

# The Jester in Verwoerd's Court: English Press Cartoons, 1959–1965

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## Abstract

The political cartoon has proven to be an effective means not only to mock but also to criticise the government of the day and to expose its abuse of power. The visual nature of cartoons, combined with humour, enables cartoon artists to bring across their message in a succinct manner. Cartoonists also employ references to events that their readership can relate to, making cartoons a mode of communication whose impact should not be underestimated. This article considers how cartoons that appeared in English-language South African newspapers viewed the Verwoerd government's policies, specifically the implementation of those regarding the Bantustans or homelands. The article focuses on how cartoon artists used two phenomena of the time, the Space Race and the Beatles, to convey their criticism of the National Party government. The article also considers the effectiveness of the cartoons artists – like jesters in the royal court, masking their moral judgement behind witty remarks – to unmask the true intentions of the government's homeland policy.

**Keywords:** National Party; H.F. Verwoerd; separate development; apartheid; Bantustans; homelands; political cartoons

With the passing of Advocate J.G. Strydom in 1958, Dr H.F. Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs, became prime minister of South Africa. It also marked a decade of National Party (NP) rule. The seat of power was not a comfortable one. The NP won the general elections in 1948 with a mere five seats and although they won the 1958 election convincingly, the opposition parties had more votes when combined, making it potentially difficult for the NP to implement new legislation. Notwithstanding the situation, the Verwoerd administration was intent on pushing through its various projects, from making South Africa a republic and breaking ties with the British Empire and substituting the imperial system with the decimal system, to replacing the predecessor's policy on segregation with an all-encompassing policy known as apartheid.

The English press was particularly critical of the NP's policies. It represented the English-speaking electorate that was suspicious of the party's Afrikaner nationalist standpoint and concerned with how they would be affected by certain of these policies. This article focuses on the English press, and specifically on how cartoonists employed by various English newspapers, viewed the implementation of the Bantustan or homeland policy. Cartoonists adopted the role of the fool or jester in the Verwoerd administration, poking fun at what they considered was an illogical and even puzzling course of action. For this article, cartoons that appeared in English-language South African newspapers between July 1958 and March 1966 are considered. These include the *Cape Argus*, *Cape Times*, *Daily Express*, *Eastern Province*

*Herald, Rand Daily Mail, Natal Daily News, The Daily News, Natal Mercury, The Star (Johannesburg), Sunday Express and Sunday Times (Johannesburg).*

In the first instance, the article discusses the role that cartoons play as an agent of social and political criticism and how their portrayal of current-day issues can be of value to researchers. Second, the historical time-frame or ‘the contextual knowledge of *what* the cartoonist is commenting upon’<sup>1</sup> is considered. The establishment of the Bantustans was a key feature of apartheid policy and this article offers a brief overview of the NP’s reasoning behind this policy. The article then provides an analysis of a selection of cartoons that appeared in English newspapers of the time and the methods employed by the cartoon artists to engage their readers and convey their message. In conclusion, the article weighs up the value of these cartoons, not only as historical sources. It considers how effective the cartoons were in ‘challenging assumptions that are taken for granted’<sup>2</sup> and the role, if any, that they played in the eventual dismantling of apartheid.

### **The power of the pen**

One of the earliest forms of political satire is the political cartoon.<sup>3</sup> According to the South African cartoon artist Anthony ‘Stidy’ Stidolph, the value of satire lies not only in the humour it generates but also in its function as critic.<sup>4</sup> Scholars agree that the basis of caricatures and cartoons has not only been to lampoon but also to expose and criticise ‘the abuse of power’ and political corruption.<sup>5</sup> Cartoons are considered as one of the foremost communication devices or ‘visual opinion news discourse[s]’ to deliver social criticism.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike print editorials, the visual nature of cartoons, throughout the centuries, made it possible to reach and communicate with people of all classes and levels of education.<sup>7</sup> Even in the late-twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, where literacy is far more widespread, cartoons are the most ‘read’ item on the editorial page.<sup>8</sup>

The key weapon in a cartoonist’s armoury<sup>9</sup> is not the sword but the pen, a ‘few deft touches’<sup>10</sup> of which can keep ‘the powerful humble, and governments accountable’.<sup>11</sup> As early as 1906, M.H. Spielmann described the cartoons from the weekly magazine *Punch* as a ‘crystallised’ opinion.<sup>12</sup> It is this ability to ‘reduce a complex situation to a formula which sums it up neatly’, rather than the comical portrayal of matters, that Ernst Gombrich considers the power of cartoons.<sup>13</sup>

In his foreword to a compilation of cartoons on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu sums up the impact of cartoons as follows:

It never ceases to amaze me how cartoonists [...] can cut through to the heart of whatever it is they are dealing with. [...] Times without number [the cartoonists] see the point so quickly, points that we lesser mortals take a while to comprehend or even longer to express quite so succinctly and [...] so devastatingly. [...] So the cartoonists here enable us to gain insight fairly quickly into what we might miss or take an unconscionable time discovering. They make us say, ‘Now I see the point!’<sup>14</sup>

Several scholars<sup>15</sup> agree that cartoons are ‘vivid, compact, attention-getting’<sup>16</sup> and a ‘purposeful condensation of sometimes complex meanings into a single configuration’.<sup>17</sup> However, unlike Gombrich they consider humour just as much an important aspect of cartoons. They are of the opinion that the ability to represent and comment on serious matters

by eliciting 'highly emotional attitudes' entertainingly and amusingly, as opposed to an intellectual discussion in an editorial or in-depth article, makes cartoons such persuasive rhetorical tools.<sup>18</sup> The humorous, even grotesque exaggeration of powerful decision makers' most prominent features,<sup>19</sup> reducing them to 'clumsy, stupid, incompetent oafs',<sup>20</sup> is merely the sugar coating of what J.N. Darling, Pulitzer Prize-winning American cartoonist, describes as a 'capsule of sober judgement'.<sup>21</sup>

As caricatures rely on eliciting emotions 'from outrage to delight', they often touch a nerve.<sup>22</sup> William Gamson and David Stuart liken cartoonists to 'a kind of peanut gallery', often mocking and even rude and disrespectful.<sup>23</sup> Rather than being a disadvantage, being relegated to the 'cheap seats' in the political arena counts in their favour, as it allows them the freedom to articulate that which cannot necessarily be expressed openly.<sup>24</sup> This 'licence to heckle' makes them a particularly 'tough gallery'.<sup>25</sup> Tutu, himself the subject of many a cartoon, likens the role of the cartoonist to that of the fool in a medieval court. The latter's witty, amusing and diverting comments, sometimes even bordering on offhand facetiousness, belied his insightful observations about the sovereign. More importantly, Tutu points out, 'he was able to get away, figuratively, with murder and [...] was able to take liberties with the [...] king'.<sup>26</sup>

