

The local role of a Wellington Afrikaner Broederbond branch, 1937–1994

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Introduction

The history of the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB) is well documented. Its functioning is closely examined in the books by Ivor Wilkins and H. Strydom,¹ and by J.H.P. Serfontein.² In Hermann Giliomee's recent work, the influence of the AB has also received attention.³ According to Giliomee it is a misconception, perpetuated by South African historiography, that the Broederbond's influence was on a par with that of the NP.⁴ The Afrikaner Broederbond itself has also produced histories of the society,⁵ and in 2009, Rev Nico Smith published his inside perspective on the AB.⁶

The aim of this article is to contribute to the discussion on the role of the AB in the politics of South Africa by focusing on the local functioning of the AB. This is done by examining the minutes of one of the oldest AB branches, the branch in Wellington, a Western Cape rural community, from 1937 to 1994.⁷ It is clear that the results of this study cannot be generalised to include other communities, especially those in the north of the country, because the political orientation of the southern and northern Afrikaners differed significantly, with those in the south being more accommodating, especially towards the coloured population.⁸

Another unique factor of Afrikaner politics in Wellington was that black people formed a very small minority of the local population; issues on coloureds thus featured more prominently in discussions in this AB branch. However, the fact that the AB operated as a well-integrated organisation, makes it credible that local tendencies and viewpoints were more or less in line with national AB strategies.

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1 I Wilkins and H Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaners: Inside the Afrikaner Broederbond* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1978)

2 J H P Serfontein, *The Brotherhood of Power* (Rex Collings, London, 1978)

3 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2009)

4 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 421

5 Afrikaner Bond, *Draer van 'n Ideaal 1918–1997. Die Afrikanerbond* (AB, Johannesburg, 1997); A N Pelzer, *Die Afrikaner-Broederbond: Eerste 50 Jaar* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1980); and E L P Stals, "Geskieiedenis van die Afrikaner-Broederbond: 1918–1994", Unpublished manuscript, 1998

6 N Smith, *Die Afrikaner Broederbond: Belewinge van die Binnekant* (Lapa Press, Pretoria, 2009)

7 This is an extended time span. The reasons for this are twofold: (1) The article aims to provide a holistic view of the functioning of the AB branch from its inception until it was dissolved. (2) The article presents most of the available information in the minutes of this specific AB branch. The minutes were brief. They did not detail deliberations and outcomes; they presented the proceedings of the meetings in a cursory way.

8 Stals, "Geskieiedenis van die Afrikaner-Broederbond", p 331

A perusal of the minutes of this particular AB branch reveals a number of clearly distinguishable periods and this article is structured around these periods. It commences on 13 February 1937, when the branch was formed in Wellington. The AB itself was formed on 5 June 1918 in Johannesburg and was already well established countrywide by 1937, with 100 branches in most cities and towns and an approximate membership of about 1 500. To assess the local functioning of this AB branch, its deliberations have been correlated with significant local and national events, especially those that occurred during the apartheid era.

The situation before 1937

Wellington was founded in 1840 and in 1873 the municipality was established. Prior to 1937, Jews dominated the local economy and this tendency became more marked after 1937 when there was an influx of Jewish people who had fled Nazi Germany. The education of white boys in the town was mainly in the hands of the Dutch, while the girls attended the Huguenot Seminary run by teachers from the USA. English-speakers controlled the service professions and most of the agricultural industry. The Afrikaners only played a prominent role in agriculture as such, and many lived on nearby farms, the first of which was proclaimed as early as 1687.

However, from 1937 onwards, local Afrikaners initiated a political process that eventually led to their domination of all these sectors within the next two decades. The local branch of the AB played a limited, but not insignificant part in this process; its role was minimal in its first years largely because of two reasons. Firstly, it had only eight members; and secondly, at the time the AB was cautious of engaging in political activity after the fierce criticism of such moves (in 1935 and 1936) by the prime minister at the time, J.B.M. Hertzog.⁹

Impact of the Second World War (1937–1948)

The Second World War held two outcomes for Afrikaners. On the one hand, it caused division in their ranks; they were deeply divided on the involvement of South Africa in a war they did not approve of. On the other hand, it gave them the opportunity to realise many of their social ideals. Because of the economic upswing during the war it was possible to address white poverty to the extent that it was practically eradicated by the 1950s. Furthermore, because Great Britain was entangled in the war, it was possible for Afrikaners to make huge advances in establishing Afrikaner businesses and educational institutions. This also took place at the local level. The opening of the local Volkskas branch¹⁰ (a bank nationally established by the AB) in Wellington, is a prime example. During this period Afrikaners also organised themselves to take control of local school committees and school boards.

9 Pelzer, *Die Afrikaner-Broederbond*, pp 68–73

10 Now under the corporate structure of ABSA Bank

In the war years, because of their different views on the war, the Afrikaners had to exert a great deal of energy to maintain their unity. Although this was less of a problem at the local level than nationally, the local AB branches provided members with an important space to calm down and settle their differences. The minutes of the Wellington branch show that members were expected to be tolerant of one another.¹¹ A national schism in the AB on the same issue was only just warded off in 1941 and again in 1944. The matter of unity among Afrikaners was discussed at length in the local branch. Only two members were also members of the Ossewa Brandwag (OB). After much debate the branch as a whole decided to be supportive of the OB.¹² It appears that the bonds of friendship between branch members and their mutual determination to ensure the upliftment of the Afrikaner, encouraged AB and OB members alike to accept their differences throughout the war. This was evident in their meetings; they supported each other in the good and bad times of community life.

Interestingly, there is no mention in the branch minutes of the progress of the Second World War. This stands in contrast to the Town Council's minutes in 1939 and 1942 in which sympathy was extended to those in Wellington who lost family members. In 1940, the council also expressed its sympathy to Queen Wilhelmina and the Dutch nation for being caught up in a disastrous war.¹³ The focus of the AB branch, however, was more on Afrikaner issues.

On 15 December 1944, the government prohibited civil servants from belonging to the AB. This had a negative impact on the functioning of the organisation after the war. Three local members¹⁴ had to ask for withdrawal of their membership in 1945 until the ban was lifted.¹⁵ This weakened the local branch because these members played an important role in the branch's deliberations and occupied strategic public positions in the community. At that time the branch comprised only fifteen members. The National Party (NP) lifted this ban on AB members in the public service in 1948.

Perusing the minutes it strikes one as odd that the branch did not mention anything about the landmark 1948 election, won by the NP. One of the reasons might have been the weakened position of the branch. In an address to the local branch on 18 July 1947, a founder of the AB, J. Combrink, mentioned the concern among members at the AB's decline. The minutes suggest that the AB was a frail organisation at the time. Giliomee's corroborates this view: "The orthodoxy among historians is still that the NP victory in 1948 was the outcome of the Broederbond's manipulative abilities ... However, [they] ... were not decisive."¹⁶ Indeed, it can even be stated more emphatically: The contribution of the approximately 2 400 AB members (in total, countrywide) to the victory of the NP in 1948 was limited. Party political issues were not discussed at the meetings of the local branch; it seems that it

11 Local AB branch minutes, Wellington (hereafter AB branch minutes), 18 November 1941

12 This must be viewed within the broader power struggle between the AB and the OB See C Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel* (Lit-Verlag, Berlin, 2003), p 425

13 Wellington Museum, "Die Geskiedenis van Wellington en Distrik tot die Jaar 2000", Unpublished report comprising 25 chapters, Undated, chapter 3, p 20

14 Their names are not disclosed for reasons of confidentiality

15 AB branch minutes, 21 February 1945

16 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 446

distanced itself from party politics during this period. However, this attitude changed after the NP became the ruling party; the Wellington local AB branch became much more aligned with the NP.

During this period, the AB was not the dynamo producing Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid. The impression from the minutes of the local branch is that the AB rather functioned as an outcome of Afrikaner nationalism. In 1948 the eighteen members of the branch merely contributed to Afrikaner nationalism in the area; they did not initiate it. The local branch gave further embodiment to Afrikaner nationalist aspirations and the desire for increased segregation between racial groups. Afrikaner nationalism in this period was apparent in many different circumstances. In the local branch it was obvious in the discussions of reports on the workers' colony at Kakamas;¹⁷ the burial of J.D. Kestell,¹⁸ the circumstances of Afrikaners in Rhodesia,¹⁹ and specific Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (FAK) policies.²⁰ It is also apparent in members' contribution of £1 towards the repatriation of Afrikaners from Argentina,²¹ the request to buy shares in the newly-established Uniewinkels,²² a report on a Reddingsdaadbond weekend during which £100 was collected,²³ and a request for Afrikaans books for schools and universities.²⁴

From the outset, the promotion of Afrikaans at local level was extremely important to the branch. The members encouraged local Afrikaners to demand Afrikaans invoices from businesses. They also planned strategies to ensure that Afrikaans was introduced at the Huguenot University College²⁵ and the Huguenot Girls' High School.²⁶ Before they were able to influence the language policy of the Huguenot University College, the government closed it in 1950. In an effort to change the language policy of the predominantly English Girls' High School, the branch promoted its amalgamation with the Boys' High School, where the main language of instruction was Afrikaans. (This goal was reached later and is discussed in the next section.)

