

Christoph Marx

Reader: Texte aus der Sekundärliteratur

Kurseinheit 4:
Der Nationalismus der Buren

Fakultät für
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Text 1: Dan O'Meara, The Afrikaner Broederbond, in: ders.: Volkskapitalisme - Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948, Cambridge 1983, Kap. 4, S. 59-66.

The Afrikaner Broederbond

The Afrikaner Broederbond grew out of a grouping calling itself Jong Suid-Afrika (Young South Africa), formed in May 1918. In July of that year it changed its name to the Afrikaner Broederbond. It was a time of political crisis and depression when, according to the Bond's later secretary, 'The Afrikaner soul was sounding the depths of the abyss of despair' (quoted in Serfontein 1979:31). The 1913 split in the SAP produced confusion and bitterness amongst Afrikaners, particularly in the northern provinces. This was compounded by the violent suppression of the *Rebellie*, the execution of Jopie Fourie and the imprisonment of its leaders by Botha's government. Agriculture was depressed and the influenza epidemic raged. The squeeze on land and the effects of the *Rebellie* drove increasing numbers of rural whites into the cities, accelerating the problem of 'poor whiteism'. All writings on the Bond stress the significance of this period when 'politically and economically the Afrikaner had been reduced to a slave in the land of his birth' (Oelofse 1964:7-8).

These conditions generated many organised responses. In the OFS General Hertzog formed the NP in 1914. Similar parties were formed in the Transvaal and the Cape the following year. The *Helpmekaar* (Mutual Aid) organisation was conceived to pay the fines of the imprisoned leaders of the *Rebellie*, and its mobilisation of the savings of Afrikaans-speakers was partly to inspire the formation of the two future insurance giants, Sanlam and Santam (chapter 7 below). The growth of the cooperative movement dates from this period. In the Cape the cultural nationalism of the Afrikaans language movement was given political and economic muscle. In three full years a handful of Cape Town and Stellenbosch professional men formed Die Nasionale Pers (National Press), the Cape NP, and Sanlam and Santam. But the Western Cape was little affected by the economic and political crises which wracked the northern provinces. The well-off, educated Afrikaners who formed these groupings were in a very different position from those in the north. The bitter words of a later anti-Cape survey of the formation of the Bond echo the recurring conflict between north and south in nationalist politics: 'compared with the acute

stress raging in the northern provinces, there was little need south of the Hex River' (Veg November 1968).

This important point highlights what were in effect the different class bases of the nationalist movement in the Cape and the Transvaal. While this was analysed at length above, here it is vital to note that, from the outset, as a predominantly Transvaal organisation, the Broederbond differed from the mainstream of that province's nationalist movements. Whereas Transvaal Afrikaner nationalism was then overwhelmingly rural in its social basis and concerns, the Bond was a determinedly urban grouping of the petty bourgeoisie. It was founded by fourteen railway clerks, policemen and clergymen (CESO 1965: para. 32). While its membership always reflected the domination of petty bourgeois elements (see below, p. 63), two groups in particular played a central role in its early years. The Bond involvement with the question of Afrikaans schools after 1921 attracted a large number of teachers into its ranks (Louis J. du Plessis 1951). They soon infused life into the Bond, and through men such as L.J. Erasmus and, particularly, I.M. Lombard and J.H. Greijbe, dominated its leadership.¹ By the later half of the 1920s, however, large numbers of academics from the Calvinist University of Potchefstroom had joined the Bond and were displacing the teachers from the leadership. Men such as Professor L.J. du Plessis, J.C. van Rooy and H.G. Stoker brought to the Bond a developed and rigorously conservative Calvinist *Wetenskap*. They infused new vigour into the organisation and self-consciously operated as its ideologues. By the late 1920s they were without doubt its guiding force. L.J. du Plessis became deputy chairman in 1928, and chairman in 1930, to be succeeded by J.C. van Rooy in 1932. In the confused days of coalition and fusion the influence of the Potchefstroom academics kept much of the Afrikaner intelligentsia out of the UP and provided some ideological credibility for the very weak G/NP in the north.