The humorous nature of cartoons does not reduce them to 'simply inconsequential entertainment vehicles'<sup>27</sup> or condemn them to merely 'supplement the news presentation with statements of "meaning"'.<sup>28</sup> The critical view of the cartoonist is directed to 'burning matters of the day', with the intention, as Josh Greenberg points out, to 'frame a contemporary political or social issue by defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies'.<sup>29</sup> Cartoonists, therefore, operate with a moral purpose to 'further the cause they passionately support or to thwart a perceived wrong'.<sup>30</sup>

Georgianne McVay, Shelton Caswell and Richard Scully agree in their individual writings that 'a flourishing satirical press is a marker of a liberal, free press' and the cartoonist a hero, a 'pillar of democracy' who debunks 'political myths and [...] exposes the truth'.<sup>31</sup> Stuart and Gamson point out that this normative role makes cartoonists 'serious players' in issues of international importance and in 'challenging assumptions that are taken for granted'.<sup>32</sup> In light of this, scholars assert that cartoons not only reflect the 'prevailing feeling of the nation'<sup>33</sup> but can also mould public opinion.<sup>34</sup>

These above-mentioned qualities make cartoons of significant value for researchers.<sup>35</sup> In their 2012 article on the lessons to be learnt from cartoons, Ria Widd, Leyland Pitt and Adam Mills summarise the use of political cartoons as follows:

Political cartoonists draw their inspiration from the news. Political scandals, sexual rumormongering, conflicts, victories, defeats, disasters, and economic turmoil provide the cartoonist with a never-ending flow of stories to tell by means of pictures. The cartoonist seeks to reflect not only what is happening but also what people are thinking such that stories create pictures and, in turn, pictures tell stories. Thus, tracking cartoons over time provides an excellent gauge of sentiment toward various issues, what was and is important over time, what people were and are thinking, and what they were and are passionate about.<sup>36</sup>

This is in line with McVay who states that cartoons enable researchers to grasp the majority attitudes that lead to certain decisions and actions. She also considers the 'graphic

commentary' that these cartoons provide as indispensable to historians, as they serve as cultural-historical source from which researchers can form a picture about a certain period in history.<sup>37</sup>

To form such a clear picture, researchers should access an 'assumed memory bank' or a 'store of background knowledge that one calls upon when interpreting the everyday common-sense world'.<sup>38</sup> This memory bank refers to a certain time-frame and space in which cartoons are set. Crucial to the analysis of discourse, therefore, is an awareness of the broader context within which a specific text, or, as in this study, a cartoon, was constructed. As early as the 1960s, academics recognised the importance of a 'theory of caricature' that would explain not only the caricature or cartoon itself, but the role its producers (i.e. cartoonists and publishers), the milieu within which these cartoonists work and the audiences they address play in shaping its meaning.<sup>39</sup> Research that is more recent<sup>40</sup> concludes that such a theory would also consider the social structure and the historical epoch within which the cartoon emerges to provide, in the words of Ray Morris, 'a "cognitive map" for understanding everyday life' to which the cartoon refers.<sup>41</sup>

### **Mapping Verwoerd's court**

NP officials endeavoured to justify the policy of segregation not only as a matter of control but as one in which persons of authority had a moral obligation to ensure the well-being and advancement of people of colour.<sup>42</sup> In an article on the South African Native Administration, Doreen Atkinson describes many white officials' relationship with black residents in their charge as that of a patriarchal family. As black people were the designated minor in this relationship, their individual rights and privacy were of 'relative unimportance', and the moral education they received from the paternalistic parents 'invariably [had] a coercive dimension'. Yet, in many cases the bond by white officials for black residents was one of intimacy, affection and concern for their well-being.<sup>43</sup>

This sense of 'concern' can be seen in the proceedings at the annual conference of 1957 of the Institute of Administrators of Non-European Affairs' (IANA). Dr Language (Manager of Non-European Affairs in Brakpan/Township Manager of Brakpan) pointed out that the social decay of the urban Bantu was due to 'detrribalisation and urbanisation as a consequence of which their sense of tribal and community discipline has been lost with nothing to take its place'. He questioned what his fellow administrators had done about the problem and went on to admit that they still had to find 'a substitute for the lost community pride and discipline for which the traditional Bantu were so renowned'.<sup>44</sup>

Under NP rule, however, this paternalistic relationship took on a more totalitarian character.<sup>45</sup> Although Strijdom was an 'unabashed defender of race mastery', his successor, Verwoerd, was careful to avoid the negative connotations to biological race determinism in the era after the Second World War.<sup>46</sup> He 'insisted that apartheid had to do more with the preservation of cultural and ethnic difference than racial hierarchies'.<sup>47</sup> As Saul Dubow points out, framing the policy in this way 'proved to be both a more pliable and palatable means of explaining the desirability of different peoples or nations (*volke*) to develop along their own independent lines'<sup>48</sup> – in what was called 'separate but equal'.

According to the NP, this line of thinking could be backed up scientifically by 'the new ethnological discipline of *volkekunde* (Afrikaner nationalist anthropology)' that proposed a 'theory of immanent group differences based on culture and inner spiritual qualities

(*volksei*)'.<sup>49</sup> The Tomlinson Commission Report (1954) further strengthened this line of thinking. The findings proposed that in order to safeguard each group's unique qualities, special rural land reserves had to be created for black South Africans.<sup>50</sup> Called 'Bantustans' or 'homelands', these areas would be demarcated along ethnic lines, which the NP government claimed were the 'original homes' of the black people of South Africa.<sup>51</sup> These reserves would be run along the lines of the 'original tribal order' under the strong leadership of chiefs.<sup>52</sup> In the words of Dr W.W.M. Eiselen, sometimes referred to as an 'intellectual architect' of apartheid,<sup>53</sup> 'the duty of the native [is] not to become a black European, but to become a better native, with ideals and a culture of his own'.<sup>54</sup> A resurrection of what was considered the traditional order would also provide a bulwark against the 'dislocation of the social structure, with a consequent weakening of binding values',<sup>55</sup> which was experienced by urban Blacks in the townships of major industrialised areas.

The NP government foresaw a time when the Bantustans would reach a level of political and economic development to no longer be reliant on South Africa and as 'independent states would then coexist alongside white South Africa in a spirit of friendship and collaboration'.<sup>56</sup> Verwoerd went as far as maintaining that this development would be 'fully consonant with [the] processes of decolonisation in the rest of Africa' as each ethnic group would have its own government and the people would enjoy full rights as citizens. He even foresaw the creation of 'a "commonwealth" in southern Africa'.<sup>57</sup>

However, Verwoerd's insistence on the positive aspects of apartheid could not mask the true intention behind Bantustans policy.<sup>58</sup> Apartheid was 'an ideology born of the will to survive or, put differently, the fear of extinction' of the white South African population.<sup>59</sup> The NP won the election 'on the back of fearmongering about the *swart gevaar* – "black danger", as represented by African urbanisation and anxiety about white economic collapse'.<sup>60</sup> They maintained that white survival would only be possible if they were the demographic majority. As black people 'had no right to be in urban areas other than to minister to the needs of whites', 'more durable forms of social organisation' were needed to solve what the NP administration considered 'fundamentally undesirable'.<sup>61</sup> The solution came in the form of the policy of apartheid, and specifically the relocation of urban blacks to Bantustans. The apartheid policy had to reshape South African society to ensure its continued existence.<sup>62</sup> Put differently, apartheid was a 'major administrative mechanism' not only for curbing the rights of black people as citizens but also by physically and permanently removing them from South Africa.<sup>63</sup> This entailed a massive relocation programme that forced an estimated 3.5 million people from their homes and livelihoods to be resettled in the Bantustans.<sup>64</sup> This ambitious project was grist to the mill of cartoonists of the English press. The following section examines their response to the government's plans.