By 1946, it was clear that Jews were running a growing number of local businesses and the AB branch began an initiative to open an Afrikaner co-operative as a counter move²⁷. This idea was eventually dropped when an Afrikaner-run agricultural co-operative opened – without the branch's involvement. One successful local initiative by the branch was to lobby for a Volkskas Bank in Wellington and to promote it after its opening in 1945. Giliomee claims that “without Bosman [the AB's treasurer] and his nationalist zeal, the bank would probably not have survived”.²⁸ It

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- 17 AB branch minutes, 16 September 1937; 15 July 1942
 18 AB branch minutes, 26 February 1941
 19 AB branch minutes, 21 June 1944
 20 AB branch minutes, 19 May 1948
 21 AB branch minutes, 25 October 1937
 22 AB branch minutes, 21 November 1938
 23 AB branch minutes, 15 October 1940; 15 October 1941 Afrikaners' strong identification at this stage with the Reddingsdaadbond is discussed in N Diedericks, *Die Reddingsdaadbond en die Toekoms van ons Volk* (Voortrekker Pers, Johannesburg, 1943)
 24 AB branch minutes, 17 March 1942; 13 August 1943; 16 February 1944
 25 AB branch minutes, 20 November 1940
 26 AB branch minutes, 26 February 1941
 27 AB branch minutes, 23 September 1946
 28 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 435

would be correct to add that without the active intervention of AB branches in various smaller towns, Volkskas would probably have had a difficult time to establish itself nationally within a decade.

When compared to the time spent on the issues outlined above, the branch spent far less of its time discussing strategies on segregation. With a population of approximately 3 300 whites, 4 400 coloureds and 500 blacks, the Wellington Town Council took strong segregation measures in this period. The local AB branch, however, played a very limited part in these political arrangements. From the second half of the 1930s the government was moving steadily towards segregated residential areas for people who were not white.²⁹ This was duly reflected in the decisions of the Town Council. On 1 June 1938, the Council applied to the Minister of Native Affairs for the promulgation of a regulation in terms of article 5 of the Native Urban Areas Act No 21 of 1923, to limit the influx of black people into the town.³⁰

During 1939, various Afrikaner organisations³¹ approached the Town Council and persuaded it to vote at the coming municipal congress in favour of separate townships for whites and coloureds. The Council decided to accede to this request, but its representative at the congress eventually voted against the resolution, much to the annoyance of the white local council members.³² On 15 December 1943, the Council discussed a town plan that provided for separate housing for coloureds and blacks, and onwards from 1944, housing schemes were developed according to this plan.³³

Some years earlier, in 1941, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church moved to a new church building in the township designated for coloureds. This was because of pressure exerted by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) that the coloured congregants vacate the church building adjacent to the Dutch Reformed Church. No trace could be found in the minutes that these issues were ever discussed at meetings of the local AB branch. It therefore seems that there was a broad drive for segregation among the white residents of Wellington.

It is true that the local AB branch did not initiate local segregation but there is little doubt that the members supported this social movement. They certainly discussed two cases of segregation among themselves and acted on them. In 1945, they requested that segregation be introduced in the local post office³⁴ and the following year, in 1946, they called for the segregation of the municipal library.³⁵ The postmaster informed them that he would do his best to comply with the request,³⁶ and the library agreed to serve coloured borrowers in a separate room. The branch dismissed the resistance from coloureds to these measures, ascribing their complaints to ignorance of the situation and merely the work of a few isolated agitators.³⁷ The branch supported local segregation, but did not have to lobby for it – the need for

29 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp 460–461

30 “Geschiedenis van Wellington”, chapter 3, p 47

31 The AB, being a secret organisation, did not take part in this action

32 “Geschiedenis van Wellington”, chapter 3, p 48

33 “Geschiedenis van Wellington”, chapter 3, p 48

34 AB branch minutes, 19 March 1945

35 AB branch minutes, 28 March 1946

36 AB branch minutes, 21 May 1946

37 AB branch minutes, 24 April 1939

segregation had already become ingrained among the whites in the town, with the branch being only one facet of the local segregation movement.

Only occasionally did local segregation occupy the agenda of the branch. From its founding in 1937 until 1994 the issue discussed most frequently was the national problem of interaction between whites, blacks, coloureds and people of Indian descent. The first of these debates took place on 26 July 1937 when the matter was discussed as a spiritual and social problem. This confirms the notion that early thoughts on segregation can be traced back to the missionary work of the DRC.³⁸ The branch believed that the “racial problems” their descendants would have to face in the future would depend on how successful missionary endeavour was among the seven million black people in South Africa at the time.³⁹ The alternative to Christianisation was that the blacks might well adopt Communism – a course of events that the branch resisted strongly. On 25 October 1938, it was informed that the DRC considered the colour bar as a positive move and the branch promptly adopted this as its own standpoint, a view it maintained until the end of the 1960s.

In addition, the branch’s understanding of demographics played a role in its support for the policy of segregation. At its meeting on 20 October 1947, it discussed the most recent census data and concluded that territorial segregation was a prerequisite for the survival of whites in South Africa. In other words, the local branch echoed D.F. Malan’s ideological stance, expressed in a letter to a US cleric in defence of segregation. There were, he said, “two irreconcilable ways of life: between barbarism and civilization, between overwhelming numerical odds on the one hand and insignificant numbers on the other”.⁴⁰

As shown above, it is clear that the branch played a relatively limited role in influencing political and social trends in this period. It did not even touch on the high-profile water dispute in 1940–1941, a court case between the municipality and the farmers along the banks of the Spruit River. Nor did local AB members discuss the municipality’s plans for a sewerage system submitted at a public meeting on 25 March 1946 and approved by the community.⁴¹ No reference to the whites-only election of 1948 or to the NP victory at the polls appeared in the minutes. The branch was at the periphery of local politics, a terrain dominated by the Town Council, the political parties and the DRC. The local AB branch was only involved to a very limited extent. Its role during these uncertain Second World War years, a time nevertheless filled with many opportunities, focused almost entirely on the promotion of Afrikaner culture and Afrikaner interests.

Establishment of Afrikaner nationalism (1949–1959)

In the period from 1949 to 1959, Afrikaner nationalism and the apartheid ideology became solidly entrenched in the Wellington local community. This gave the local AB branch a convenient environment to exercise its ideological influence. In the 1950s there was much more involvement in lobbying for school committees, the school

38 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 459

39 AB branch minutes, 25 October 1937

40 Quoted in Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 499

41 “Geschiedenis van Wellington”, chapter 3, pp 24–27; chapter 3, p 36

board, the municipal council and the divisional board elections. In 1952, it was reported that for the first time the majority of the elected town councillors were people whom the local branch of the AB believed had a positive attitude towards Afrikaner nationalism. However, it seems that from 1952 to 1994 the local AB could never boast more than a few of its members on the municipal council; at no stage did it ever enjoy a majority in the council. In most elections, the branch members supported other candidates who they believed would act positively towards local Afrikaner interests. As far as educational matters in the town were concerned, the branch played a leading role in the amalgamation of the boys' and girls' high schools. The members influenced the principal and school committee of the girls' high school. It strengthened its position of control in 1954 when it was able to influence the first election of the high school's amalgamated school committee. Thereafter, members influenced the election of school committees by lobbying in their private capacity for their preferred candidates.

