

Sietse Bosgra's response to Esau Du Plesses's Open Letter

As Esau du Plessis was one of the many persons that contributed to the Dutch anti-apartheid activities I traced his address in Sweden to send him a copy of the Dutch chapter of the SADET study. Esau used this friendly and respectful gesture by me to raise a personal attack on me. I must conclude that he has not changed since he left our country: bitter, seeking confrontation with the leading persons of all the other anti-apartheid organisations, in those days especially the AABN.

It was not strange that SADET contacted me to write the history of the Dutch anti-apartheid struggle. After the fall of apartheid the existing Dutch anti-apartheid organisations founded a common committee together with some outside specialists in order to preserve all documentation and records, make them accessible for research, promote further research and publications. As its secretary most of the work fell on my shoulders.

During the writing of the Dutch chapter I was in regular contact with the relevant people who were connected with Kairos and AABN, and at the end I gave them the full script to read and comment. I deny that I "distorted facts by means of omissions and wrong information". In the Open Letter of Esau du Plessis there is not one convincing example to support this claim.

Esau uses this Open Letter to present a more complete picture of his anti-apartheid activities in the Netherlands and of his organisation BOA. Of course it was impossible for me to describe in 90.000 words all Dutch anti-apartheid activities in such detail and mention the contributions of every anti-apartheid activist, of the political parties, the trade unions, the churches etc. But BOA was by far the smallest of the different organisations, and moreover in most anti-apartheid activities in the Netherlands described in the chapter BOA was not involved.

During his stay in the Netherlands Esau tried to increase support amongst the Dutch population for the anti-apartheid struggle by accusing his audience in interviews and at meetings of being racists and at the origin of South African apartheid. From his Open Letter it becomes clear he still cherishes the same negative attitude to the Dutch public. Concerning the rise of the pro-apartheid movement in South Africa I did not "contribute apartheid to Germany" as Esau writes. From his Open Letter I conclude that we agree that the rise of apartheid was in the first place an autonomous process in South Africa. My view that there was very little connection with the Netherlands and more with German fascism is not "a gross falsification of history" but based on studying the relevant literature.

Contrary to the Dutch anti-apartheid activists and the few white South Africans that were connected with the Dutch anti-apartheid movement Esau could and did present himself in the Netherlands -and was often accepted- as representative of the victims of apartheid. At the same time he did not accept us, white Dutchmen, as equally able and qualified to talk about the suffering of the black population under apartheid. In that respect it is relevant to mention in my report that in South Africa he was classified as "coloured".

Esau complains that the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement (AABN) refused to support BOA's orange boycott, but it is strange that Esau now suddenly also criticizes the Angola Comité for not supporting it. There was a clear division of work. It would be just as stupid to complain

that BOA never collected money for the liberation movement of Mozambique or campaigned against NATO's arms deliveries to Portugal.

I correctly wrote that Esau “offered his support to the Comité Zuid-Afrika (CZA)” but refused to join it. This is completely in agreement with Esau's own statement in his Open Letter that he wrote articles for CZA's periodical, and his remark “that I soon became so bitterly disappointed and frustrated by the CZA that I never joined it and did not become a member.” Esau also in fact supports my text that he did not agree with the negative attitude of CZA towards the use of violence by the ANC. It is strange that he now suddenly praises in his Open Letter Rev. Buskes as a giant in the anti-apartheid struggle while the same Buskes was one of the leading persons in the CZA that was strongly opposed to support for the armed struggle of the ANC.

I wrote that BOA criticized the Dutch government's policy towards apartheid and added: “And yet the same government had subsidised the BOA's boycott campaign.” Why is this “an extremely colonial and paternalistic view”? As I described in the section on the finances of the anti-apartheid organisations all Dutch anti-apartheid organisations were in exactly the same position, and the South African ambassador was furious about this situation. But BOA was the only anti-apartheid movement in the Netherlands that was so dependent on state funding that it had to close when this financing stopped.

Another minor point of Esau's criticism is that there were only two local branches of the Azania Committee. But I did not write anything about the number of branches as I was not able to study the documentation of that organisation. Only now (2009) there are discussions about handing over the files to the common Dutch anti-apartheid archives. But of course there were in those days in any larger Dutch city Maoist supporters of the Azania Committee.

I conclude that there is no ground for “substantial rectifications of my report”.

Sietse Bosgra