

SOWETAN Friday October 12, 2001

Buthelezi's D-G hits back in 'lies' row

By Selby Makgotho

HOME Affairs director-general Mr Billy Masetlha has accused Home Affairs Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi of "not telling the truth".

Masetlha denied that he had failed to consult Buthelezi on key issues.

He also said he was surprised to learn from media reports that he had failed to consult Buthelezi on the issue of asylum-seekers.

The tiff between the two erupted after the Cape High Court granted an interim order against the department, giving relief to the foreign spouses of South African citizens and permanent residents applying for permanent residence.

The spouses gained the right to apply for a work permit, which had to be attended to within 30 days while their applications for permanent residence were being processed.

The tension between the two was in the spotlight when opposition MPs asked if the department had been taken to court for not allowing the spouses of South African citizens and of perma-



Home Affairs Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi

nent residents to work while their residence applications were being processed.

Buthelezi later accused Masetlha of misleading the department on the matter.

"The minister is really not telling the truth when he says I failed to inform him of this decision," Masetlha said.

It is understood that Masetlha had been warned that lawsuits would follow if the

department persisted in making life difficult for foreign spouses.

The warnings allegedly came from Buthelezi, from the department's deputy chief director and its chief director for legal services and also from other bodies such as Lawyers for Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Masetlha disputed that he had ignored the warnings.

Buthelezi's head of communications Mr Leslie Mashokwe commented that this was a serious matter currently receiving Buthelezi's attention.

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THE NATAL WITNESS, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2001

8



OUR READERS WRITE

IFP walkout

I REFER to the editorial "Unseemly" (Witness, October 10). This follows the report of the previous day, "IFP fails to turn up for Millin hearing".

The IFP's chief whip, Inkosi Gumede, when interviewed by the Witness's political reporter and pressed for the reasons for the charges against Mrs Millin, is quoted as saying, "she did not respect the party caucus by walking out when a meeting was still proceeding." If this was sufficient reason for suspending a member of caucus, then practically every member should be suspended as members frequently walk in and out of meetings, often not returning.

The Natal Witness of September 27, covering events of the previous day in the KZN legislature, reported "provincial dispute ends in IFP walkout" in regard to a motion by all other parties to suspend KZN's parliamentary secretary and deputy secretary. However, in this case the walkout by the IFP took place after a division had been called, which, according to universally-accepted parliamentary procedure, results in the locking of parliamentary doors while votes are counted. In this case, while counting was in progress, the IFP speaker, presumably under pressure from certain IFP members, ordered staff to open the doors, whereby the IFP walkout ensued, minus the two oblivious ordinary IFP whips who were counting votes and seemingly unaware of their colleagues' impulsive action.

Such unseemly behaviour not only violates the sanctity and rules of Parliament, bringing the entire legislature into disrepute, but also illustrates with devastating clarity the appalling double standards which currently abound in IFP politics in KZN.

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30 Mail & Guardian October 12 to 18 2001

Comment & Analysis



KRISJAN LEMMER

Mixed dressing

The confusion this week in Parliament's portfolio committee on home affairs over the status of the Immigration Bill and the contract of the Director General of Home Affairs, Billy Masetiha, was compounded by various comments during its proceedings by the committee's chairperson, Aubrey Mokoena.

"You are not allowed to shoot like a thunderbolt," he told members. "You can't throw everything into a pot. We don't want a pot-pourri of a Bill or a salad of a Bill. We must move along properly in tandem ... Let us forget about time frames. Let us not compromise a good Bill with time frames."

When various members tried to speak at the same time, Mokoena intoned: "One fool at a time." Later, he said: "You don't want a jumble of interventions."