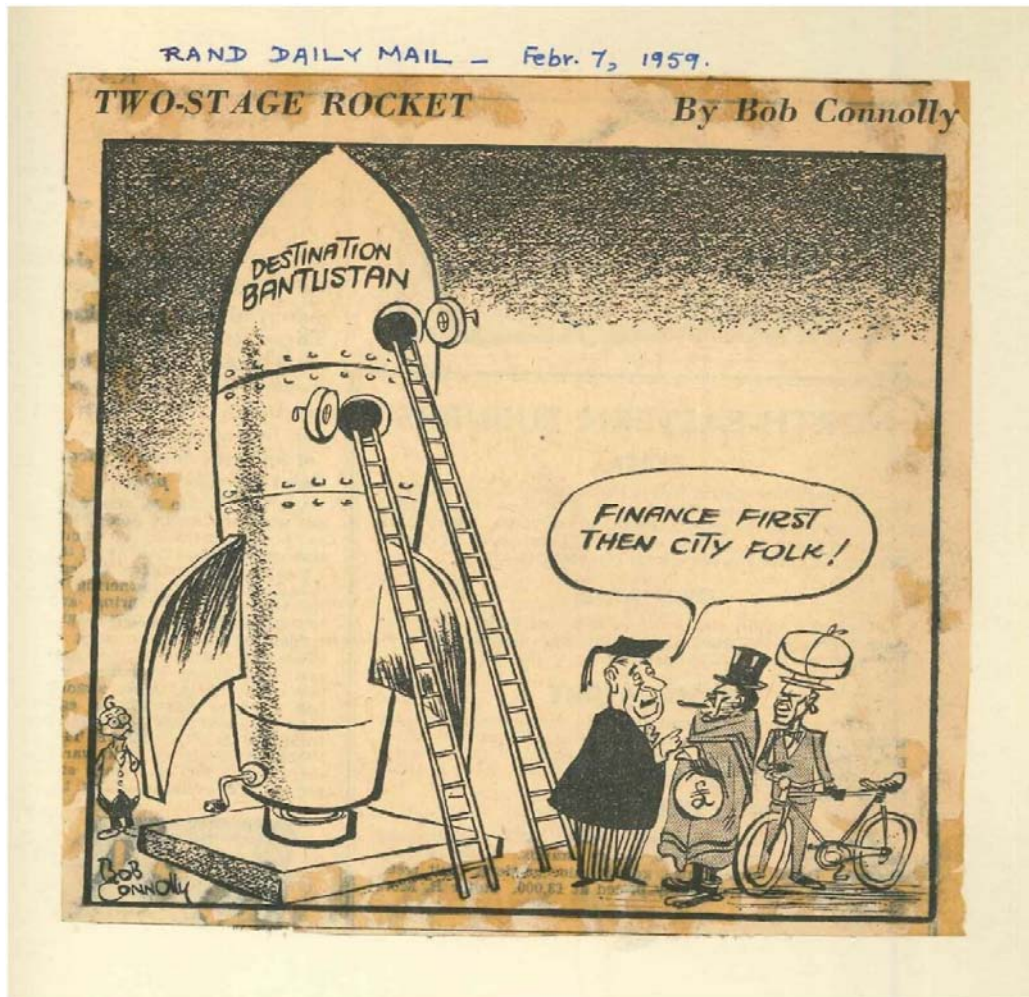
### **Making mischief in Verwoerd's court**

In their criticism of the NP's segregation policy, the cartoons varied in their tone: on the one hand, the NP was portrayed as an incompetent, blundering fool putting in place impractical, even ludicrous, policies, ignoring international criticism and wasting the taxpayers' money. On the other hand, the Verwoerd administration was seen as self-important, aggressive and inhumane. As the division of black people into designated ethnic groups often took place on an arbitrary basis, particularly in the case of people of mixed ethnic ancestry, families were divided purely according to skin colour or the language they spoke.<sup>65</sup>

For cartoon artists, an ideal way to engage the public is to use references to historical events and personages or past cultural texts or to focus on events that appear regularly in the general news and have an element of excitement.<sup>66</sup> During the period in question, the race to make travel in outer space possible and the popular music group the Beatles dominated international news. The collection selected for this article includes 6 cartoons making reference to the Beatles and 10 depicting space travel.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Soviet Union (USSR) and the United States of America (USA) entered into what came to be known as the Cold War. These superpowers competed for mastering space flight which, coupled with the ability to manufacture missile-based nuclear arms, was seen as the symbol of ideological superiority and essential for national security. Initially, the USSR headed the race with the first successful launch of a spacecraft, the Sputnik 1, into the earth's orbit in 1957 and sending the first human, Yuri Gagarin, into space in 1961.<sup>67</sup> In 1969, the USA took the lead when it landed a manned mission on the moon. This captured the imagination of people across the world and the English press was quick to use the metaphor of space flight to criticise the apartheid policy and poke fun at the NP.

The *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Times* both used the space rocket to point to the exorbitant cost of establishing various Bantustans across South Africa and the absurdity of relocating urban blacks who made up the majority of the workforce in industries. In the *Rand Daily Mail* of 7 February 1959, the government's implementation of the Bantustan policy is portrayed as a two-stage rocket, the first part consisting of allocating funds to the project and the second, relocating urban blacks to the Bantustans. In front of the rocket Daan de Wet Nel, Minister of Bantu Administration and Development for the period 1958–1966, addresses two black men with the words, 'Finance first, then city folk!' (see Figure 1). With a PhD in anthropology, Nel was deemed as the perfect candidate to implement the Bantustan policy as he supposedly had knowledge of the 'true' needs of the various ethnic groups in South Africa.<sup>68</sup> The cartoonist portrays him as wearing a square academic cap. This, however, is not to show respect for his learning but rather to mock the NP's claim that its policy was based on academic research. The black man directed to enter the rocket's first stage wears a blanket, as traditionally worn by Basotho, but with a Western-style top hat and a cigar, denoting affluence and sophistication. The juxtapositioning of the two styles is jarring to the viewer as the cartoonist is trying to convey how irreconcilable the needs of urban blacks are with what Bantustan policy was holding up as their 'true culture'. This black man is also holding a bag of money, hinting at the fact that the implementation of the policy would cost blacks the most, not only in monetary terms. The Black man destined for the second stage of the rocket is an urban black, dressed in a western-style suit and hat. In contrast with this outfit, he is carrying a bundle with his few belongings on his head, the traditional way of transporting things like firewood or pots of water. He is holding a bicycle, which is a recurring theme in cartoons on the implementation of the apartheid policy. When blacks still were allowed to live in what were designated as white areas, they relied on bicycles as a mode of affordable transport. With the relocation of blacks to townships outside of urban areas, the distance made bicycle travel unviable, necessitating black workers to find alternate modes of transport. This added to their already strained financial situation.



