

# THE MAN VORSTER FEARED

**SOBUKWE AND APARTHEID** by Benjamin Pogrund (Jonathan Ball, 389pp, R39,95).

**Who said** this of Robert Sobukwe? "We are dealing with a person who has a strong, magnetic personality, a person who can organise, a person who feels that he has a vocation to perform this task (of challenging the security of the State) . . ."

It was pronounced by, of all people, John Vorster when addressing parliament in 1963. Sobukwe's three-year sentence was about to run out; the question under discussion was whether on its expiry the government should continue to keep him in detention — as, in the event it did, for six years — or release him.

There is nothing patronising in Vorster's words. Willy-nilly he, a former wartime detainee, likened Sobukwe to himself when he said of him: "There has been no change of heart . . . during the time he has not been in our midst."

Vorster was speaking of Sobukwe as of an equal. But, in a sense, he was hoisting himself by his own bootstraps — since in terms of integrity, Sobukwe was the equal of any man in the land. It was this that drew to him, despite his black nationalism, men who were liberals in the best sense of the word, such as Pat Duncan, Ernie Wentzel and the author of this book.

It may be argued that the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the movement founded and led by Sobukwe, ran amok by identifying itself with the anti-white violence of Poqo. Pogrund shows that the activities of Poqo ran completely counter to Sobukwe's creed of non-violence, which he derived from Gandhi.

Can it be said that Sobukwe hardly rates as an important political figure? He admittedly held no important office in the ANC before 1958 and only led the PAC from the time of its foundation in that year until it was banned, along with the ANC, in 1960.

Quality of leadership is what counts. Sobukwe was always right out in front; he never asked his followers to do anything he was not willing to do himself. At the time of Poqo's foundation, he was in jail and no longer in control of the PAC. When he came out, the leaders of the PAC were in exile and there was no longer any scope for non-violent mass action.

Is there too much Pogrund in this book? My answer is no. In the first place, it is by entering into an intimate account of a friendship that Pogrund is able to show that he had penetrated Sobukwe's mind. Only thus can he demolish the charge laid at Sobukwe's door of being an anti-white racist as opposed to a black nationalist.

Secondly, Pogrund was justified in exposing the barriers placed in the way of this friendship by the authorities. If he presents himself as the active party in surmounting

these barriers, this is because Sobukwe's scope for taking the initiative was checked by the authorities at every turn.

Finally, there was one situation in which it was essential for Pogrund to show that he had exerted himself to the utmost in Sobukwe's cause. This was when Sobukwe's health showed signs of breaking down. The authorities were dragging their feet about having him brought to Johannesburg for an exhaustively thorough diagnosis — and Pogrund alone combined the energy and know-how needed to deal with the matter.

Pogrund is entitled to show that he did his utmost, in the face of great difficulties, to ensure that Sobukwe got proper diagnostic treatment. *Radford Jordan*

Robert Sobukwe Papers

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