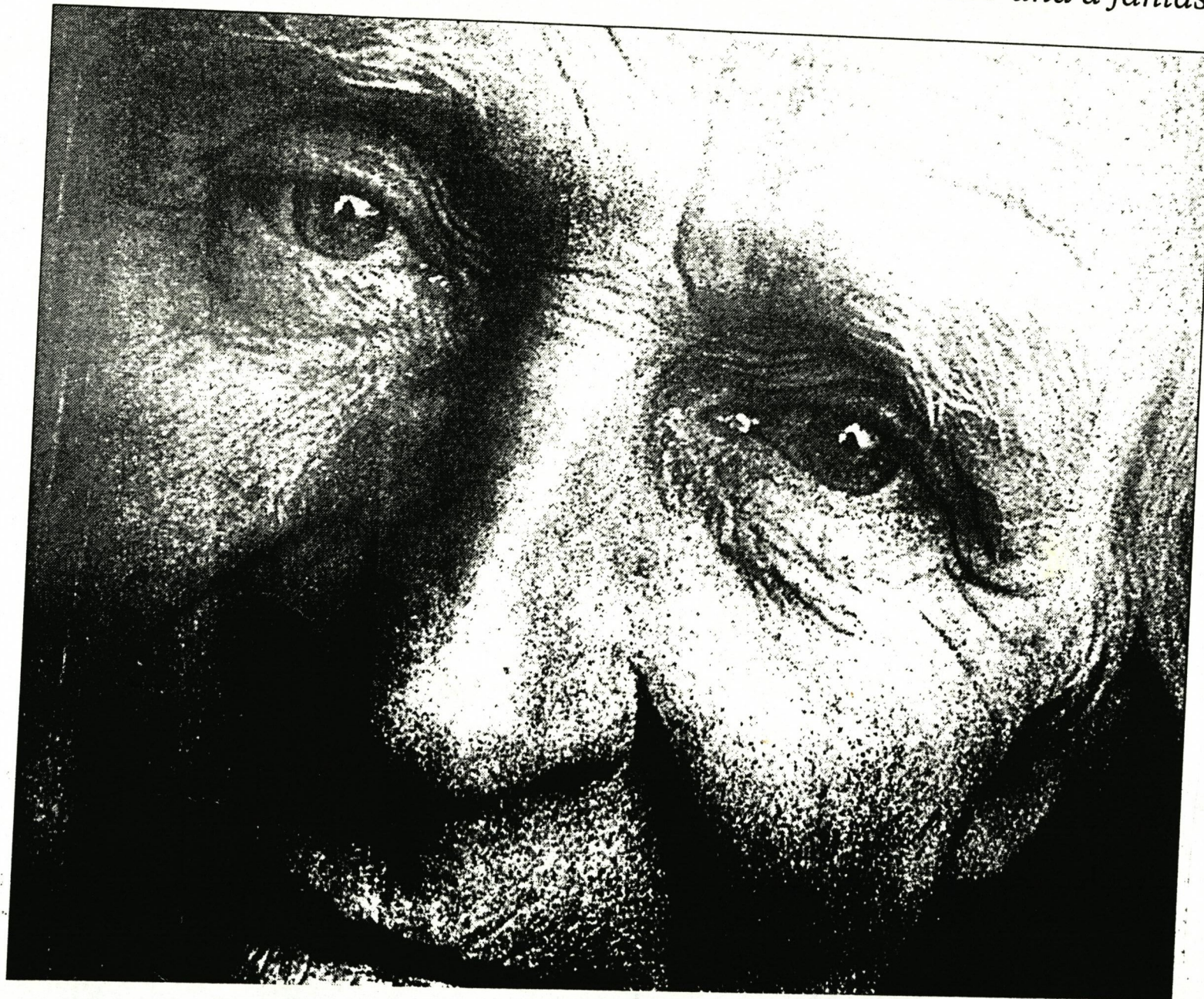
Lemmer understands that there is no truth in the rumour that the committee's proceedings have been nominated as the South African alternative to the British TV programme, *Yes, Prime Minister*.

But the Democratic Alliance has unsportingly complained to Madam Speaker, Frene Ginwala, about Mokoena's performance and has made "an urgent call" for an investigation into his "management and leadership".

The Great Imposter

A new biography reveals that Laurens van der Post was a liar and a fantasist

THE NATAL WITNESS, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2001



Laurens van der Post ... a gifted man who felt a need to fabricate his life.



by
**JOHN
CONYNGHAM**

ABOUT 10 years ago, at a dinner party in Pietermaritzburg, I heard a disturbing story about Laurens van der Post. The narrator was a KwaZulu-Natal artist who had got to know the writer during one of his visits to the province. Van der Post had taken an interest in his paintings and some time later the artist had sent him a selection of his most recent work to look at. For a time the artist heard nothing but was then dumbfounded to discover one of his paintings on the cover of a new book by Van der Post. When he expressed his disappointment that neither had he been asked for permission, nor had he been acknowledged, the author dismissed his concerns and ended their friendship.