However, in its very early years, according to the then secretary, the Bond was 'little more than a semi-religious organisation'.² The official Bond history makes clear that prior to 1927 the organisation had no real conception of its function or role. Wracked by dissension and disagreement, it struggled to clarify its purpose and establish itself as a disciplined body. In 1919 the first purge occurred when only nineteen of the over a hundred members undertook to make a 'declaration' of loyalty. A second purge followed an acrimonious split from 1923 to 1925, mainly over the Nationalist/Labour Party Pact. Late in 1921, in an attempt to enforce discipline, the Bond decided to transform itself into a secret organisation. Again, its official history details the strong internal opposition to this policy, leading to a number of expulsions and even the dissolution of the West Rand Division in 1926. The struggle over the secrecy ruling seems only to have been resolved in 1932 (Pelzer 1979: 14–16, 55).

For much of the 1920s the Bond functioned in semi-Masonic fashion (and for a while seems to have modelled itself on the Freemasons), operating almost

exclusively in the cultural field. Within the bounds of its limited resources it sought both to foster its members' direct interests by finding them employment and to debate the economic, social and political issues confronting them—issues such as 'the native question, immigration, profiteering, home language education and library affairs' (Military Intelligence 1944: section V, para. 8). Its 'cultural action' sought to promote Afrikaans in schools and commerce, encourage mother-tongue education and develop Afrikaans literature (Pelzer 1979:90). Although it began slowly to move out of its Transvaal base, establishing the first division in the OFS in 1926 and in the Cape in 1931, it remained overwhelmingly a Transvaal organisation with but 212 members in nine divisions by 1927. During these first ten years of its existence it cannot be said to have been a significant force in either Afrikaner cultural life or nationalist politics.

Two traumatic events in the 1920s and 1930s decisively altered the Bond's role and led to its relatively rapid development into the highly disciplined vanguard organisation of northern Afrikaner nationalism. The first occurred in 1927 when General Hertzog abandoned republicanism following the 1926 Balfour Declaration granting South African Dominion status. This 'betrayal' prompted a Bond decision to 'expand activities and take an active part in the life of the [Afrikaner] community leaving no avenue neglected' (Military Intelligence 1944: section V, para. 8). The divisions were instructed to increase their influence in local affairs, so that in every district Afrikaners would be aware of a 'moving force, even if its source could not be precisely located'. This marked the end of the 'youthful phase' of the Bond and the start of its attempted 'systematically to infiltrate every arena of importance to the continued existence of the Afrikaner and to make the AB's influence felt' (Pelzer 1979: 95–6).

The effect of the Balfour Declaration on nationalist politics likewise brought home the Bond's need for a 'public front' (Pelzer 1979: 119). This led to its establishment in December 1929 of the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Association, hereafter FAK). Under the chairmanship of the OFS Nationalist Party MP, Dr N.G. van der Merwe, the FAK was an umbrella body designed to provide 'central organisation' and 'clear direction' to the myriad Afrikaner cultural groupings. The Bond's paternity of the FAK is undisputed. Its official history acknowledges that as 'a creation of the AB, the FAK is regarded by the mother-organisation as its public arm' (Pelzer 1979: 120). The FAK was to be the most important and influential of the Bond's numerous public fronts. With token exceptions the two bodies shared the same executives and officials who publicly implemented the FAK policies secretly decided upon in the Bond. By 1937 almost 300 cultural bodies were affiliated to the FAK. Now, in effect, the Bond's early concern with routine cultural work was openly undertaken by the FAK, freeing the Bond to concentrate on other issues. In the words of its chairman in 1932:

We find the AB is slowly handing over the cultural work to its much bigger son, the FAK... [But] national culture and the welfare of the folk will only flourish if the South African people break all foreign bonds. After the cultural and economic needs, the AB will have to devote its attention to the political needs of our people (*Rand Daily Mail* 8/11/35).³

