

PREAMBLE: The topic of this report is a collection of court documents pertaining to the trial of Breyten Breytenbach, compiled by Martin Welz and published by McGraw -Hill in 1977 , under the title , Breyten en die Bewaarder. This trial, heard by Mr. Justice W.G. Boshoff, in June - July 1977, arose out of an escape attempt by Breytenbach the previous year, while he was being held in the Maximum Security Prison , in Pretoria.

I have thoroughly studied the material Welz makes available, which consists chiefly of letters and transcripts of tape recordings of conversations between Breytenbach and a young warder, Pieter Gerhardus Groenewald, whom the authorities clearly employed as an agent provocateur.

In what follows I shall rely chiefly on this material. But I shall rely also on (a) My own impressions of Breytenbach, whom I met for a few hours and conversed with , shortly after the trial in question, when the authorities transferred him to the Pretoria Local Prison before changing their minds; (b) my knowledge of Breytenbach's associates and the milieu which formed him (I was , for instance, a close friend of his associate, Jobst Grapow, who now works as a film editor in Rome and I know Breytenbach's brother , Cloete and have met Yolande Breytenbach) ; (c) my first-hand knowledge of prison conditions.

I shall make use of bracketed page references to make clear when I am referring to or drawing on Welz's book, and indicate in the text when I am using my own background information. I shall also assume that comrades perusing this report are familiar with the events surrounding Breytenbach's first trial, in 1975.

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT IN GENERAL
AND TOWARDS THE SACP IN PARTICULAR : On June 16 , 1976, Breytenbach wrote a letter to the then head of the Security Police, General Mike Geldenhuys, offering to work for the Security Police in return for his release (cf. PP I96 - 197). In this letter , he speaks of the frustrations of his situation , adding " ... I feel that you could make much better use of me than is presently the case. In an attempted "analysis" of the current situation, Breytenbach expresses the view that the SACP have "strengthened their hold" on the ANC and that ~~the~~ ^{the} Party could be expected to play " an even more important role than was the case for the communist parties in Frelimo and the MPLA." Breytenbach adds: " In the light of the above attempt at analysis I wish to suggest that I be released and attempt to - in co-operation with your Service - become a member of the SACP."

This letter should be seen in the context of a letter written by Breytenbach to Marius Schoon on July 24, 1976, while the latter was awaiting release. Referring to his own organisation , Okhla, Breytenbach explains that " it was set up at the request of and in co-operation with elements of the ANC but it was a case of the right hand not knowing what the left hand was doing and I suspect that what happened was just as great a surprise for the official organs of the ANC as for others, and that it would inevitably have to be disowned by them (I don't know if this was the case)" (P117, emphasis Breytenbach's)

Breytenbach continues in the next paragraph: " one of the most basic problems of which you are certainly aware and will hear a great deal more of outside is the relations between the SACP and the ANC. ... As you doubtless know by this time I am not a member of the SACP. (And you?) It would have been better if I was! (And who knows what the future hopefully can bring." (P117)

Now, in the light of Breytenbach's offer to Geldenhuys, I think it is possible - and I put it no higher than that - to place a sinister construction on these last remarks of Breytenbach's. It looks as though he were fishing (a) for information as to whether Schoon was a Party member and (b) angling for contact with the SACP with a view to penetration.

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Breytenbach goes on to say that the people with whom he had been working were "Marxists and revolutionaries", although not Trotskyites. Such criticism as they had of the SACP, he claims, "comes rather from the left". He also suggests that some of his confederates had Maoist tendencies. I should add that all Schoon's replies to these letters were in my view, friendly but cautious and correct. It must be remembered that he and Breytenbach had been friends since their student days in the Cape. His letters, nonetheless, gently correct Breytenbach's criticisms and give him sound advice as to how to cope with his sentence.

As to there being leftist criticism of ~~the~~ Party on the part of Breytenbach's associates, my own experience of his circle suggests that this is almost certainly correct. During 1973 ~~xxx~~ or '74, I met Jobst Grapow in Johannesburg. He had come to SA during the period when Breytenbach legally visited the country with his wife. In the course of a long conversation, Grapow compared South Africa to present-day Czechoslovakia, saying both were countries in which "nothing goes on", by which I took him to mean that no progress was being made towards throwing off the yoke of oppression. He also made other remarks - for instance about the use of the term "masses" being outdated - which smacked of some or other variant of leftism and anti-Sovietism. These views coming from him were no surprise to me since I knew that in his student days at Stellenbosch he had been one of a party of South Africans, who had gone to Europe to render refugee aid to Hungarians who had taken part in the counter-revolutionary uprising there. Grapow is an intelligent and talented person, but easily caught up in intellectual fashions. It would not surprise me therefore if he had imbibed some or other leftist deviation in Rome, where he lives. Grapow and Breytenbach have always been extremely close. I mention the former and his views in order to give an impression of the ideological climate in which their adventure was undertaken.

