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SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

An enigma, as he has been called. A riddle.

What's the key to a man like Pik Botha? What do you make of a minister who pours grappa from a skull for a select group of drinking companions in the small hours of the morning or who chews his way pensively through a bunch of long-stemmed roses at a diplomatic reception? Who is he? A grim enemy, whose steady gaze holds the threat of retribution, or a peacemaker, a brother to the other Africans around the negotiating table?

When can you claim to know him? When he engages you in heated debate across a table on the subject of self-determination or peace negotiations? Or around a campfire under the night sky when he hesitantly reads a poem he has just finished writing on the back of a cigarette box by the light of a leadwood fire?

Who am I?

an astronaut

a passenger

an animal

an almoner

a rover

hunter often missing the mark

thief who lies and deceives

wage earner

cave dweller

Afrikaner

twister of facts

middle-aged man

awaiting the grave

summonsed and awaiting trial

victim of my own thoughts

the hunter and the hunted

defenceless before fate

Wie is ek?

'n Ruimtereisiger

'n passasier

'n dier

'n aalmoesener

'n swerwer

jagter wat dikwels mis skiet

dief wat lieg en bedrieg

salaristrekker

grotbewoner

Afrikaner

feite-verdraaiër

mens in sy herfs

grafafwagtend

gedagvaardigde verhoorafwagtende

slagoffer van my eie denke

prooi van my eie rooftog

uitgelewerde aan die noodlot

beachcomber and shipwreck
bruised branch
smoking wick
hypocritical believer ...

strandloper en skeepswrak
geknakte tak
rokende lamppit
skynheilige gelowige ...

Pik wrote this poem in 1985, in the midst of domestic unrest and international peace negotiations for Southern Africa.

“In a way,” said Chester Crocker, “his personality always struck us as somewhat larger than life.” The gaunt, bespectacled former diplomat, a familiar figure at international negotiations, had seen Pik in action often enough in the days when Crocker was American Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, the leader of the negotiating team on Namibia and Angola.

“A man of many facets.”¹

“I could hardly sum him up in a few sentences” – this from the angular Namibian farmer turned politician.²

Dirk Mudge’s days as leader of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance lay behind him, a period in which he had tried to sell a negotiated independence for his parched country to the voters, and members of the audience had broken chairs over each other’s heads in the ensuing scuffle. The difficulty was that Mudge still had questions for Pik. And questions about Pik. “Just when you think you’ve got him, he wriggles out from under!” he said. His dispassionate assessment: “Pik is intelligent, sharp, thinks on his feet and is a formidable negotiator.”³

“The *Pikkewyn*!” This from Thomas Langley.

“Guard your tongue!” his wife interjected sharply.

“He’s no negotiator!”

Langley and Pik had been opponents for years – the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Opposition spokesman for that portfolio. Their differences evidently went deeper than politics. “He can’t debate an issue point by point,” Langley explained. “In that kind of situation he is quickly driven into a corner.”⁴

The celebrated cleric in the purple cassock raised one eyebrow above his spectacles. “I once opposed him in a TV debate.” Archbishop Desmond Tutu rubbed his hands in evident satisfaction. “He ... did a commendable job defending the indefensible, I mean apartheid!”⁵

Pik Botha was in his element in front of the TV cameras, always. If anyone can testify to this it is Cliff Saunders, who interviewed Pik virtually

“COWBOYS DON’T CRY”

Pik Botha is undoubtedly one of the most *durable* of South African politicians, wrote one journalist shortly after the hullabaloo over the black president remark. Nothing seemed to break Pik’s speed. He simply got on with his job with his customary panache. In fact, according to his fellow diplomats, South Africa’s relations with its neighbouring states were the healthiest they had ever been since his appointment as minister.¹

The dressing down he received in Parliament was merely the beginning of the long succession of setbacks that the year was to bring.

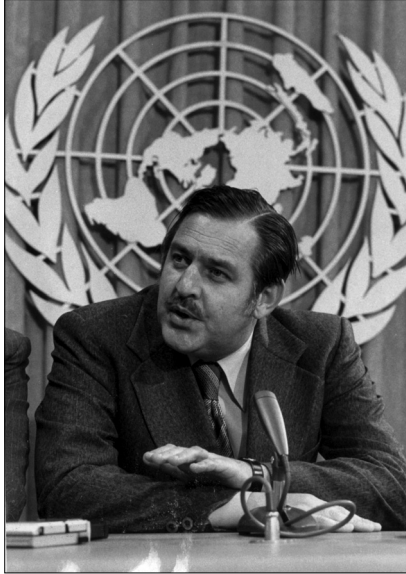
In March 1986 he went to Europe for discussions with leaders like Mr Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Dr Chester Crocker and Frank Wisner, the American Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. PW Botha consented to the trip with reluctance. “If you’re going to say this kind of thing while you’re in the country, how do I know what you’re capable of saying overseas?”

“Sir,” replied Pik, “that is a risk you’ll have to take. If I don’t go I can’t do my job as Minister of Foreign Affairs.”²

So Pik, Helena and their party went overseas, just at the time when Halley’s long-awaited comet was visible as a speck of light in the southern sky. En route to Frankfurt for a meeting with Wisner the aircraft had to touch down in Athens. The pilot circled the city for a long time to give the passengers the best view of the comet, which only appears once in a lifetime.

The night sky had held great fascination for Pik ever since his childhood, and he was flying above the ancient city that his father, Frikkie, had taught him about. The vivid associations sparked a train of philosophical thought. Athens, he mused, had pursued virtually the same ideals as its enemy, Sparta, but the two civilisations had operated completely differently and had ended up destroying each other. This surely held a lesson for his own country.

South Africans were striving for peace, even if they were poles apart in their approach. The sooner all the people in the country could agree to



A press conference after a meeting with Kurt Waldheim, 24 June 1977.



With Pope John Paul II, October 1979. "We found personal rapport."



Discussions in the veld with Henry Kissinger (left front) and Magnus Malan (right front).