In the period between the formation of the FAK in 1929 and coalition in 1933, under the leadership of the Potchefstroom academics the Bond strove to strengthen its organisation, tighten discipline and extend its membership to the Afrikaner elite throughout the country' (Moodie 1975: 146-7). Membership rose from 212 in nine divisions in 1927, to 362 in 17 divisions in 1929, reaching 1,023 in 55 divisions by 1933 (Pelzer 1979: 32). Internal opposition to the Potchefstroom academics and their reorganisation of the Bond during this period led to the formation in 1930 of a breakaway Handhawersbond by one-time Bond secretary L.J. Erasmus and other members of the Transvaalse Onderwysersvereniging (Transvaal Teachers' Association, hereafter TO).⁴

In these years the Bond also began for the first time to intervene in the growing conflict within the NP. In 1930, following discussions in the Bond, FAK chairman and Nationalist MP Dr N.J. van der Merwe formed the Republikeinsebond (Republic League) as a ginger group within the NP, agitating against Hertzog's leadership. Yet whatever the dissatisfaction with Hertzog, given both the class alliances underlying the NP and the general's enormous political stature, the Broederbond was in no position to mount an open challenge until he himself precipitated a break. The long coalition/fusion crisis of 1933/4 was the second catalyst which finally transformed the Bond. As analysed above, fusion disorganised the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie and detached it from its traditional political alliances. In the political vacuum following the collapse of the NP in the north, the Bond progressively assumed for itself the role of the directing body – or in its own words 'war council' (Pelzer 1979: 12) – of Afrikaner nationalism.

As the fusion crisis ripened in 1933/4, the leadership again tightened discipline and 'purified' the Bond. Its 1934 annual congress decided to infiltrate members into 'key positions' in all leading institutions. New regional councils were introduced to strengthen local and national coordination (Pelzer 1979: 55, 109, 36). And according to a later Bond chairman, in 1934 a campaign was begun to recruit 'Afrikaans national political leaders'. Dr D.F. Malan, the Transvaal G/NP leader J.G. Strijdom, and leading OFS *ge-suiwerde* C.R. Swart, now joined (Serfontein 1979: 40), to be organised into a Bond parliamentary group. At the end of 1934 a Bond 'Political Commission' was appointed with L.J. du Plessis as 'Political Commissar' – though this title was later dropped and the Commission was renamed the Parliamentary Commission (Pelzer 1979: 148, 174). Professor du Plessis soon also became the chairman of the Transvaal G/NP.

Who did this reorganised Bond represent, and how did it function? It must be stressed that it remained based predominantly in the urban areas of the

northern provinces, especially the Transvaal. The Bond's influence and membership in the Cape was always slight compared with the north. In the 1930s the Afrikaans-speaking urban white population was overwhelmingly working-class. Membership of the Bond was constitutionally required to reflect the occupational structure of the local Afrikaans communities, giving the Bond the 'right' to speak in their name. In practice, membership was confined largely to the professions. A stiff annual membership fee (£12.10.0), a system of regular financial levies and a strict requirement that members be 'financially sound', ruled out anything but token working-class membership. One long-time member and former divisional chairman told me that workers as such were never involved, as it was felt 'there was no specific need for workers in the Broederbond'. Bond membership remained almost exclusively petty bourgeois. In 1944, the first year for which a reasonably reliable breakdown of members' occupations exists, teachers, academics, clergymen and civil servants accounted for over fifty per cent of members, with lawyers, journalists, politicians, farmers and assorted businessmen as other large occupational groupings (Military Intelligence 1944: section V; *Die Transvaler* 14, 20 December 1944 and 3 January 1945). This heavily petty-bourgeois membership comprised in effect the cream of the northern Afrikaner intelligentsia, and came to be regarded – and so regarded itself – as the self-chosen elite of 'Afrikanerdom'.