During this period the agenda of the local AB branch was dominated by it support and promotion of Afrikaner interests both locally and nationally. Members received indirect reports from local Afrikaner organisations such as the Reddingsdaadbond,⁴² the Voortrekkers,⁴³ the local Volkspele Laer;⁴⁴ and the Music Society.⁴⁵ The branch also backed national Afrikaner organisations, including the Christiaan de Wet Fund⁴⁶ and the 25th anniversary celebration of the founding of the FAK.⁴⁷ The Wellington AB branch also ensured that Afrikaners played a significant role in organising the centenary celebrations of the Bainskloof Pass⁴⁸ and the Mail Coach Festival.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it supervised the 75th anniversary celebration of the founding of the Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners.⁵⁰ Afrikaner clubs and societies were also founded, notably the Manneklub⁵¹ and the Noodhulpliga.⁵² Strategies were implemented to ensure that addresses in the local telephone directory were entered in Afrikaans format.⁵³ The establishment of a local museum became an important initiative that the branch pursued for a number of years.⁵⁴ In the area of moral issues, the branch was less successful. It was recorded that the members could not convince café owners to close their businesses on Sundays;⁵⁵ nor would the local homing pigeon club agree to stop organising flying sessions on Sundays, despite the argument that these involved gambling.⁵⁶

42 AB branch minutes, 22 August 1949

43 AB branch minutes, 24 April 1950; 15 October 1951; 22 October 1958 It is clear that the AB ensured the viability of local Voortrekkers commandos This movement was established on 30 September 1931 See J de V Heese, *Die Voortrekkers en ander Suid-Afrikaanse Jeugverenigings* (Nasionale Pers, Cape Town, 1940), p 63

44 AB branch minutes, 28 July 1953

45 AB branch minutes, 25 August 1958

46 AB branch minutes, 19 February 1951

47 AB branch minutes, 17 May 1954

48 AB branch minutes, 17 February 1953

49 AB branch minutes, 19 May 1952

50 AB branch minutes, 20 May 1950

51 AB branch minutes, 18 May 1959

52 AB branch minutes, 21 September 1959

53 AB branch minutes, 18 May 1956

54 AB branch minutes, 22 March 1955

55 AB branch minutes, 13 March 1950

56 AB branch minutes, 13 June 1950

The period from 1949 to 1959, became a decade of growing Afrikaner confidence. On 23 May 1953, the Wellington AB branch recorded with satisfaction that the poor white problem had officially been eradicated. Furthermore, in 1954 it noted republican aspirations for the first time, following a report in this regard received from the AB's national meeting.⁵⁷ By this time an integrated national network of Afrikaners, established through AB membership, was a reality, and AB members from branches throughout the country visited the Wellington branch on a regular basis. Its members also visited branches in other towns. The branch also became part of an AB district council that included a large portion of the Western Cape; regional contacts were made, ideas exchanged and opinions formulated. Politicians and senior officials usually addressed these meetings and there was always time set aside for questions.

Such meetings provided an opportunity for Afrikaners to co-ordinate strategies and receive counselling on common problems; they also ensured that AB members had a good understanding of government policies. An example of a burning issue taken up with senior government officials at these meetings was the struggle of Afrikaners to make progress in the public sector.⁵⁸ White immigration had increased in the aftermath of the Second World War and the branch supervised projects to ensure that immigrants from Europe were integrated into the Afrikaner community as rapidly as possible with the aim of strengthening Afrikanerdom demographically.⁵⁹ From the preceding discussion, the branch's involvement in the promotion and extension of local Afrikaner culture is clear. The branch's political contribution is evaluated in the following paragraphs.

The NP's victory at the polls in May 1948 was arguably the most significant change in South African society during this period, all the more so because the NP was a predominantly Afrikaner party. The NP championed apartheid as an official policy, but an ideological substantiation of apartheid was still lacking. To this end, the Suid-Afrikaanse Buro vir Rasse Aangeleenthede (SABRA) was founded on 23 September 1948. Its aim was to act as a counter weight, an alternative to the "liberal" South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR). SABRA's establishment meant that considerable funding had to be raised and the AB infrastructure was used for this purpose. In June 1950, the minutes of the local Wellington branch noted that it had already contributed £322 towards this initiative. From its establishment, the branch remained keenly interested in SABRA's work and speakers from SABRA addressed members of the branch periodically.⁶⁰ In 1955, Nic Olivier told members that apartheid was an injustice towards the coloured community. His opinion was that this could be redressed by moving 8 000 blacks per year out of the Western Cape over the next fifteen years.⁶¹ The local branch duly decided to support this particular strategy.

57 AB branch minutes, 19 October 1954

58 AB branch minutes, 23 October 1959

59 AB branch minutes, 20 February 1956; 21 July 1958; 10 August 1959

60 AB branch minutes, 2 June 1952; 23 February 1955

61 AB branch minutes, 23 February 1955

One of the NP's most significant initiatives in this period was to promulgate the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act in 1950. The local Dutch Reformed Mission Church (which comprised only coloured members) raised strong objections against these apartheid measures at a council meeting on 25 March 1950.⁶² In 1951, the Wellington Town Council determined the preliminary boundaries of the coloured residential area in accordance with the Group Areas Act. The council's final submission had to be presented to the government before 28 February 1953 and the boundaries identified would then be valid for 75 years. In a letter dated 30 May 1955, the coloured ratepayers and voters rejected these group area proposals out of hand, saying they were totally unacceptable. Nevertheless, the government went ahead. It published the area boundaries of Wellington in the press on 26 August 1955, although they were only announced officially on 3 February 1961.⁶³

Part of the local process to identify separate residential areas involved a fierce tussle, lasting from January 1956 to December 1958, between Paarl and Wellington. The dispute arose over the incorporation of a small coloured community, Newton (comprising 1 060 souls), into their respective municipal areas, with a view to future expansion of their coloured communities. After a protracted struggle, Wellington won the dispute.⁶⁴ However, the minutes of the local AB branch recorded none of this local activity towards implementation of the Group Areas Act; nor did they note the forced removal of black people in the 1950s to Noodkamp, in terms of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951. Furthermore, the NP government ploy to enlarge the senate in 1956 to expedite the removal of coloureds from the common voters' roll, also went unrecorded in Wellington's AB minutes. The fact that no objections to these local and national events appear in the minutes can perhaps be interpreted as the branch members' tacit approval and acceptance of the government's hardening of apartheid in the 1950s.

One of the local processes in which the branch did take an active part was the establishment of a coloured secondary school at Wellington. In its minutes of 19 February 1951, the branch took the credit for the founding of the school. However, according to a recent school history project, the school opened on 26 January 1948 after concerted pleas by the coloured community.⁶⁵ Furthermore, nationally the government increased coloured secondary schools from five to eighteen in the period between 1946 and 1953, after compulsory education for coloured children was introduced.⁶⁶ It is therefore unclear whether the branch could indeed take much credit for establishing the school. In furthering segregation (as it had earlier in the case of the post office and the public library), the branch worked towards implementing apartheid at the station⁶⁷ and in the municipal offices.⁶⁸ The minutes make no mention of the library that was opened for Wellington's coloured residents on 22 July 1958.⁶⁹ In this period, congenial interaction with coloureds was, however, valued; members of the branch held periodic discussions with local coloured leaders in the late 1950s.

62 "Geskiiedenis van Wellington", chapter 11, p 11

63 "Geskiiedenis van Wellington", chapter 4, pp 6–7; chapter 4, p 10

64 "Geskiiedenis van Wellington", chapter 4, pp 13–14; chapter 4, p 15

65 Interview conducted by the author with the principal of a Wellington school, 31 October 2000

66 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 510

67 AB branch minutes, 15 September 1950

68 AB branch minutes, 21 April 1952

69 "Geskiiedenis van Wellington", chapter 4, p 39

Two national events were discussed in branch meetings and were duly recorded. The report of the Tomlinson Commission was presented to the prime minister, H.F. Verwoerd, in October 1954 and was then discussed at a Volkskongres (People's Congress) in May 1956. After much debate on the implications this report, the idea of reservation areas for blacks became the accepted standpoint of the local branch and was viewed as an important tenet of apartheid.⁷⁰ Secondly, on 25 March 1957 the branch discussed the bus boycott staged by black commuters; the reaction of the branch members was that the pass laws should probably be applied more strictly to address the problem.

Hermann Giliomee is of the opinion that during this period Afrikaners were more inspired by nationalism than they were by apartheid,⁷¹ but the Wellington AB branch minutes do not fully corroborate this view. It appears that Afrikaner nationalism and the notion of segregation were closely interwoven in South Africa and that in this period Afrikaner culture was strongly promoted not only on a political level, but also – and as much – on a social level.

Republican confidence (1960–1969)

The 1960s were eventful years in the history of South Africa. To provide a background against which an evaluation of the contribution of the local AB in the 1960s can be made, some of the main events of the decade will be outlined.

This period began with an upsurge of strong resistance against apartheid among blacks; in juxtaposition, Afrikaner nationalism reached a milestone with the republican dream becoming reality. On 21 March 1960, black resistance to the hated pass laws was expressed in Sharpeville and was met with police brutality; a week later, on 30 March, there was a protest march to parliament. The following month, on 8 April, Verwoerd was wounded in an assassination attempt but he soon returned to his office, even more determined to enforce the now formidable array of apartheid legislation. He announced that a referendum would be held in October 1960 to gauge the feelings of the white electorate on becoming a republic. He firmly believed that a republic would create white unity, which he felt was a prerequisite for maintaining apartheid. However, in December 1960, the Cottesloe consultation organised by the World Council of Churches, accepted the following resolution: "Everyone has the right to own land where he is domiciled and to participate in the government of his country." Delegates also agreed that the "banning of mixed marriages was not grounded in the Holy Scriptures"; that migrant labour had "disintegrating effects" on family life; that job reservation had to be replaced by a "more equitable system of labour"; and that coloured people had to be directly represented in parliament.⁷² In the aftermath of this consultation, Verwoerd put so much pressure on the delegates that in February 1961 the DRC distanced itself from the conference.