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HOW WAS OKEHLA LINKED AND /OR FUNDED AND SUPPORTED BY OTHER ORGANISATIONS ?

The question as to how Breytenbach's organisation "got off the ground", who lent him support and/or legitimisation is one which has certainly exercised my mind since the time of his arrest and must surely have intrigued other Comrades, who may read this report. In a letter of July 27, 1976, Breytenbach asks Schoon to talk to Johnny Makatini "and only to him". He asks Schoon to tell Makatini "that the organisation S. in Paris is well known to Boss. That they know among other things about the printing press project (I do not know how) and also about his (Makatini's) contact in Seamews Street. The Degree of their knowledge points clearly to much co-operation between themselves and the French. " (PI2I)

In his reply to Breytenbach of August 2, 1976, Schoon expresses reservations about carrying a confidential message to Makatini, meant for the latter on an exclusive and EYES ONLY basis. In his reply of the following day, Breytenbach accepts Schoon's reservations and drops the request, but gives the following explanation of his relations with Makatini: " It is the case that the work with which I have been engaged came through him and I believe that MK's high command were fully informed of it (just as Tambo was as well). But I know Makatini (and Tambo's) position with regard to the SACP and I doubt whether the RC as such (the work - the nature thereof) had knowledge of it. M. told me (for security reasons) to make no mention thereof to any ANC member, which I ~~and~~ did not do - and this placed me in a false position in relation to the ANC. " (P125) Breytenbach goes on to express the belief that Makatini " used - or misused? - me as a pawn". The initial 'S' refers, of course, to the French organisation, Solidarité. During planning for his escape attempt, Breytenbach used the candle-wax method and the services of the warder, Groenewald, to write to a worker in this organisation, Mme. S. Cordier, seeking assistance. (P112). It seems obvious that Breytenbach had (or thought he had) some encouragement from Comrade Makatini to embark on his adventure and that Solidarité provided some of the back-up.

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OTHER MATTERS : Perhaps because of his French connections, Breytenbach expressed a special interest in my Comrade, Alex Moumbaris, who was still in Local prison at that time . On one occasion he asked the provocateur , Groenewald, to go to Local and contact Moumbaris (P70). And in the letter to Schoon, already referred to , he says "The following information is for comrades in London (certainly for Ronnie Kasrils) ~~xxx~~ The guy who sold out Moumbaris works presently at Compol under the name of "Gladstone". He sifts information and identifies ANC members and is further a glorified tea boy." Breytenbach adds that the SA security apparatus also makes use of the South African journalists Jack Viviers of Beeld and Chris Vermaak of Rapport. (PP 121 to 122) At the end of this particular letter , Breytenbach says that because he does not wish to be an armchair critic - "Omdat ek nie soos 'n stuurman van wal af wil staan en kritiseer" - he would like to become a member of the SACP (PI22)

I cannot think that much else in these documents is of any great intelligence value. Groenewald took letters from Breytenbach to the academic , James Polley, to the writer , Andre Brink, to Peter Randall of Ravan Press, to his brother Cloete and to Yolande. Many of these letters relate to personal and literary matters. Breytenbach also continually urged Groenewald to contact Gerry Mare, whose role in the affair will be known to you from reports of the first Breytenbach trial.

The most striking thing about the transcripts of Breytenbach's conversations with Groenewald is that the latter is so obviously an informer and provocateur. I can only think that the effect of virtual solitary confinement on Breytenbach was such as to distort his judgement to the degree where he was unable to see this. Groenewald's attempts to elicit information from Breytenbach are so crude and inexperienced that it can only have been the latter's desperation to get out of prison at any cost that prompted him to trust this man.

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OVERALL COMMENTS: Breytenbach comes from a fairly conventional Afrikaans family. His brother, Cloete, is in my estimation a photographer of some talent, although a rather thuggish conservative in other respects. Grapow, too, comes from a conservative home - his father was once a member of the Nazi Party and he comes from Namibia originally, having studied mathematics at Stellenbosch. Both men were part of a group of young Afrikaners who had rebelled against their background. However, it is my impression that this rebellion was first a revolt against restrictions on their own personal liberty and only secondly a protest against the political system in South Africa. It is easy for such people to become confused politically, especially in exile.

What is at issue is not so much their psychological or even ideological confusion, but how and by whom this confusion was used in an attempt to divide the National Liberation Movement. I would say it is the French and Dutch ends of the spectrum which need to be investigated in this respect - possibly enquiries in Italy, where Grapow and his wife live, might prove fruitful. I believe I might get something out of Grapow, but it would perhaps entail an expensive trip to Rome. Clearly, too, the lesson of this affair is that ANC members should exercise the highest degree of caution in discussions with people, however sympathetic, who stand outside the Movement's official ranks.

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