This elitism was a crucial aspect to the functioning of the Bond. Membership was constitutionally restricted to financially sound, white, Afrikaans-speaking, Protestant males over twenty-five years old. These had to be of 'unimpeachable character' and actively accept South Africa as their sole homeland, containing 'a separate Afrikaner nation with its own language and culture' (Oelofse 1964: chapter 3, para. 11-56). Nobody could apply to join. The extremely stiff, complex selection procedure was designed to ensure secrecy and to control and maintain ideological purity and rigid discipline. Candidates could only be proposed from within the local divisions. Every single Bond member and the Executive Council vetted each candidate, who could be rejected by a simple blackballing procedure. In effect, then, most members were known to each other, and in this sense the Bond clearly was a self-chosen, self-reproducing elite.

The Bond was a policy-making, coordinating body. It determined fields of action and their parameters without itself directly implementing policy. This was left to the front organisations and individual members. It was organised into local divisions of between five and fifty members. A twelve-member Executive Council presided over daily affairs and administration. The divisions were required to meet monthly to 'discuss everything to do with Afrikaners in its particular area, especially economic life'. Issues and proposals were thoroughly discussed and criticised and then referred to other divisions. If necessary the Executive Council appointed 'a committee of experts' to consider particular issues. According to a former member, the complex policy-making process generated 'a feeling of intense comradeship'.

As the old boy network *par excellence*, the Bond set up 'ongoing machinery to handle everything'. Once 'fully worked out policy' had emerged from the consultation process it was either implemented by mandated individual members working through front organisations, or 'laid before the volk' in a volkskongres (congress of the volk) – themselves organised by a Bond front organisation (CESO 1965: para. 39).

A picture emerges of an immense informal network of influence in all regions and all sections of the Afrikaner community, together with a powerful organisational bond forging very strong group loyalties. The vital significance of the Bond as it developed after fusion lay in the fact that through it the intellectual cream of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie was independently organised into a militant, highly disciplined body. Through the coordination and direction of the disparate individual talents of this class, and their 'systematic infiltration' into all 'key bodies in national life' where they could exercise 'quiet influence', the Bond provided a superb vehicle for the discussion, elaboration, adoption and eventual execution of what, after fusion, amounted to the independent programme of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie.

Given the extreme weakness of the northern G/NP, especially in the Transvaal, the extra-parliamentary Bond became clearly the most significant and influential northern Afrikaner nationalist organisation. In contrast to the Cape, where the party remained the dominating force, in the Transvaal and the OFS the Bond acted to a large extent independently of the party and, at least in the 1930s, effectively controlled the northern G/NP. Whilst in the Cape the old generation of political leadership formed in the early twentieth century retained firm control, in the northern provinces a new generation of intellectuals assumed the leadership of Afrikaner nationalism through the Bond. These younger men had not fought in the Anglo-Boer War and had lived most of their lives in a unified South Africa. Given a chance of leadership and an influence they would otherwise have had to wait long for, they brought to Afrikaner nationalism new vigour, ideas and perspectives. To the influence of the young Potchefstroom academics was soon added that of four celebrated doctors, N. Diederichs, P.J. Meyer, H.F. Verwoerd and A. Hertzog (the general's son). All were newly returned from overseas study in the early 1930s, and Diederichs and Meyer in particular, strongly influenced by European fascism.⁵ With the Potchefstroom academics, they led the post-fusion ideological redefinition of Afrikaner nationalism.

Soon after coalition, a new Journal, *Koers* (Directions), appeared from Potchefstroom. Its first editorial expounds its self-conscious ideological role: 'Indeed in our country and throughout the entire world, there prevails the greatest confusion on religious, moral, educational, social, political and economic issues. However weak and impotent it may be in many respects, with the mercy and help of God *Koers* will try to give direction in all these areas' (August 1933).