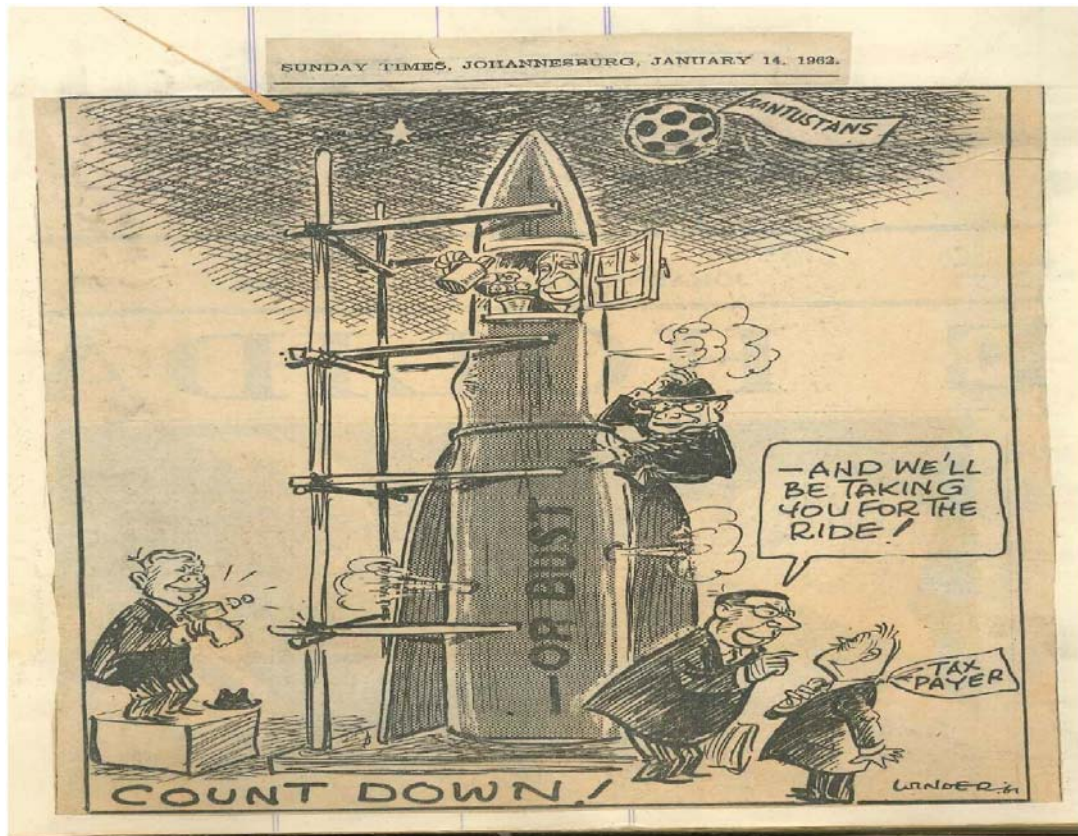
**Figure 1.** Bob Connolly, ‘Two-Stage Rocket’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 February 1959.

Source: University of Pretoria Archives (UPA), I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

On 14 January 1962, *The Sunday Times* published a cartoon entitled ‘Count Down!’ (see Figure 2). It shows a rocket, resting in its scaffolding and ready to be launched, bearing the name ‘— or Bust’. It plays on Verwoerd’s impatience to get the relocation programme instituted is clear: he is depicted with an alarm clock strapped to his wrist, counting down the seconds to lift-off. It also represents De Wet Nel’s efforts at selling the notion that Blacks would be returning to their ‘true homes’: he is depicted standing inside the rocket, watering a pot plant on the windowsill, making the rocket look more homely. Hans Abrahams, Governor-General<sup>69</sup> of the Transkei homeland, clings to the side of the rocket, holding on to his hat. He definitely does not want to be left behind, as his position comes with a certain measure of prestige and monetary compensation. In front of the rocket, drawing the reader’s attention, is Eben Donges, then Minister of Finance, addressing an alarmed-looking taxpayer. His words, ‘— And we’ll be taking you for the ride!’, are meant figuratively, namely to cheat or swindle taxpayers out of their money to pay for the implementation of the apartheid policy.<sup>70</sup> In the sky above, among the stars, is a planet flying a flag with the term



'Bantustans'. The black spots on the planet's otherwise white surface make it easily identifiable: it refers to the NP's concern with 'black spots' – areas where blacks reside – in what they consider should be 'white territory'.<sup>71</sup> The message of the cartoon is that black people are not welcome in urban areas and that the NP will go to any lengths to remove them from the townships that surrounded major industrial centres. The cartoonist exaggerates the NP's efforts to remove black people by using the image of the rocket, as space travel will send them away as far as possible, namely outside the earth's atmosphere.



**Figure 2.** Teddy Winder, 'Count Down!', *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 14 January 1962.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

A cartoon in the *Rand Daily Mail* of 5 June 1959, entitled 'Orbit Corner', portrays the harsh realities of the apartheid policy for black people (see Figure 3). De Wet Nel is portrayed sitting at a desk addressing a black man. In front of the desk is a placard with the following ultimatum: 'Farm Labour or Else'. But de Wet Nel is quick to point to another option, with the words 'It so happens you have another choice!' This choice is to board a space rocket named 'Bantustan Special', surrounded by notices stating 'Departing Any Day Now', 'All Aboard!' and 'Room for One More'. The fact that black people are offered a choice alludes to free will. The bitter irony of using the concept of choice is that black people could not make such decisions about their future as they did not have the right to vote. Moreover, whichever of the two options they chose, both would have dire consequences: if they wanted to stay in South Africa, they would be relegated to menial, poorly paid farm labour; and if



they moved to the Bantustans, the opportunities to make a living would be limited to non-existent.

