

My reply to Sietse Bosgra's response

Dear Sietse Bosgra,

I have read your response to my open letter. My first reaction was that it contained so much racist garbage that it was not worth answering. However, in retrospect and on further reflection, I consider it necessary to grace it with a response, especially since it will most probably also be read by people who do not know the Dutch situation.

Your first point is that I am "bitter, seeking confrontation with the leading persons of all the other anti-apartheid organisations, in those days especially the AABN". This is absolutely nonsense and you know it. I have never sought any confrontation with you, Cor Groenendijk of Kairos or Conny Braam of the AABN. You referred in your report to De Volkskrant, 19 June 1975, in which I said "Vorster can give the AABN a gold medal...". This was true at the time, but became outdated. Both the AABN and the BOA were dynamic and not static movements. We actually co-operated with the AABN and Kairos in the campaign against the AMRO bank for giving direct loans to the S.A. government; also we published jointly with AABN a brochure on SACTU. We were well underway to co-operate increasingly with AABN and Kairos until you started meddling in the anti-apartheid struggle. Apart from that interview of 1975 can you come up with another example?

Your further make the remarkable, but equally false assertion that "in most anti-apartheid activities in the Netherlands described in the chapter BOA was not involved." We have not been invited and we did not refuse. Besides, our urban campaigns were very time consuming and labour intensive. Our days were more than full.

You continue to make fantastic and unfounded statements that during my stay in Holland I tried to increase support amongst the Dutch population "by accusing the audience in interviews and at meetings of being racists and at the origin of S.A. apartheid." Can you give any concrete examples supported by evidence? Take, for example, the BOA edition of the monthly Amandla. We published articles on racism by reputable experts such as Professor D. van Arkel, Professor J. Breman, Professor C.J. Labuschagne, Cedric Mayson, Mpo Ntoane, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Piet de Rooy, Dr. Karel Roskam, Ann Stoler, Professor John Rex, Professor W.F. Wertheim and others. These are all Europeans, except M. Ntoane. It is therefore nonsense to state "He did not accept us, white Dutchmen, as equally able and qualified to talk about the suffering of the black population under apartheid". Where is the evidence for this nonsense? Over 90% of the people in the BOA and in the cities all over Holland were Dutch people. You said it was therefore "relevant to mention in my report that in South Africa he was classified as coloured". This is not how you formulated it in your report. You are obsessed with colour and the pigmentation of people, whereas I am totally colour-blind insofar as people are concerned. A pertinent question arises, namely to what extent is this an attempt to make a racist appeal to other potential racists?

I did not complain that the AABN "refused to support BOA's orange boycott." Except for that article in 1975, can you give any further evidence? "Esau now suddenly also criticizes the Angola Comité for not supporting it." This is also absolutely nonsense. We never asked the AC to support our campaign. This is also not what I wrote.

I still maintain that Dr. Buskes and Dr. Karel Roskam are the two giants in the anti-apartheid struggle. Of course, I know that Buskes was the chairman and Roskam the secretary of the CZA. I referred to their immense work as individuals especially the enormous work of Roskam for more than forty years. But for you to pay rightful tribute to them would deprive you of your claim to be the main figure against apartheid. That is of course absurd. This is also the reason that you omitted to pay tribute to the South-Africans in exile.

It is also nonsense that BOA was the only organisation “that was dependent on state funding, that it had to close when this financing stopped.” BOA stopped for other reasons. We of course received money from private donors, the Catholic Bishops Conference, the Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk), X minus Y movement, Haëlla Foundation, the Local Council of Leiden and other sources. It was convenient for us to put a full stop to it at that moment. After all, change was already irreversible in S.A.

You in no way answer the contents of my open letter. Instead you misquote and distort the essence of what I wrote. I therefore maintain and stand by the open letter.

Esau du Plessis