70 AB branch minutes, 9 June 1958

71 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 491

72 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 527

On 31 May 1961, South Africa became a republic; the realisation of this ideal was whole-heartedly supported by the local Wellington branch of the AB.⁷³ In September 1961, after a contentious report concluding that coloureds had to be permitted full citizenship and should have representation in parliament, SABRA was taken over by the Afrikaner intelligentsia in the Transvaal. Thereby, the organisation aligned itself more closely with Verwoerd's apartheid ideas. In 1961, the ANC embarked on a relatively low-key sabotage strategy in their resistance campaign, and 1962 saw the arrest of Nelson Mandela. In the same year, the United Nations (UN) began to take resolutions to impose sanctions against South Africa. In 1963, the Publication Control Board was introduced and the so-called Sestigers, a critical Afrikaner literary movement, was in full swing. On 6 September 1966, Verwoerd was assassinated.

Of these significant political events, few were reflected in the minutes of the local AB branch. By and large the issues discussed were viewed from the perspective of Afrikaner nationalism, an ideology driven by the NP and reflected upon by the AB. To keep the branches well informed the AB developed a system of working papers; these were distributed periodically to the branches in the 1960s. The working papers were not always welcome at branch level, because it was felt that they prevented the branch from focusing on local matters and member issues. However, the system did play an important role in integrating the AB branches into the national political agenda of the NP, despite the fact that the number of visits received from members based elsewhere in the country fell markedly. The working papers maintained a mutuality that the visits had previously ensured. In addition, joint meetings of local branches, district and national meetings continued in this decade, also encouraging integration and co-ordination. The first working papers focused on republican matters. Thereafter they dealt with a wide variety of issues: Afrikaans newspapers and magazines,⁷⁴ the issue of AB defensibility,⁷⁵ the relationship between Afrikaans churches,⁷⁶ the threat of Communism in South Africa,⁷⁷ agricultural issues,⁷⁸ education,⁷⁹ issues on the Afrikaans language,⁸⁰ and Afrikaans as a second language for blacks.⁸¹ When discussing the working paper on Afrikaans newspapers, members were of the opinion that coloureds did not read Afrikaans language newspapers because of offensive reporting. It was decided jointly by the local branches to raise this issue with the relevant parties.⁸² Verwoerd's death in 1966 immediately led to a decrease in working papers – probably because of ideological uncertainty after the loss of his strong leadership. It was not until 1971 that working papers resumed their prominent role in AB procedure.

73 AB branch minutes, 20 June 1960

74 AB branch minutes, 18 October 1961

75 AB branch minutes, 18 April 1962

76 AB branch minutes, 24 October 1962

77 AB branch minutes, 23 January 1963

78 AB branch minutes, 23 October 1963

79 AB branch minutes, 20 January 1965

80 AB branch minutes, 18 January 1966

81 AB branch minutes, 15 October 1969

82 AB branch minutes, 19 July 1961

The local branch's political role was even less apparent in the 1960s. It took its lead from prominent political figures who were regular speakers at joint meetings. On 18 August 1964 at a joint meeting of branches, A.P. Treurnicht gave his rendition of the Christian foundation for a conservative viewpoint: "It acknowledges the unity of the human race in Christ, but denies that this negates the otherness of *volke* [nations, ethnic groups]." ⁸³ This probably reaffirmed the branch's belief in the biblical grounding of apartheid in the aftermath of the Cottesloe conference of 7–14 December 1960, where anti-apartheid voices denouncing separate development as unchristian and unbiblical, might have perturbed some branch members.⁸⁴ The rejection of the Cottesloe statement by the synod of the Western Cape DRC was reassuring to the branch.⁸⁵

A sceptical member reported that P.W. Botha had convinced him at an AB meeting that the government policy on coloureds actually gave them more privileges than might otherwise have been the case.⁸⁶ On 17 May 1965, Botha asked local branches to give the government a chance to fulfil its arduous task, implying that the local branches should leave politics to the NP leadership.⁸⁷ There was little or no originality in the topics raised at meetings during this period. However, in an interesting entry in the minutes of 20 July 1966, a member reported his conversation with a senior official serving under Jomo Kenyatta.⁸⁸ He suggested that Kenyatta might well consider détente with South Africa in the light of the common ideological struggle against Communism shared by their two countries. This foreshadowed the possibilities for détente that John Vorster investigated a few years later.⁸⁹

The 1960s were characterised by the full implementation of apartheid. On 31 March 1964 the Town Council discussed a petition signed by 276 citizens urging the council to "do something" about the coloured people who loitered about at night and caused annoyance.⁹⁰ The council's laconic reply was that they did not have the power to do anything about it. The first coloured management committee was constituted on 3 March 1966.⁹¹ On 16 June 1965, a coloured cleric was granted a temporary permit by the council to occupy the church parsonage in the white area, while a residence was being built for him in the coloured area.⁹² The black community of Wellington, 1 800 in all, was gradually moved to the Paarl Township for blacks in 1968–1969.⁹³ In August 1968 the mayor stated in his annual report that the resettlement of coloureds, who live in white areas in contravention of the Group Areas Act, had been finalised,

83 AB branch minutes, 18 August 1964 Translated from the original Afrikaans Treurnicht was a minister and leader in the DRC

84 For a detailed description of the conference, see A H Lückhoff, *Cottesloe* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1978)

85 AB branch minutes, 24 October 1962

86 AB branch minutes, 21 February 1962 Botha was deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, 1958–1966

87 AB branch minutes, 17 May 1965

88 Jomo Kenyatta was president of Kenya, 1964–1978

89 A J Venter, *Vorster's Africa: Friendship and Frustration* (Ernest Stanton, Johannesburg, 1977), p 30

90 "Geschiedenis van Wellington", chapter 4, p 8

91 "Geschiedenis van Wellington", chapter 4, p 2

92 "Geschiedenis van Wellington", chapter 11, p 16

93 "Geschiedenis van Wellington", chapter 4, pp 24–25

“thereby placing Wellington among the limited number of towns that have achieved this distinction”.⁹⁴

Again very little detail on the implementation of local apartheid was recorded in the minutes of the branch. The regular discussions between members and local coloured leaders became problematic because of the finalisation of local apartheid in the early 1960s. The national AB chairperson, H.B. Thom, promoted the idea of such discussions and it seems that talks with theology students at the local theological college could have led to notable breakthroughs had there not been members who expressed misgivings. They felt that these talks were not the responsibility of the branch. This led to a heated debate and emotions flared. Eventually those opposed to the discussions held sway.⁹⁵ This reflected the hardliner approach of the new chairperson of the AB in the 1960s, P.J. Meyer. By terminating these discussions, the branch probably missed out on an ideal opportunity to play a more creative role in addressing problems on race relations in the coming decades. The members supporting the talks did not abandon their idea; they tabled it again at a meeting in 1966.⁹⁶ This time around there was more acceptance of the idea. However, when they attempted to initiate the talks again in the 1970s, they found the coloured leaders less willing to oblige.

In its meeting of 17 July 1968, the branch discussed the “verligte-verkramppte” debate among Afrikaners – terms coined in 1967 by Willem de Klerk, an academic from Potchefstroom. From the minutes it seems that except for a brief period in the mid 1960s, the branch was more inclined towards the “verligte” (enlightened) stance. This was probably typical of Western Cape branches under the influence of the newspaper *Die Burger*. They were exposed to less demanding racial interaction in view of their ongoing links with the Afrikaans-speaking coloureds. The only recorded endeavour on segregation in the 1960s was the branch’s discussion of an initiative to use the local government to force white owners of pubs that served coloured patrons to move their pubs from white residential suburbia to the area adjoining the coloured townships.⁹⁷

As had been the case in the previous decade, the local branch monitored the elections of school committees, the school board and municipal elections closely in the 1960s. The names of those nominated for school committees were circulated and members of the local branches would lobby for candidates of their choice. Branch members also promoted the building of new buildings for the white primary and high schools.⁹⁸ During municipal elections it was impossible to lobby secretly. The understanding was that members would vote for candidates sympathetic towards Afrikaner nationalism, but would not become actively involved in the process of nominations or elections. An idea the branch toyed with was to find a taxpayers association friendly to the AB’s ideals to lobby for local elections,⁹⁹ but nothing came of this plan in the 1960s.