At the time the story seemed shocking because Sir Laurens was widely considered to be one of the great figures of the 20th century: a war hero, writer, explorer, mystic, environmentalist, Jungian, behind-the-scenes diplomat, and friend and confidant of the great. Only now, as J.D.F. Jones's meticulously researched biography* points out, do we realise how much the myth differed from the man, and that throughout his life Van der Post was at worst a compulsive liar and at best a fantasist with a confused appreciation of fact and fiction.

One of very many examples of this alarming disregard for the truth emerged in the eighties when journalist Jean-Marc Potiez conducted a series of interviews with the sage. The result of this probe into his thoughts and feelings was a book called *A Walk with a White Bushman*. As its title suggests, it delved deep into Van der Post's relationship with Africa and its peoples.

"My own story began with the Bushman stories. I had a nurse, Klara, who was a Bushman woman, a Stone Age person. Hers was the first human face I can remember ... the most wonderful apricot skin ... She had a beautiful face with those very ancient eyes of the Bushman. I looked into her eyes and it was as if I looked at the first dawn of the first day. It is one of the dearest faces. Even as I talk about it I am filled with the most incredible emotion."

However, Klara the Bushman maid never existed. In an attempt at an explanation, Van der Post's last surviving sister suggested that the family may at one point have had a Griqua woman as a servant. After all, she added, the older sisters always nursed their younger siblings. Neither were there two male Bushmen employed on his grandfather's farm, as Van der Post had also claimed.

These inventions about Bushmen only began to appear when the writer and amateur anthro-

pologist was in his fifties and his books about the Kalahari and its people were fashionable. And, in his various fabrications, Klara the nursemaid changed in name and racial grouping from book to book, if she featured at all.

Just as Klara was an invention, so were his family's aristocratic origins. His father was neither a Dutch aristocrat nor was his mother of Huguenot stock. Ironically, although Van der Post never knew it, his lineage can apparently be traced far back to a Hottentot chief's daughter whose mother may possibly have been a Bushman.

Another fabrication was his military rank of lieutenant-colonel during his time as a prisoner-of-war in the Far East. He was, in fact, never more than an acting captain. Also, he later referred to himself as having been "Military Governor of Batavia" which is patently untrue.

Another falsification was his

claim to having reported directly to Lord Louis Mountbatten. While he did meet the Supreme Commander of South Asia on a few occasions, there was nothing remarkable about their association. However, later entries in *Who's Who*, which are always submitted by the individuals themselves, tell another story. As long as Mountbatten was alive, Van der Post correctly described himself as merely having been attached to the British Mission in Batavia until 1947. But in 1981, not long after the possibility of contradiction had been ended by Mountbatten's assassination by the IRA, he changed his entry and gave himself the grand title of "Lord Mountbatten's Military-Political Officer".

The list of his self-aggrandising lies seems endless: despite his claims, he didn't go out on whaling ships from Durban harbour, he didn't captain the Springbok hockey team, he didn't meet D.H. Lawrence, he was not

a co-founder of the Capricorn Society, he didn't play a pivotal role in resolving the Rhodesian crisis ...

If lying was bad, even more reprehensible was his seduction of a 14-year-old girl who had been entrusted to his care on a journey by ship from South Africa to England and his refusal ever to acknowledge his paternity of the child born of the liaison.

But such caddish behaviour on his part was not unusual either. South African novelist Nadine Gordimer tells another, similar, story. Around 1930, when Van der Post was a junior reporter on the *Cape Times*, a young Johannesburg couple decided to combine their honeymoon at the Cape with an important court case for the husband. At the opening session the wife noticed a good-looking reporter and they exchanged a few words. Later, when she returned to her hotel room for a rest, she heard a knock on the door and opened it to find Van

der Post. Without explanation, he flung off his clothes and they embarked on a wild and passionate two-week affair.

They planned to run away to Europe together but she had first to return to Johannesburg. There, to her horror, she realised that she was pregnant with what she knew was his child. She telephoned and told him the news, assuming that because they were in love they would weather the scandal together. But when she phoned his newspaper, she was told that he had left the country. She later had an abortion and would never have a child of her own.

As a serial philanderer, he was little better to his first wife, and to his second, who selflessly devoted herself to him for the rest of his life. Neither was he much of a father to his two children, something that came to haunt him in old age, although he belatedly developed close links with his daughter.