During the 1930s *Koers* was effectively the theoretical journal of a major

faction of the Bond. It raised all the contemporary issues, answering them in policy terms. Through his regular column *Die Loop van Dinge* (the passage of things), 'Political Commissar' L.J. du Plessis kept up a running commentary on political affairs. His analysis of coalition in the first issue clearly illustrates the economic basis of Bond nationalism and well sums up the fears of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie generally:

General Hertzog has achieved what neither General Botha nor General Smuts could accomplish. He has reconciled the great majority of Afrikaners with the idea of the British Empire. . . . When, with Sovereignty [i.e. in the 1926 Balfour Declaration and the 1931 Statute of Westminster] General Hertzog also accepted cooperative Imperialism, in practice the differences between the two large parties on this issue fell away. . . . It is therefore certain that under the new regime less emphasis will be placed on sovereignty than on mutual cooperation within the Empire. Once again Imperialism will stride triumphant throughout the land. Under present international conditions, cooperative Imperialism will mainly, though not exclusively, take the form of economic collaboration. Our monetary system, our commercial and banking policy, our industrial sector will remain Imperialist oriented and grow increasingly so. In place of the old political subjugation we now enter a period of economic dependence. And the golden chains so forged are much stronger and more dangerous than the old [political] chains because they are more difficult to recognise, and once forged, are not easily discarded. The apparatus of this collaboration is already largely extant, particularly in the banking and commercial sectors. Only a government fully committed to South Africa's economic independence could escape this octopus grip. What will happen under a government sympathetic to [Imperialism] is impossible to predict (*Koers*, August 1933).

In this environment of perceived 'imperialist' domination, the Bond strove to interpret the world and formulate counter-policy for its petty-bourgeois membership. Political power was seen as one of the keys to the ending of this domination. Recognising its isolation and weakness the Bond sought allies by again appealing to agricultural interests and to Afrikaner workers, and fighting for what it termed 'the small man' in all sectors against the threat of 'imperialism'.

Yet such allies could not simply be appropriated by mystic appeals to the unity of the Afrikaner volk. As the enthusiastic rural support for fusion in the north indicated, poorer farmers tended to follow the lead of larger landowners and Afrikaner workers displayed an unhealthy attraction for class organisations. Given the existence of a very large group of 'poor whites', a real danger existed that they could be mobilised by working-class organisations, thereby undermining any potential mass base for Afrikaner nationalism. An obsession with the dangers of class division and class mobilisation and the pressing need for the unity of Afrikaners of all classes is thus a major theme of the Bond ideologies during this period. These groups had to be saved for the volk and mobilised as Afrikaners.

Yet underlying all these problems was the almost total exclusion of Afrikaners from control in any sector of the economy except agriculture (see

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above, pp. 52–4). If, as *Koers* argued, the basis of imperialist domination was economic, the mere capture of government would not end it. That was the discredited Hertzog panacea. The collapse of the Hertzog NP, reinforced by the urban experience of capitalism, had taught one profound lesson: it was economic strength which counted above all. From now on, the overriding aim of the Bond intellectuals would be the transformation of the economic position of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie – to transform this petty bourgeoisie into a bourgeoisie on the savings of Afrikaner workers and farmers. This was the now proven Cape formula. Thus the Bond strove to break the economic dependence of the petty bourgeoisie on other classes and burst open the doors of economic advance now barred to them by the use of their mother-tongue. Together with the Afrikaner finance capital in the Cape, the Bond began the task of generating explicitly Afrikaner capital, to enable the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie to participate in the industrial capitalist economy through the medium of their own language. This was seen as a direct assault on 'imperialism' and its *alter ego*, 'capitalism'. The Afrikaans language and culture provided the primary focus for the ideological redefinition of Afrikanerdom and its nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s, as the petty bourgeois militants of the Bond in a wary alliance with the Sanlam mafia, sought to mobilise Afrikaans-speakers of other classes in support of their vision. Thus, throughout the thirties, as the Bond concentrated its attention on these problems it operated in three broad areas: the ideological redefinition of Afrikanerdom and Afrikaner nationalism; the organisation of Afrikaner workers into ethnic trade unions; and the establishment and promotion of Afrikaner business interests. These are explored in turn in the following chapters.

Text 2: Garrit J. Schutte: The Netherlands, cradle of apartheid?, in: Ethnic and Racial Studies, 10, 4, 1987, S. 392-414.