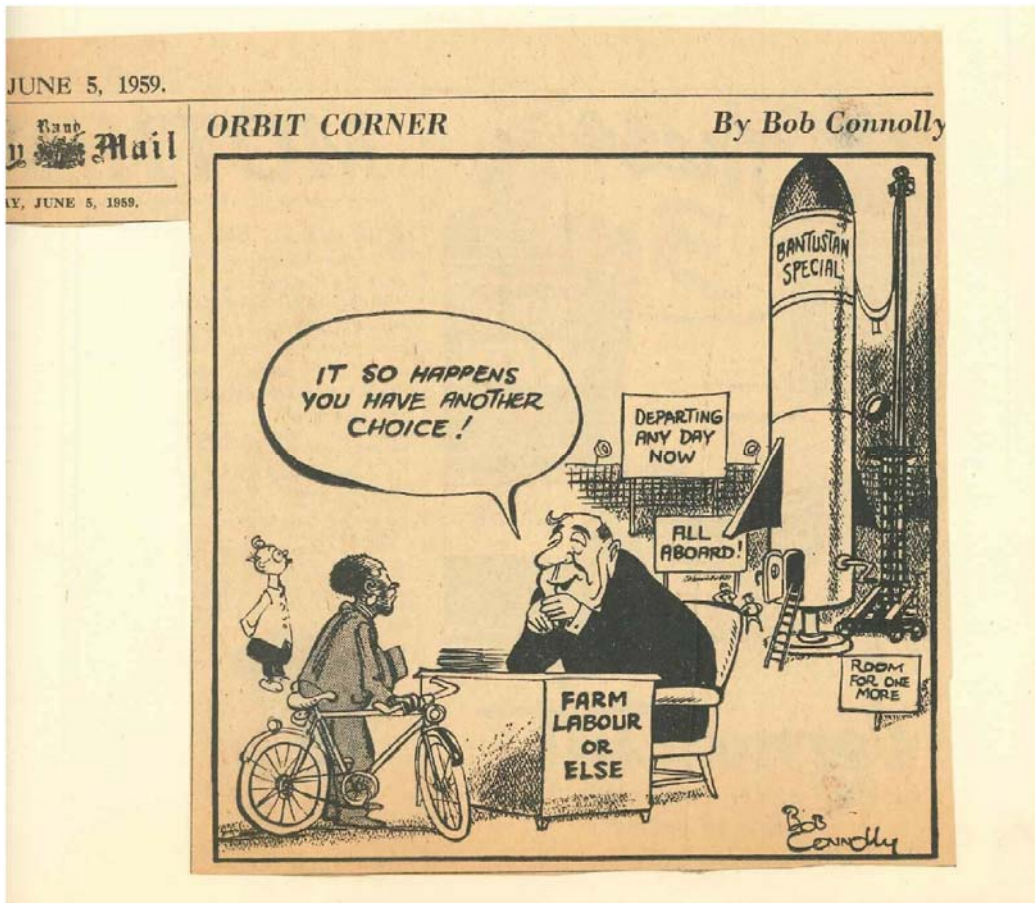
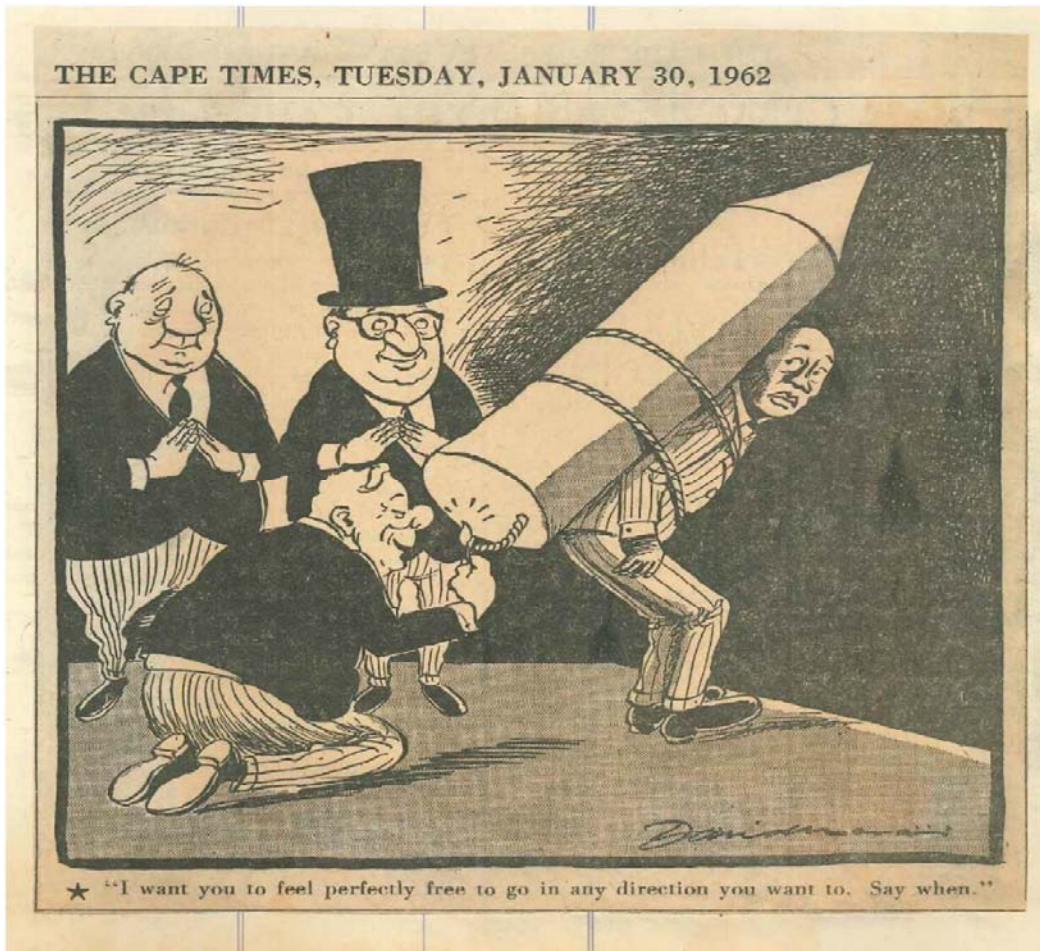


Figure 3. Bob Connolly, 'Orbit Corner', *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 June 1959.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

In a similar vein, a cartoon that appeared in *the Cape Times* of 30 January 1962 mocks the NP's efforts to promote its Bantustan policy by presenting the relocation process as a choice (see Figure 4). The cartoon portrays De Wet Nel and Abrahams looking on as Verwoerd lights a rocket attached to a black man's back. Verwoerd's actions and his words to the man – 'I want you to feel perfectly free to go in any direction you want to. Say when' – express the irony of the situation. As the cartoon illustrates, the relocation to Bantustans was non-negotiable. Besides, not only did black people have no say whether they wanted to move, they also had no choice where they would move to. As allocation to an ethnic identity was based on very narrowly interpreted cultural and language criteria, many people were removed from their place of birth and, as already mentioned, families of 'mixed' ethnicity separated.