But while there is nothing particularly exceptional about such dishonourable behaviour, whether maritally or extramaritally, or the art of embellishing or omitting details in life histories, as many autobiographies do, there still remains something remarkable about the extent to which this gifted man felt the need to fabricate his life.

Speaking in a radio interview last week, biographer Jones cautioned that not a single word that Van der Post spoke or wrote should necessarily be believed. The biographer also concluded that in the course of his research he began to realise that his subject's nature was classically that of a conman who gets away with one deception and in so doing is emboldened to do it again, and again, until such a ploy becomes almost second nature.

As Jones explains, from an early age Van der Post moved easily between literal truth and what he saw as imaginative truth. Yet whenever he manipulated reality it was always to promote himself or position himself at the centre of whatever was happening. This occurred throughout his life, from his youthful days as a reporter, through his war experiences in Ethiopia or as a prisoner in a Japanese camp, during his years in post-war London, or in the Kalahari, and, later, as a guru and elder statesman. But whatever the circumstances, one thing was always certain: Van der Post would make himself the hero of his tale.

Nevertheless, for all his failings, Laurens van der Post was undoubtedly an exceptional individual. His charm was legendary, as his numerous friends and acquaintances can attest — among them Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Margaret Thatcher and Prince Charles, whose surrogate father he became. He was also, says his biographer, a storyteller of genius. Equally brilliant in lecture halls and small "fireside" gatherings, he never failed to enchant his audience. Also, part of his appeal, to the British particularly, was his exoticism: despite his monocle and Savile Row suits he was always a romantic figure rooted in the South African hinterland and the Kalahari.

Understandably, he never wanted a biography written about himself. However, after approaches by several biographers, the Van der Post family decided to pre-empt unofficial versions by giving their blessing to British writer and journalist J.D.F. Jones who has had a long connection with South Africa. Recently, Van der Post's daughter Lucia said that she regrets the decision, feeling that Jones has been uncharitable. From her perspective that may seem true but for the rest of us the truth provides a riveting read and yet another salutary warning of how even the highest of the mighty can so easily have feet of clay.

* *"Storyteller: The Many Lives of Laurens van der Post"* by J.D.F. Jones — published by John Murray, London (R195).

Business Day P2 12/10/01

Masetlha says tiff to blame for poor service

Simphele Xeko

Parliamentary Reporter

CAPE TOWN — Home affairs director-general Billy Masetlha yesterday blamed the ongoing squabble between the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) for the deterioration in the department's service delivery, saying the differences were ideological and affected SA's democratic governance.

Masetlha, who has over the past six weeks been embroiled in a political war of words with his principal, Home Affairs Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi, stuck to his guns, insisting that he had, in fact, signed both the employment and performance contracts.

He signed a five-year employment contract — with the department of public service and administration — upon his employment in June 1996.

Cabinet later approached him on June 20 this year with an offer of a 12-month extension to his contract, which he accepted.

Based on this, cabinet gave him another tenure with the proviso that Buthelezi and President Thabo Mbeki discuss circumstances surrounding the new contract.

According to Masetlha, the problem arose when Buthelezi approached him with another contract, apparently drafted by his special advisor, Mario Ambrosini. After reading the conditions contained in Buthelezi's contract, Masetlha refused to sign it on the grounds that he had already signed "a legitimate one" with government.

"Since I had already signed a contract with the department of public service and administration, I was very surprised when I was approached by the minister (Buthelezi). This contract had preconditions to my employment that I could not accept."

Masetlha, a former ANC intelligence operative, dismisses claims that he had been deployed to Buthelezi's department to spy on the minister. "There is an aura surrounding me and portraying me as this dangerous spy and I don't know where it comes from ... I am in government to make sure that home affairs is a success and that we deliver services to our people."

He lamented the fact that the political squabbles between the ANC and IFP have led to democracy and service delivery taking a back seat. Among services affect-



Mangosuthu Buthelezi

ed, he said, were the immigration control system and the collapse in the regulation of foreigners entering and leaving the country — let alone the department's daily administration and "demoralised" staff.

"The issue here is not the controversy surrounding (me), but ideological differences between the ANC and IFP. There is a lot of belligerence and I don't know why we don't practice what we often preach — democracy and service-delivery."

Buthelezi could not be reached for comment.