94 “Geskiedenis van Wellington”, chapter 4, p 9

95 AB branch minutes, 17 March 1963

96 AB branch minutes, 20 April 1966

97 AB branch minutes, 15 November 1967; 15 October 1968; 19 November 1968

98 AB branch minutes, 21 November 1962; 21 January 1963; 21 September 1964; 15 February 1967; 17 April 1968

99 AB branch minutes, 26 September 1963

In the 1960s the branch continued its campaign to lobby for a local museum,¹⁰⁰ as well as acquiring plots for the Andrew Murray children's home¹⁰¹ and the Voortrekkers.¹⁰² The branch also received reports on FAK activities;¹⁰³ the founding of the local Rapportryerskorps;¹⁰⁴ the integration process of European immigrants into the Afrikaner and white community;¹⁰⁵ and fund-raising initiatives for the proposed Taalmonument.¹⁰⁶ In the 1960s the branch was buoyed by the realisation of apartheid and the fulfilment of most of its local Afrikaner ideals. But this elation was premature. The members of the branch seemingly began to realise this. The coming decades saw the branch struggle to promote Afrikaner ideals in the face of the realities of South African society.

Rethinking apartheid with regard to coloureds (1970–1979)

On the surface the apartheid system was well established by the 1970s and seemed secure. Most of the leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were in gaol or had fled into exile. John Vorster, the prime minister, was tough on security matters; South African had virtually become a security state, a situation taken even further by P.W. Botha by the end of the decade.¹⁰⁷

But as seen through the minutes of the local AB branch, another picture unfolded. In the beginning of 1970, the branch discussed the political orientation of students at the University of Stellenbosch. This was in the aftermath of the student revolt that began in Paris in May 1968, which had a slight ripple effect on Stellenbosch students. The branch members felt that the majority of students now preferred to be seen primarily as South Africans rather than Afrikaners. Those who wished to label themselves as Afrikaners did not have the leaders who could articulate this choice as meaningful and defensible.¹⁰⁸ The AB branch members therefore identified the need to develop youth leaders,¹⁰⁹ but they recognised at the same time that the Afrikaner youth was tired of insincerity. The members also did some serious soul-searching on the justification of apartheid as far as coloureds were concerned.¹¹⁰ They concluded that they would have to give up some of their ideals and only retain the basic aspirations they regarded as vital.¹¹¹

100 AB branch minutes, 16 May 1960; 22 May 1963; 24 July 1963

101 AB branch minutes, 15 August 1962; 23 January 1963; 30 June 1963; 21 October 1964

102 AB branch minutes, 15 August 1962; 22 May 1963; 16 October 1965; 19 October 1966; 16 May 1967; 18 June 1969

103 AB branch minutes, 15 February 1961

104 AB branch minutes, 15 September 1965

105 AB branch minutes, 17 August 1966; 18 March 1968; 21 January 1969; 22 July 1969

106 AB branch minutes, 16 September 1969

107 P W Botha was Minister of Defence from 1966 to 1980

108 AB branch minutes, 21 June 1970; Smith, *Die Afrikaner Broederbond*, p 176

109 AB branch minutes, 20 January 1971

110 AB branch minutes, 16 September 1970

111 AB branch minutes, 28 January 1971

The branch received a report in 1972 that the tide had turned among the student body at Stellenbosch, and that 88% of the current students supported the National Party. The members therefore shifted their attention to focus on the young men who were performing national service in the police and army on the country's borders.¹¹² Military activity intensified when Portuguese rule over Angola and Mozambique ended following a coup in Lisbon on 25 April 1974. By 1975, South Africa was involved in the civil war in Angola, hoping to forestall the influence of Communism in the region by preventing the establishment of an independent Marxist regime. By the end of the decade the AB branch again shifted its focus on the youth – it requested training and preparation for young Afrikaners to make contact with militant black and coloured youth.¹¹³

The 1970s were also characterised by other events that influenced the course of South African history. July 1976 saw the outbreak of the Soweto uprising. Local coloured students also showed their support for the Sowetan youth by burning trucks and buses. In its reaction, the local branch took the following decision: “Calmness, composure and non-violence is expected of us. Defence must not become retaliation that might well set off a chain of events we will later regret. God has a hand in everything that happens and we must place our problems before Him.” The meeting went on to express its appreciation for the work of the South African Police. It emphasised that the public should take the necessary precautions to protect itself but should avoid taking the law into its own hands. The minutes go on to advise that “in view of the present unrest, we as whites must now with all earnestness strive to make contact with coloured leaders in our own community.”¹¹⁴

By 1971 it was decided to resume contact with coloured leaders, but this time through informal relationships. It seems that the efforts in this regard met with little success; it was reported that the coloured leaders were somewhat reluctant to oblige.¹¹⁵ Having discussed this problem, the members decided: “As for our interaction with coloured people we will have to be more liberal, by for example receiving prominent members in our homes.”¹¹⁶ In 1975 the branch received notice that the government had instructed magistrates to form liaison committees to encourage positive interaction between whites and coloureds.¹¹⁷ In accordance with this directive, an official liaison committee was established at local level to discuss issues of local importance across the apartheid divide. On 19 July 1976 the branch conducted an extensive debate on who should initiate the building of such relations. Members eventually agreed to differ. Some were of the opinion that the church should take on this role, but others expressed their reservations. It was felt, for example, that the time was hardly ripe for the Dutch Reformed Mission Church minister, being coloured, to preach in the local Dutch Reformed Church, because members of the congregation would probably walk out.¹¹⁸

112 AB branch minutes, 23 May 1972; and 29 November 1972

113 AB branch minutes, 19 March 1979

114 AB branch minutes, 13 September 1976 Quotations translated from the original Afrikaans

115 AB branch minutes, 15 June 1971; 18 February 1974

116 AB branch minutes, 16 September 1974 Translated from the original Afrikaans

117 AB branch minutes, 14 October 1975; 17 November 1975

118 AB branch minutes, 15 June 1976

At the General Synod of the DRC in 1975 a report on race relations was duly accepted. This provided a scriptural justification for apartheid, making it almost impossible for the DRC to be a local leader in building inter-race relations. The branch subsequently received a report saying that the liaison committee under the auspices of the magistrate was doing splendid work.¹¹⁹ On 13 September 1977, a new, fully elected Management Committee was constituted to be responsible for the administration of the coloured residential area.¹²⁰ This development was not noted in the branch minutes.

The branch's misgivings about apartheid as far as coloureds were concerned, made it receptive to new national initiatives to incorporate coloureds into the national political sphere, a move that gained momentum later in the decade. In 1976, Nic Treurnicht was the speaker at a joint meeting of local AB branches. He made the proposal that there be three separate houses of parliament; one each for whites, coloureds and Indians, each with its own senate. A joint senate, headed by the state president as chairperson, was also envisaged.¹²¹ The branch had reservations about this and recorded the following year: "We cannot expect the coloureds to accept separate development without witnessing that whites are prepared to uphold an acceptable and equal personal relationship – only then will the coloureds accept the integrity of whites."¹²²

Branch members felt that new initiatives on the circumstances of coloured people were necessary, especially after having studied a discussion paper on the Erika Theron Commission's findings.¹²³ The next year the branch was informed that the NP congress planned to discuss a new political dispensation for coloureds.¹²⁴ The tide had turned against apartheid. In 1977, this was reflected in a request the AB head office made to the local branches to report by the end of that year on measures that they had taken to end petty apartheid locally.¹²⁵ On 18 September 1978, a gathering of AB branches in the Boland discussed the NP's new constitutional ideas. A decision was reached that 1980 would be far too early to implement the new constitutional proposals: "For the plan to continue the necessary climate must first be properly created. For this to succeed it is absolutely necessary to move immediately away from discrimination." The branch supported the viewpoint of the joint committee that a proposal be put forward to the government calling for one parliament representing whites, coloureds and Indians.¹²⁶

Locally, in the minds of influential white leaders, the 1970s saw a complete reversal of opinion on the role of coloureds in the apartheid state. Indeed, by this time there were also concerns on the way apartheid was applied to black people, with the idea of homelands coming under fire. S.P. Terblanche addressed a joint meeting of AB branches on 20 August 1973 saying it was naïve to think that blacks would always be temporary dwellers in urban areas; they were bound to become permanent dwellers

119 AB branch minutes, 21 February 1977

120 "Geschiedenis van Wellington", chapter 5, p 2

121 AB branch minutes, 18 October 1976 Treurnicht was the National Party MP for Piketberg

122 AB branch minutes, 21 March 1977 Translated from the original Afrikaans

123 AB branch minutes, 18 July 1977

124 AB branch minutes, 15 August 1977

125 AB branch minutes, 19 September 1977

126 AB branch minutes, 18 June 1979 Quotation translated from the original Afrikaans

in the course of time.¹²⁷ This would certainly bring the issue of their political rights to the fore. Economic integration, he said, was inevitable. Later that year the branch reported to its head office that it felt that the consolidation of the homelands had to take place according to the 1936 legislation.¹²⁸ Hermann Giliomee comments that AB members were not prepared to make more “white” land available for the proposed consolidation of the reserves. He claims that “comfortable middle-class life and a seemingly stable state” made the Afrikaner “less and less willing to make sacrifices for a political vision.¹²⁹ More probably, the members of the AB were already convinced that the homelands were an unattainable dream.

