures as their governments become increasingly more remote from the electorate. ●

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