**Figure 4.** David Marais, *Cape Times*, 30 January 1962.

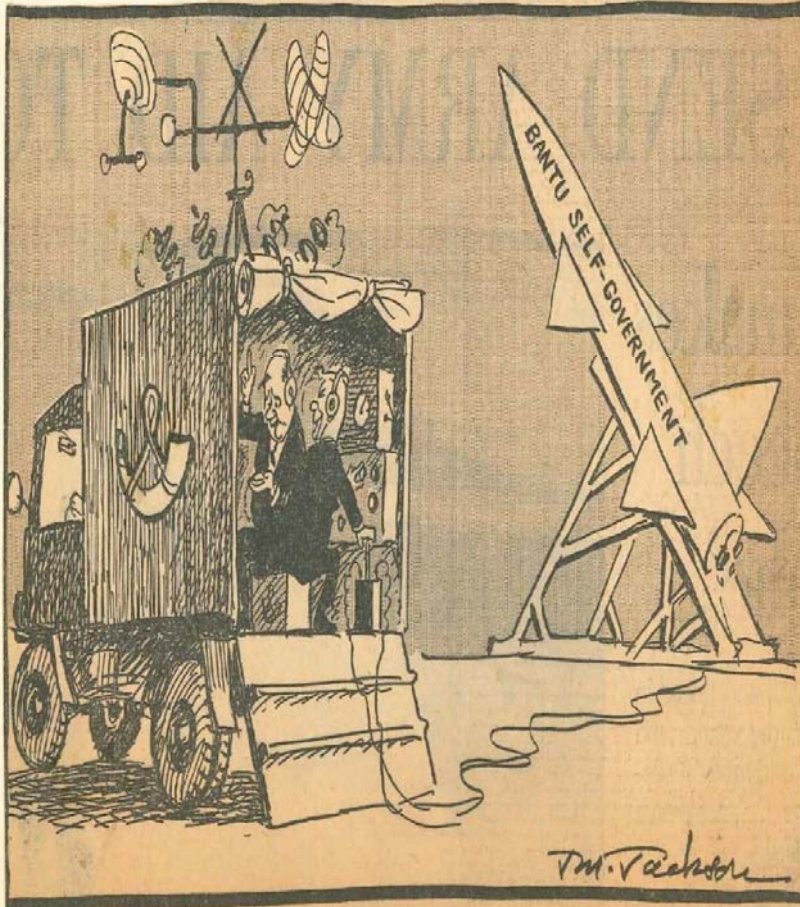
Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

In *the Cape Argus* of 19 May 1961, the relocation of black people is shown as almost a fait accompli (see Figure 5). Seated in a little truck, emblazoned with the NP emblem on the side, De Wet Nel and Verwoerd are portrayed as two engineers ready to launch the 'Bantu Self-Government' rocket. Verwoerd, grinning from ear to ear at the prospect of ridding the country of black people, is ready to push down the lever to send the rocket into space, while De Wet Nel is counting down the seconds. Both are wearing earphones to protect their ears from the noise, alluding to the NP's unwillingness to listen to any advice or heed any criticism.



THE CAPE ARGUS, TUESDAY, MAY 19, 1959

## Guided missile!



**Figure 5.** J.M. Jackson, 'Guided Missile!', *Cape Argus*, 19 May 1959.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

Several cartoons published in *the Cape Times* also alluded to the NP stubbornly going ahead with its policies despite international disapproval. In a cartoon published on 30 March 1961, Verwoerd, De Wet Nel and Eric Louw, Minister of Foreign Affairs, are dressed in space suits, complete with oxygen masks, ready to take off on the rocket 'S.A.S. Weg-Is-Ons' (away we go) (see Figure 6). Their head-in-the-sand attitude towards international criticism is emphasised by an ostrich, also in space gear. Verwoerd's remark, 'And, since the rest of the world stubbornly persists in refusing to accept our policies, I have no option but to withdraw my application for continued membership', refers to what David Scher describes at the 'lonely road' South Africa faced after leaving the Commonwealth.<sup>72</sup> Verwoerd did not

consider South Africa becoming a republic as a hindrance to its continued membership of the Commonwealth; but he did not foresee other member countries' vehement reaction to the apartheid policy. Faced with mounting criticism and the possibility of being expelled, he unexpectedly withdrew South Africa from the Commonwealth on 15 March 1961.<sup>73</sup>



**Figure 6.** David Marais, *Cape Times*, 30 March 1961.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

In August of the same year, *the Cape Times* again touched on the fact that the Verwoerd government might have started to feel the pinch of both national and international censure. Verwoerd and De Wet Nel are floating in space with the earth and the moon in the distance, when Verwoerd remarks: 'What's so special about this Russian fellow just because he got back to earth? *I like it here*' (see Figure 7). Another cartoon published two years later again shows Verwoerd defiant in the face of criticism and equally removed from reality (see Figure



8). Floating in space with earth far below, he discusses with his fellow astronauts, De Wet Nel and Abrahams, the newspaper headline that South Africa is to get a rocket institute. His confident conclusion is that: 'Considering how far we've gone without rockets, just think what we could do WITH rockets'. In the next three decades, the NP would invest heavily in creating parastatal companies in an attempt to become more self-sufficient in the face of international sanctions.<sup>74</sup>



**Figure 7.** Unsigned cartoon, *Cape Times*, 9 August 1961.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.



**Figure 8.** David Marais, *Cape Times*, 29 October 1963.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

A cartoon which appeared in *the Natal Daily News* of 6 February 1962 refers to the paternalistic relationship between the two races and, more specifically, to how this 'parent-child' relationship changed under the Verwoerd administration (see Figure 9).<sup>75</sup> It portrays the Bantustans as children, incapable of looking after themselves and dependent on adults for making decisions in their interest and for their well-being. The Bantustan of Zululand is depicted as a little boy pleading with Verwoerd: 'No Mister, Sonny does not feel he'd like to be South Africa's next spaceman'. Verwoerd, however, shows no mercy. Like a parent or teacher, ready to scold and reprimand a naughty child, he grabs him by the ear with the intention of attaching the boy to a kite labelled 'Independent Zululand Bantustan Plan'. The newly established Transkei is also portrayed as a little boy, crying as he flies in the air, attached to an 'Independent Transkei Bantustan Plan' kite held on a string, by De Wet Nel. The image of a kite seemingly flying freely, yet attached and controlled from a distance, refers to the superficial independence of Bantustans.<sup>76</sup> No other government ever recognised these entities as independent countries and economically they remained to a large extent



dependent on South Africa.<sup>77</sup> The cartoon also alludes to the NP's incompetence. Armed with a pot of 'Apartheid Paste' glue, scissors, string and a few blueprints, the NP's attempts to create a completely segregated society are portrayed as a children's craft project that stands in sharp contrast to the great scientific and technological advances that characterised the Space Race.



**Figure 9.** Jock Leyden, *Natal Daily News*, 6 February 1962.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

Similarly, a cartoon in the *Rand Daily Mail* of 13 May 1963 entitled 'Launching' likens the NP politicians to boys playing in the backyard, trying to imitate the two superpowers (see Figure 10). The NP's launch pad for its plans is a homemade see-saw consisting of a wooden plank balanced over a barrel. Placed on the bottom end of the see-saw is the rocket 'Bantustan or Bust', with Abrahams (dubbed the 'Hon. Astronaut', thus taking a stab at his elevated title), holding the liberty flame, ready to be launched into space. De Wet Nel, counting down from 10, is ready to jump onto the opposite end of the see-saw, to send the rocket into space. Ministers Louw, Donges, Verwoerd and Vorster are peering over the picket

fence at what the cartoonist labels a ‘Cape Palaver’, a mere fuss. This cartoon is not the first stab by this specific cartoonist, Bob Connolly, at the government’s lack of sound reasoning. In the two cartoons represented in Figure 1 (*Rand Daily Mail*, 7 February 1959) and Figure 3 (*Rand Daily Mail*, 5 June 1959), he already portrayed the South African rockets as completely outdated, equipped just like early motor vehicles with cranks to start the combustion engines.