Transkei became “independent” in 1976; Bophuthatswana in 1977; Venda in 1979; and the Ciskei in 1981. None of these events are reflected in the minutes. However, there is mention of a working paper on the homelands that the branch discussed; it concluded that it was farfetched to expect that precedence be given to black workers from the homelands above those from the cities.¹³⁰ In reaction to a report from the national meeting of the AB in 1976, branch members expressed the opinion that the Afrikaners in the northern part of the country had not taken the economic realities of South Africa into account, realities that made their proposals unfeasible.¹³¹ Most of the papers delivered at the 1976 AB conference supported Verwoerd’s vision of the establishment of separate states in South Africa,¹³² but there were also members who expressed strong misgivings on the system’s feasibility.¹³³ Hermann Giliomee is correct when he claims that “by the late 1970s the idea of economically viable homelands had hopelessly faded.”¹³⁴

The scene was set for change when P.W. Botha became prime minister on 28 September 1978. The branch noted important reforms arising from the Wiehahn and Riekert reports,¹³⁵ namely in the “unexpected” scrapping of work reservation and the recognition of black unions by Minister Fanie Botha.¹³⁶ It is noteworthy that Botha’s announcements were minuted as “unexpected”, because AB members had come to accept that the NP would inform them of major policy changes before these were announced publicly. This unexpected information presaged a new tendency on the part of NP leaders: over the following years they increasingly disempowered the AB. The AB also took a knock in the 1970s when there were several breaches of its security code. The first was reported on 23 March 1970, with further leakages making the headlines in November 1972 and March 1976. These breaches eventually led to the publication of two books on the Afrikaner Broederbond in the late 1970s.¹³⁷ All this impacted heavily, and negatively, on the image of the AB.

127 At the time, Terblanche was professor in Economic History at the University of Stellenbosch

128 AB branch minutes, 18 September 1973

129 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 544

130 AB branch minutes, 18 October 1976

131 AB branch minutes, 15 November 1976

132 Stals, “Geschiedenis van die Afrikaner-Broederbond”, pp 378–380

133 Stals, “Geschiedenis van die Afrikaner-Broederbond”, p 381

134 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 605

135 According to the branch minutes, members discussed these reports at length on 15 October

1979

136 AB branch minutes, 23 April 1979 Fanie Botha was Minister of Manpower

137 Wilkins and Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaners*; Serfontein, *The Brotherhood of Power*

Furthermore, the security breach had a local ripple effect. In the mid 1970s wealthy Afrikaner farmers became a powerful force in local politics. In some cases their influence even surpassed that of the AB, particularly in the Wellington Town Council. They were not AB members and discredited the local AB to such an extent that the branch decided not to become involved in the municipal elections of 1976. These farmers maintained a congenial relationship with the NP and its leadership, entertaining cabinet ministers and later, even prime ministers. The farmers played a highly significant role in local politics and proceeded to demonstrate in no uncertain terms that they could exercise a greater influence on local matters than the AB members. Although there was distance and even some bitterness in the interaction between the two groups, they had a shared political orientation because of their mutual bonds with the National Party. In the local elections of 1978, the AB branches again lobbied for their preferred candidates.¹³⁸

Until the 1970s, the branch was deeply involved in the promotion of Afrikaner culture – if not in an organised way, then closely involved as individual members. From the 1970s, with so many Afrikaner ideals already realised, the branch's discussions for the first time became predominantly political, with national politics taking centre stage. The minutes give the distinct impression that the members of the branch realised early in the 1970s that Afrikaner nationalism was on a collision course with the realities of South African society. Such a collision was unavoidable, but the impact had to be cushioned as much as possible.

The branch supported certain Afrikaner cultural affairs in the 1970s, namely financial support for the restoration of the Nasionale Vrouemonument (National Women's Monument)¹³⁹ and for the Voortrekkers.¹⁴⁰ Wellington's local museum was founded in 1977 and the branch expressed its willingness to ensure that the museum become an attractive feature of the town.¹⁴¹ The local AB branch, together with others, also began the development of the comprehensive Hawekwa Youth recreation site near Wellington.¹⁴² In addition, the branch wrote a letter to the AB's executive board in support of a strict censure of the arts,¹⁴³ and expressed support for the buying of bonus obligations (a government gambling system to help fund South Africa's military expenses).¹⁴⁴

By the end of the 1970s the branch was prepared to accept the notion of coloureds and Indians sitting in parliament with white legislators. (However, the NP implemented a tri-cameral system in 1983.) But the branch had no consensus or clarity on how whites and blacks were to share South Africa's resources. This issue was destined to dominate the discussions of the local AB branch in the 1980s.

138 AB branch minutes, 16 October 1978

139 AB branch minutes, 17 July 1978

140 AB branch minutes, 18 February 1974; 15 April 1974; 17 October 1977

141 AB branch minutes, 21 February 1977

142 AB branch minutes, 23 April 1979

143 AB branch minutes, 18 March 1974; 18 June 1974

144 AB branch minutes, 20 August 1979

Rethinking apartheid with regard to blacks (1980–1989)

The 1980s began with Robert Mugabe taking over the government in Zimbabwe on 17 April 1980. The stark reality of white minority governments giving way to black rule was now close to South African borders. ANC-underground cadres began to strike at high-profile targets: the SASOL plant in 1980; the Voortrekkerhoogte military base in Pretoria in 1981; the Koeberg nuclear reactor near Cape Town in 1982; and the Air Force Headquarters in Church Street, Pretoria, in 1983. In September 1984 urban unrest (spurred largely by increased rents in the townships) erupted in the Vaal Triangle and turned into widespread rebellion that persisted until mid 1986. The government's declaration of states of emergency failed to stem the tide of unrest. This set the scene in which the local AB branch reconsidered apartheid as far as blacks were concerned, although the minutes make no specific mention of any of the incidents outlined in this paragraph. In the 1980s the local AB branch tended to reiterate the letters from head office, most of them indicating that the dream of pure Afrikaner nationalism was all but over; its end was nigh. This virtually paralysed the Wellington AB branch and it initiated little activity during this decade.

On 17 March 1980, at a joint meeting of branches, Minister Fanie Botha admitted that mistakes had been made; the homelands policy had failed abysmally. On 20 October 1980, the local branch minutes mentioned that the national AB council meeting had considered the introduction of another chamber in parliament, one that would represent urban blacks. On 28 February 1981, the branch had to answer specific questions from the head office on what it considered the necessary prerequisites for the survival of the Afrikaners. The branch decided: "From this point onwards we must proceed purely on the basis of Christian norms of neighbourly love and goodwill, irrespective of colour or race, as a collective body. We must not practise our politics as if white and black are at opposite poles; we must rally together in our mutual struggle against the communist threat".¹⁴⁵ F.W. de Klerk spoke at a joint meeting of local branches on 17 May 1982 saying that

the language, culture, traditions, education, residential areas and churches for each population group are non-negotiable. But everyone is economically and socially interdependent, and common issues can only be solved through negotiations and co-responsibility. The trekker pioneers did not have security; similarly we cannot wait for guarantees, we will have to acknowledge the other communities, especially the coloureds, and involve them in our decision-making processes.¹⁴⁶

Towards the end of 1982, after A.P. Treurnicht and 21 dissident NP members had defected from the party on 24 February 1982,¹⁴⁷ the local branch minutes reported that P.W. Botha had declared at a national AB council meeting that members should either go to his assistance – or simply ignore him. Botha maintained that the idea of a homeland for coloureds was senseless. According to him, the AB's focus at that time had to be on deliberation, consultation and co-responsibility.¹⁴⁸ The following year, Gerrit Viljoen informed a joint meeting of local branches that interracial school sport was necessary to develop political maturity and encourage multiracialism. He said

145 AB branch minutes, 15 June 1981. Translated from the original Afrikaans

146 AB branch minutes, 17 May 1982. Translated from the original Afrikaans. De Klerk was Minister of Internal Affairs from 1982 to 1985

147 Treurnicht was a former Minister of Administration and Statistics and Transvaal NP leader

148 AB branch minutes, 17 October 1982

that Afrikaners should certainly value their own culture, but that a common Western culture was the property of all nations and races.¹⁴⁹

