



ZISA

Zimbabwe Institute for Southern Africa

Factsheet

15 March 1993

Ref: 589

Michael Sparks

The Goniwe Inquest

Johannesburg, March 15 — An event that happened nearly eight years ago, at the height of the clampdown by then President PW Botha, refuses to disappear and is leaving a trail of political dirty dealing all the way to the cabinet.

The murder of four black activists in the troubled Eastern Cape Province was brought to the fore again about a year ago when a Johannesburg newspaper published a copy of a signal message sent by the military commander of the region, Brigadier Christoffel van der Westhuizen.

The signal went to the State Security Council, which included Botha as well as the current President, FW de Klerk, requesting permission for "the permanent removal from society" of black political leader, Matthew Goniwe and two colleagues.

Two weeks after the date on the signal the burned bodies of Goniwe and three colleagues were found in the veld.

In an attempt to dampen the furore that followed the publication of the signal, De Klerk ordered a new inquest into Goniwe's death, which is currently taking place in Port Elizabeth.

This began recently with Van der Westhuizen, now a general in charge of Military Intelligence - submitting an affidavit that the words "permanent removal" merely meant prolonged detention, rather than requesting permission to kill - as many people have interpreted them. Van der Westhuizen was adamant that he had not tried to have anyone killed, or indeed that he had done anything illegal in his career.

The officer who drafted the message on Van der Westhuizen's instructions, Lieutenant Lourens du Plessis, gave evidence supporting this, as did the man who received it, General Johannes van Rensburg, then secretary of the State Security council.

But three days later Du Plessis applied to the court for indemnity from prosecution and submitted an affidavit saying that Van der Westhuizen had explicitly ordered him to send a message requesting permission to kill Goniwe. The euphemistic wording was his own.

Du Plessis went on to give details of an elaborate plan devised by Van der Westhuizen to quell the black uprising in the region in which Goniwe was a central figure.

The plan, set out in a document hand written by Van der Westhuizen and signed by him, called for a coup in the nominally independent homeland of Ciskei. The homeland president Lennox Sebe was to be "taken out" and a close aide General Fikile Zibi was to "disappear permanently", Sebe's estranged half-brother, Charles Sebe, would take over. But first he had to escape from prison where Lennox had put him.

Van der Westhuizen wrote: "The plans should not be traced back to South Africa," and the neighbouring Transkei was to take the blame.

Charles Sebe would then merge Ciskei with Transkei to form a single Xhosa homeland where a new party, the Xhosa Resistance Movement, would be formed to counter the influence of the popular African National Congress in the area. It would be modelled on Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha movement in KwaZulu.

This Xhosa movement would be armed by the SA Defence Force, "under the cover of a front organisation." It would then counter the ANC in its stronghold and "permanently damp down the revolution there".

The document was addressed to General AG "Kat" Liebenberg, then head of Military Intelligence and now Chief of the Defence Force, and codenamed "Operation Katzen".

Then on March 11 the current head of Transkei, Major General Bantu Holomisa, called a press conference to reveal that he too has documents implicating Van der Westhuizen and Liebenberg in the plot.

It turns out Holomisa, who toppled the original Transkei regime in a coup in 1987 and is now allied to the ANC, was the source of the original signal that was published. He claims to have 12 more secret documents which he is threatening to release periodically, whenever disclosure of the Government's dirty tricks activities flags.

Holomisa's documents reveal that the coup plot was known to at least one Cabinet member, Tertius Delport, the Minister of Local Government who was then a legal advisor to the military.

It was also discussed by the State Security Council of which Botha was chairman and De Klerk a member.

Events bear out what the documents contain. In the early hours of September 6, 1986, six white men brandishing rifles burst into Ciskei's Middledrift prison and released Charles Sebe.

Five months later there was an unsuccessful commando attack on Lennox Sebe's palace. The coup was blamed on Transkei.

The De Klerk Government is trying to brazen out the allegations. The president's spokesman Dave Steward issued a statement on Thursday accusing Holomisa of "pursuing an opportunistic political agenda", and denying that the Cabinet or the State Security Council had ever ordered or approved anything illegal.

But the Government has not responded to the damning disclosures. Nor has it explained why Van der Westhuizen and Liebenberg remain in their top jobs, particularly since the disclosure in December of a covert operation within the Military Intelligence establishment to sabotage the country's reform process.

De Klerk fired 23 top military officers at the time, but not Van der Westhuizen and Liebenberg, prompting speculation that they could make embarrassing disclosures if they are touched.