**Figure 10.** Bob Connolly, ‘Launching’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 May 1963.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

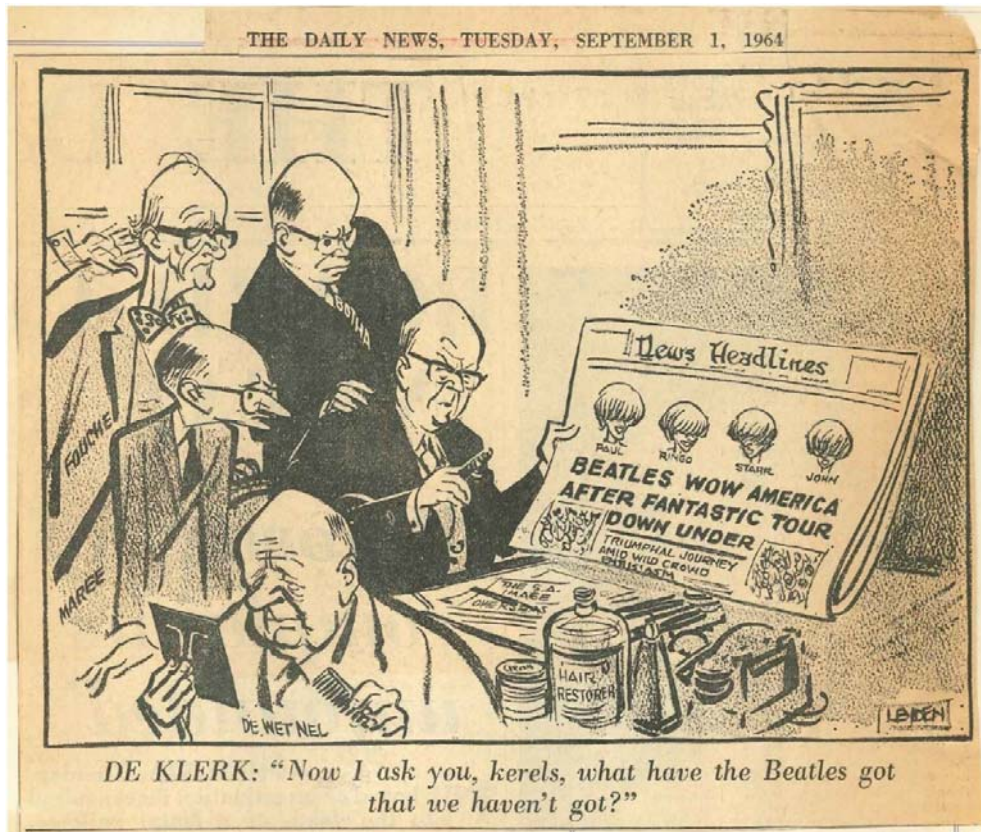
In the cartoons referring to the Beatles, Verwoerd, De Wet Nel and several other ministers (Minister of Labour, Jan de Klerk, Minister of Indian Affairs, Willem Maree, Minister of Defense, Jim Fouché and Minister of Public Works, Paul Sauer) as well as Abrahams are depicted as members of the music group, thus playing with the theme of the Beatles’ popularity. The Beatles, undoubtedly one of the most popular English rock bands in history, were at the height of their popularity after an enormously successful world tour in 1964, which included countries such as Australia and the USA, triggering an ‘intense fan frenzy’

dubbed 'Beatlemania'.<sup>78</sup> By the same year, South Africa had become increasingly isolated from the international community. In 1962, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 1761, condemning apartheid; and the very next year a Special Committee Against Apartheid Realised was established to coordinate action against the NP government. One of the most effective ways for member states to show their aversion to the policy was to boycott South Africa. Economic, military, cultural and sport sanctions were implemented, effectively cutting South Africa off from the rest of the world.<sup>79</sup>

Also known by the nickname 'the Fab Four', the Beatles 'suggested new ways of being'.<sup>80</sup> From the 'well-behaved look with slim suits, which gave them an elegant silhouette, ties and the mop-top hairstyle, a voluminous haircut with bangs',<sup>81</sup> to the 'the way they spoke, the songs they created with an effortlessness that seemed almost alchemical [...] they challenged the tired conventions that defined class-bound, insular, early-60s Britain'.<sup>82</sup>

In stark contrast, the middle-aged, often balding and overweight NP members, dressed in morning dress,<sup>83</sup> were backwards-looking and narrow-minded. As ardent Afrikaner nationalists, they looked to events of the past, such as the Great Trek and the South African War, to garner support for their cause. Comparing the NP members to the Beatles, therefore, seems ludicrous, emphasising what desperate measures, according to the cartoonists, the South African government would have to take to regain international favour. This is made clear in a cartoon that appeared in *The Daily News* on 1 September 1964 (see Figure 11). De Klerk, points to the news headlines reporting on the successful world tour of the Beatles and asks his fellow ministers (Minister of Justice Blackie Swart, Sauer and Fouché): 'Now I ask you, kerels [chaps], what have the Beatles got that we haven't got?' The contrast between their bald heads and thick-rimmed glasses and the youthful Beatles is further accentuated by De Wet Nel who, holding a hand mirror, combs his few remaining strands of hair with serum from a bottle of 'Hair Restorer' standing on a table next to a telephone and other office supplies.