In 1983, the referendum to gauge public support for the tri-cameral constitution came under discussion on several occasions.¹⁵⁰ The focus then shifted to intense debate on how blacks could be accommodated at the level of national politics. This only ensued after the chairperson of the AB's executive council, C.W.H. Boshoff, had resigned under pressure in 1983 when the AB was no longer prepared to support his political struggle for racial segregation.¹⁵¹ The working papers discussed in the local branch in 1986 make this clear. Significantly, they were entitled: "The Citizenship of Blacks"; and "Greater Understanding for the Realities of the Black Man so that Attitudes can be Improved Reciprocally".¹⁵²

On 17 February 1986 the branch received notice that the AB was embarking on a process to identify the basic or minimal political preconditions for the survival of the Afrikaner. A few months later, it received the first working paper on this matter and it was duly discussed.¹⁵³ A report was also received to the effect that the chairperson of the AB had made contact with ANC members during a New York seminar in March 1986.¹⁵⁴ The AB wanted to provide NP politicians with a set of minimum constitutional requirements for Afrikaner survival; this would enable the NP to test its political models.¹⁵⁵ In a discussion on this issue, one member remarked appropriately: "The problem is that the Afrikaners throughout history have been indoctrinated to think of Afrikanerdom in political terms; the difficulty now is how to convince the broader Afrikaner community of this non-political Afrikanerdom".¹⁵⁶

On a national level the dismantling of apartheid began officially with the scrapping of the pass laws in 1986. From 1987, black people could have full freehold rights to property throughout South Africa. This issue was not discussed in the local AB branch. The proposal of the President's Council for the abolition of the Groups Areas Act was indeed touched upon, and branch members supported this move.¹⁵⁷ In addition, a working paper on an appropriate political model for South Africa was discussed in 1988.¹⁵⁸ The branch concluded as follows on the values and norms of Afrikaner politics: "Throughout their entire existence Afrikaners have been inseparably interconnected with other ethnic groups; in the foreseeable future they will function on an equal footing as one part of a diverse society."¹⁵⁹ Members expressed the opinion that ethnicity would inevitably play a role in the constitution of a future local government,¹⁶⁰ and that on a national government level they favoured an adapted federal system.¹⁶¹

149 AB branch minutes, 14 April 1983 Viljoen was Minister of Education from 1980 to 1989

150 AB branch minutes, 19 September 1983; 17 October 1983; 21 November 1983

151 Stals, "Geschiedenis van die Afrikaner-Broederbond", pp 618-619

152 AB branch minutes, 17 February 1986

153 AB branch minutes, 16 June 1986; see also Smith, *Die Afrikaner Broederbond*, pp 245-254

154 AB branch minutes, 21 July 1986

155 AB branch minutes, 18 August 1986

156 AB branch minutes, 20 October 1986 Loosely translated from the original Afrikaans

157 AB branch minutes, 21 September 1987; 18 January 1988

158 AB branch minutes, 15 August 1988

159 AB branch minutes, 20 February 1989 Translated from the original Afrikaans

160 AB branch minutes, 20 February 1989

161 AB branch minutes, 29 May 1989

Hermann Giliomee argues very aptly that although the AB discussed new political models extensively, they did so within the framework of Afrikaner interests, clinging to the timeworn notion of “own” and “general” affairs; they failed to heed the voices of black academics or professionals.¹⁶² P.W. Botha suffered a stroke and was succeeded by F.W. de Klerk in September 1989. In the run-up to the 1989 general election, De Klerk promised that this would be the last election from which black people would be excluded.¹⁶³ On 9 November 1989, the fall of the Berlin wall began; internationally this symbolised the fall of Communism. Thereby, the stage was set for the political transformation of South Africa to a true democracy. The AB, however, reoriented itself inadequately for this challenge in the 1980s, because it oversimplified the political dynamics of the time.

Analysing the constant flow of government information (read NP information) to the AB, and the AB’s limited feedback to the NP, it is difficult, from this local perspective, to give credence to a study that suggests that the Bond was the organisation with “the most influence on the ruling elite with respect to socio-political policy”.¹⁶⁴ This might well have occurred at macro level, but did not include a bottom-up process. The AB’s national leaders probably had an influential role due to their individual societal stature and because of the mobilising and lobbying power of the AB itself. It is certainly true, as Giliomee puts it, that

Since the early 1970s, when divisions in Afrikaner ranks began to appear, the Bond itself reflected these divisions, and, after the Bond had purged its most conservative members by the early 1980s, it mirrored divisions in NP ranks. Increasingly the cabinet had to lend its ear also to other lobbies and pressure groups beyond Afrikaner ranks, and the Bond became a group that primarily explained government actions to its members.¹⁶⁵

A member of the branch observed at a meeting that it seemed as if the AB was moving faster than the NP.¹⁶⁶ From the discussion above it is clear that the AB must have played a significant, albeit covert role to prepare Afrikaners for profound change in their constitutional status in South Africa. In this manner they helped the NP to speed up policy change. However, the AB also wished to make a positive and exemplary contribution to the new dispensation. With this in mind, in 1988 Afrikaner leaders initiated a programme called Action 2000. The focus was on development that could serve as a model for progress in an integrated South Africa and thereby demonstrate the goodwill of Afrikaners towards their fellow South Africans of other groups. Such development also had to be anti-revolutionary. By the end of the 1980s, little progress had been made with this endeavour on the local front.¹⁶⁷

162 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp 603, 621

163 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 637

164 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, suggests that a work by A Y Sadie makes this claim. See p 581, footnote 141

165 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 581

166 AB branch minutes, 20 October 1986

167 AB branch minutes, 21 November 1988; 16 January 1989; 17 March 1989; 18 September 1989; 16 October 1989

Aware of the imminent schism in the NP, the AB tried to avert a division in its own ranks.¹⁶⁸ Three factors, however, eventually led to a split. First, there was considerable impatience with members who still clung to apartheid ideology. Second, the Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP) and Conservative Party (CP) offered alternatives for conservative Afrikaners and in addition, an Afrikaner right-wing secret society was formed in 1984. Third, by 1986, preparations were under way to establish a democratic South Africa. The schism eventually had a two-way effect on AB membership flow.¹⁶⁹ NP members viewed the AB (now rid of its conservative members) more positively and eventually more NP members joined the AB than the number of conservative members leaving it. It is clear from the minutes of the local branch that the deep split in Afrikaner ranks was experienced as extremely painful and was deeply regretted.¹⁷⁰

Locally it was important for the branch to establish communication channels between groupings separated by apartheid. The minutes indicate that in 1980 coloured learners were unwilling to meet with white learners,¹⁷¹ but the coloured minister did preach during missionary week and the white congregation showed no negative reaction.¹⁷² On the local government level there were also moves to liaise with different communities. This led to the members of the coloured Management Committee acquiring the right to sit in during meetings of the various Town Council committees in September 1984. From January 1985, two members could attend open council meetings with the right to speak on all affairs on the then agenda.¹⁷³ These new moves were not recorded in the minutes of the AB branch, but it was disclosed that the committee set up to liaise with coloureds did not really function,¹⁷⁴ being hampered by a lack of interest and negative attitudes on the part of the whites.¹⁷⁵ The branch identified this negative stance as a problem.¹⁷⁶ In 1986 the branch had to report back to the head office of the AB on their progress of their contact with blacks, coloureds and Indians.¹⁷⁷ They were able to confirm soon afterwards that learners from the white and coloured high schools had indeed met,¹⁷⁸ but that they were not yet ready to accept open schools and colleges.¹⁷⁹

On 9 September 1986 the church councils of the white and coloured Dutch Reformed Churches held a fraternal discussion. This followed the decision of the DRC synod to reformulate its racial policy by opening membership to all races. The result was the formation of the Afrikaans Protestant Church (APK), with 60 ministers and 30 000 members breaking away from the DRC. The branch did not record this schism, but it certainly affected the local DRC. In 1986 and 1987, there were extensive discussions on the need for communication and contact with local coloured

168 AB branch minutes, 19 October 1981
169 AB branch minutes, 21 March 1987; 18 March 1988
170 AB branch minutes, 15 March 1982; 17 February 1986; 15 February 1988
171 AB branch minutes, 18 February 1980
172 AB branch minutes, 18 February 1980
173 "Geskiedenis van Wellington", chapter 5, p 3
174 AB branch minutes, 19 September 1985, 19 May 1986
175 AB branch minutes, 19 September 1985
176 AB branch minutes, 16 June 1985
177 AB branch minutes, 17 March 1986
178 AB branch minutes, 19 May 1986
179 AB branch minutes, 19 January 1987

people.¹⁸⁰ The AB head office promoted this move strenuously, and requested each member to make contact with at least two persons of “another race”. The branch supported the notion, but preferred the contacts to be spontaneous.¹⁸¹

The AB eventually formed a taxpayer’s society that could nominate candidates for the council elections with the potential lobbying power of the local AB branches at its disposal.¹⁸² At the first attempt in 1988, the branch nominated eight candidates.¹⁸³ As in previous decades, it supported Afrikaner affairs but on a smaller scale compared to previous decades. As usual, the functioning of the Voortrekkers was discussed,¹⁸⁴ and the school committee elections monitored.¹⁸⁵ Gratitude was also expressed for the national government’s decision not to close down the Wellington College of Education.¹⁸⁶ It seems that local Afrikaners who opposed the AB, played a decisive role in facilitating this process.¹⁸⁷ The branch on occasion also expressed its concern about the degeneration of morals; the influence of undesirable literature and videos, for example, was voiced.¹⁸⁸ It was also decided, in view of the unflattering critique on security police members, to assist in promoting a more positive image of the armed forces.¹⁸⁹

The 1980s ended with the local branches inviting a speaker to address them on the preparations for regime change in Namibia.¹⁹⁰ Ahead, in the 1990s, the local branch had to gear itself to adapt to a similar scenario in South Africa.

Positioning for a new political dispensation (1990–1994)

On 21 March 1990, Namibia became independent. That left South Africa as the last African country ruled exclusively by whites. On 2 February 1990, less than two months before Namibia’s independence celebrations, the then state president, F.W. de Klerk, unbanned the ANC and PAC. He explained to AB members at a joint local meeting shortly afterwards, that the government’s critical position had compelled the announcements of 2 February. He asked for AB members’ assistance in the opening of schools and the drawing up of a bill of human rights.¹⁹¹ It appears that the branch was never orientated towards making proposals on a bill of rights; they discussed it in view of their Christian beliefs and emphasised the difficulties they foresaw.¹⁹² However, the local branch did discuss the bill of rights that the AB head office had accepted nationally in March 1993.¹⁹³

180 AB branch minutes, 21 July 1986; 20 July 1987

181 AB branch minutes, 21 March 1988; 18 April 1988

182 AB branch minutes, 16 June 1980

183 AB branch minutes, 15 August 1988

184 AB branch minutes, 15 September 1980; 15 September 1986

185 AB branch minutes, 20 August 1984; 20 February 1989

186 AB branch minutes, 19 October 1987

187 Interview conducted by the author with a Wellington Afrikaner leader who strongly opposed the local AB, Wellington, 19 October 2000

188 AB branch minutes, 19 March 1982; 22 May 1984; 17 September 1984; 19 September 1988

189 AB branch minutes, 18 February 1985

190 AB branch minutes, 21 August 1989

191 AB branch minutes, 19 March 1990

192 AB branch minutes, 21 May 1990

193 AB branch minutes, 19 April 1993

The NP did not actively involve the AB in its preparation process for negotiations in the 1990s. It seems that F.W. de Klerk had a change of heart on the political role the AB should fill. He told a delegation of the AB in September 1990 that the organisation should rather concentrate on the promotion of Afrikaner culture.¹⁹⁴ Up to 1994 the branch members discussed the political developments in South Africa as they impacted on the Afrikaner – not as a role player, but as a marginalised group. A member of parliament told the branch that although whites were now bewildered and afraid, they had to accept the fact that their privileged position could no longer be sustained; they had to set themselves to espouse equal favouring.¹⁹⁵ Nelson Mandela echoed this sentiment after the referendum of March 1992, when he observed that whites understood that the days of white privilege were over.¹⁹⁶

The branch received a working paper from head office prior to the referendum, informing it that the Afrikaners were experiencing a time of transformation, not reformation.¹⁹⁷ At a joint meeting of local branches, the deputy Minister of Agriculture, Tobie Meyer, urged farmers to make agricultural land available to other groups when he said: “It is important to establish the image of the Afrikaner in agriculture – not as an oppressor, but as the founder and facilitator of new possibilities.”¹⁹⁸ In 1992, the different political models of the ANC, NP and Democratic Party were discussed.¹⁹⁹ The branch also received a number of working papers on the national negotiation process in 1992/93; these made it clear that the AB members’ biggest concerns under the new dispensation would be education and language.²⁰⁰ On 16 September 1993 members were informed what the NP election strategy for the 1994 elections would entail.

The political transformation of the 1990s dominated the branch’s agenda. However, members still monitored elections of school committees²⁰¹ and initiated one Action 2000 project – a community workshop on poverty.²⁰² Their branch’s local influence certainly waned in the 1990s. However, the members themselves, because of their prominence in the community, could still play a significant role in community affairs. Their greatest contribution in this period was probably their influence in persuading local Afrikaners to accept the profound national political changes.

A national process was initiated in 1993 to transform the AB from a confidential to an open organisation; in November of the same year, this was approved at a national conference. On 17 January 1994, the majority of the members of the local branch (whose minutes have been used extensively in the compilation of this study), decided that they did not wish to become part of the new organisation and the Wellington AB branch was accordingly disbanded. The reason these members provided for their decision was that a new organisation would not erase the negative perceptions many South Africans held towards of the AB; indeed, they expected

194 Stals, “Geskiedenis van die Afrikaner-Broederbond”, p 667

195 AB branch minutes, 20 August 1990

196 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 634

197 AB branch minutes, 21 January 1991

198 AB branch minutes, 17 June 1991 Translated from the original Afrikaans

199 AB branch minutes, 20 January 1992

200 AB branch minutes, 16 September 1991; 16 March 1992; 20 July 1992; 19 July 1993

201 AB branch minutes, 19 February 1990; 18 February 1991

202 AB branch minutes, 22 March 1992

increased labelling of the AB in the years to come. This sense of alienation had arisen largely because of the outcome of the national negotiation process on a new constitution.

Conclusion

The history of the AB branch discussed in this article indicates its involvement with Afrikaner nationalism from 1937 to 1994. It describes the manner in which local Afrikaner culture and interests were developed and supported locally in close association with national AB and NP strategies. Local Afrikaner power was well integrated with national politics and followed its progress closely. Whereas it played a part in supporting the process to roll segregation over into apartheid, it realised in the early 1970s that South Africa's racial diversity made fully fledged apartheid unfeasible and indeed unattainable. It thus began a phase of supporting the dismantling of apartheid over two decades, preparing for the eventuality of a new South Africa. In this process, it adopted idealistic views on Afrikaner power in a multiracial dispensation.

The AB found it difficult to maintain unity within Afrikaner ranks. Although differences of opinion arose, the Wellington AB branch helped to keep the majority of local Afrikaners loyal to the NP and ensured that eventually they were supportive of an integrated dispensation for South Africa. However, in the 1980s, the power of the local AB branch was undermined. Patterns of group thought arose and the national AB neither challenged nor supported them. Eventually, the branch felt alienated; in its opinion the new dispensation (a) did not provide adequate security for the preservation of Afrikaner culture and (b) symbolised the end of Afrikaner nationalism, despite their hopes that elements of this could be accommodated in the new political dispensation.

Abstract

The role of the Afrikaner Broederbond in local communities has not been widely explored. It is generally accepted that members of the AB, formerly a clandestine society, probably made a significant contribution to local politics during the apartheid era. This article examines the minutes of an AB branch in the town of Wellington in order to assess its political role in the period 1937–1994. It demonstrates that the local political role of the AB was somewhat limited and was mainly oriented towards the development of Afrikaner nationalism. From the 1970s, however, in anticipation of a post-apartheid dispensation it became an important discussion forum and persuasion arena for prominent local Afrikaner leaders to re-orientate themselves in the light of national socio-political change.

Opsomming

Die plaaslike rol van 'n Wellingtonse afdeling van die Afrikaner Broederbond, 1937–1994

As 'n voormalige geheime organisasie is dit onduidelik watter rol die Afrikaner Broederbond (AB) in plaaslike gemeenskappe vertolk het. Dit word algemeen aanvaar

dat AB-lede moontlik tydens die apartheidsera 'n leidende rol in plaaslike politiek gespeel het. Hierdie artikel lê die plaaslike rol bloot van 'n AB-afdeling in die funksionering van die dorp Wellington. Dit dui aan dat die plaaslike politieke rol van die AB eintlik beperk was en dat dit hoofsaaklik gerig was op die plaaslike ontwikkeling van Afrikaner-nasionalisme. Vanaf die 1970's, in afwagting van 'n postapartheid-bedeling, het hierdie afdeling egter 'n belangrike besprekingsforum en oortuigingsarena vir prominente plaaslike Afrikanerleiers geword om hulle in die lig van die landwye sosio-politieke verandering te heroriënteer.

Key words

Afrikaner Broederbond; Afrikanerbond; Afrikaner Broederbond branch; local Afrikaner influence; Afrikaner; Wellington; secret societies; local politics.

Slutelwoorde

Afrikaner Broederbond; Afrikanerbond; Afrikaner Broederbond-afdeling; plaaslike Afrikanerinvloed; Afrikaner; Wellington; geheime organisasies; plaaslike politiek.