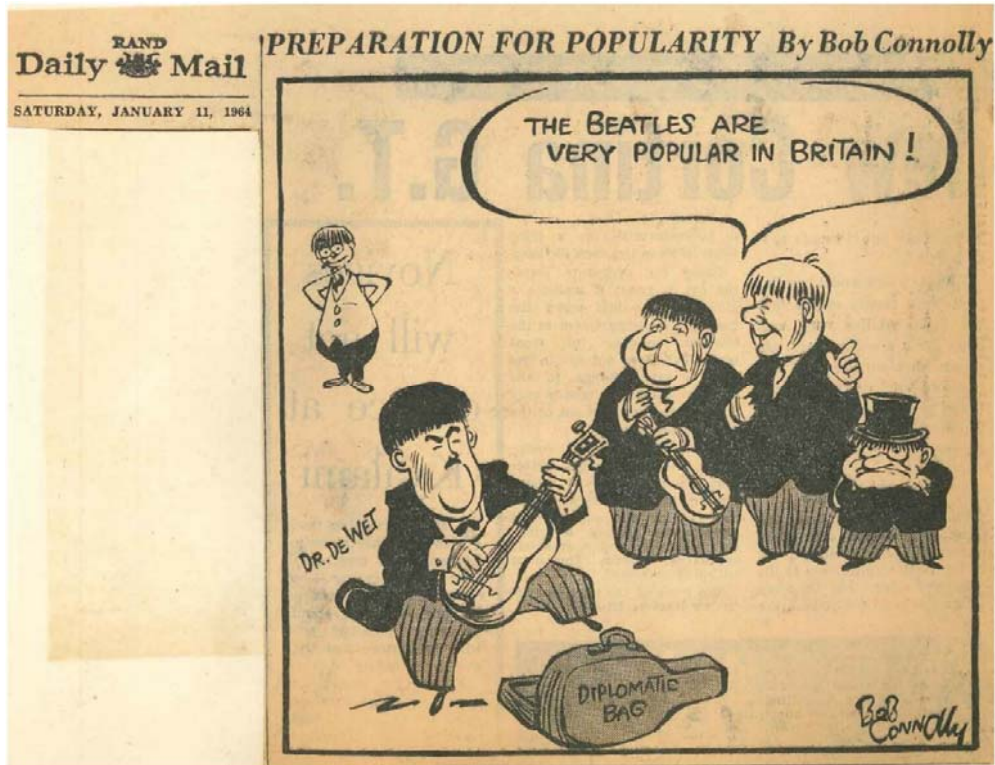




**Figure 11.** Jock Leyden, *The Daily News*, 1 September 1964.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

On 11 January 1964 a cartoon appeared in the *Rand Daily Mail* entitled ‘Preparation for Popularity’ (see Figure 12). A pleased-looking Verwoerd suggests that by disguising themselves as the Beatles, they would win some popularity abroad. Next to him stand a down-cast De Wet Nel and Abrahams, unconvinced of the plan, and this with good reason. Although all three are already sporting moptops and De Wet Nel holds a guitar, their disguise is incomplete as they are still dressed in morning dress. The cartoon further underlines the desperation of their situation by portraying the fourth member of their group, a Dr De Wet, as a beggar. Strumming a guitar, he is hoping for a kind passer-by to throw some coins into his guitar case on the floor in front of him. The case bears the inscription ‘Diplomatic Bag’, emphasising the savoir-faire it would take to garner international support.

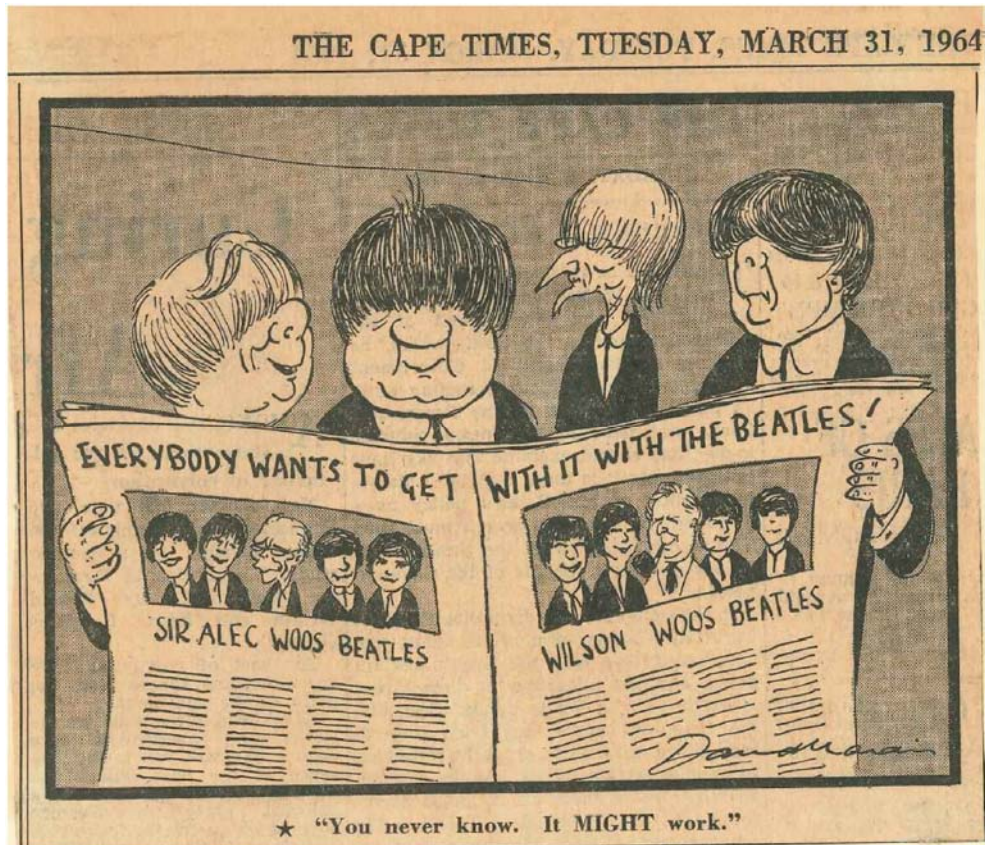


**Figure 12.** Bob Connolly, 'Preparation for Popularity', *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 January 1964.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

In a similar vein, *the Cape Times* of 31 March 1964 shows Verwoerd, De Wet Nel, Minister of Post and Telegraphs, Albert Hertzog and Minister of Finance, Theo Donges disguised as the Beatles reading a newspaper article on the British Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas Home and his successor Harold Wilson 'wooing' the Beatles (see Figure 13). Verwoerd remarks, 'You never know. It might work', thus suggesting that by disguising themselves as the Beatles, they might be able to win favour with the British politicians. The cartoon needs to be understood in the context of Verwoerd's return from the 1961 meeting of the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth of Nations, at which he had withdrawn South Africa's membership from the organisation. When he received a hero's welcome at the airport upon his return, the NP was quick to capitalise on these sentiments and portrayed South Africa's exit from the Commonwealth as settling the score of the Peace of Vereeniging of 1902 that marked the Boer Republics' loss of independence after the South African War.<sup>84</sup> Verwoerd realised, however, that the loss of Commonwealth membership meant losing the support of an important ally in international affairs.<sup>85</sup> Outside of the Commonwealth, South Africa was left with very few supporters, except for countries similarly isolated due to human rights abuses or foreign intervention, such as Chile, Israel and Taiwan.<sup>86</sup>





**Figure 13.** David Marais, *Cape Times*, 31 March 1964.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

In an attempt to attract English-speaking voters, the NP appointed two English-speaking ministers in 1961. Frank Waring, who became Minister of Information, was a Springbok rugby player who had been part of the successful tour to Great Britain in 1933 where the visitors won all five matches. The NP hoped that this would make him popular with both the English- and Afrikaans-speaking public. In a cartoon that appeared in *the Cape Times* on 17 January 1964, Verwoerd addresses Waring, along with De Wet Nel and Donges (see Figure 14). They are all dressed in a Beatles disguise, except for Waring who, in rugby shorts and shoes, is depicted reliving his glory days as Springbok. De Wet Nel is beating a traditional African drum, alluding to his position as Minister of Native Administration and his academic background as ethnographer. The cartoonist has exaggerated their moptop hairstyles, with the fringes completely obscuring their sight, hinting that they are blind to the world's opinion. Verwoerd is reminding them to make as much noise as possible as 'that is what keeps you at the top of the hit parade'. Judging from the cartoon's mocking tone, it is more a case of 'empty vessels make the most sound', underlining the futility of their attempts.

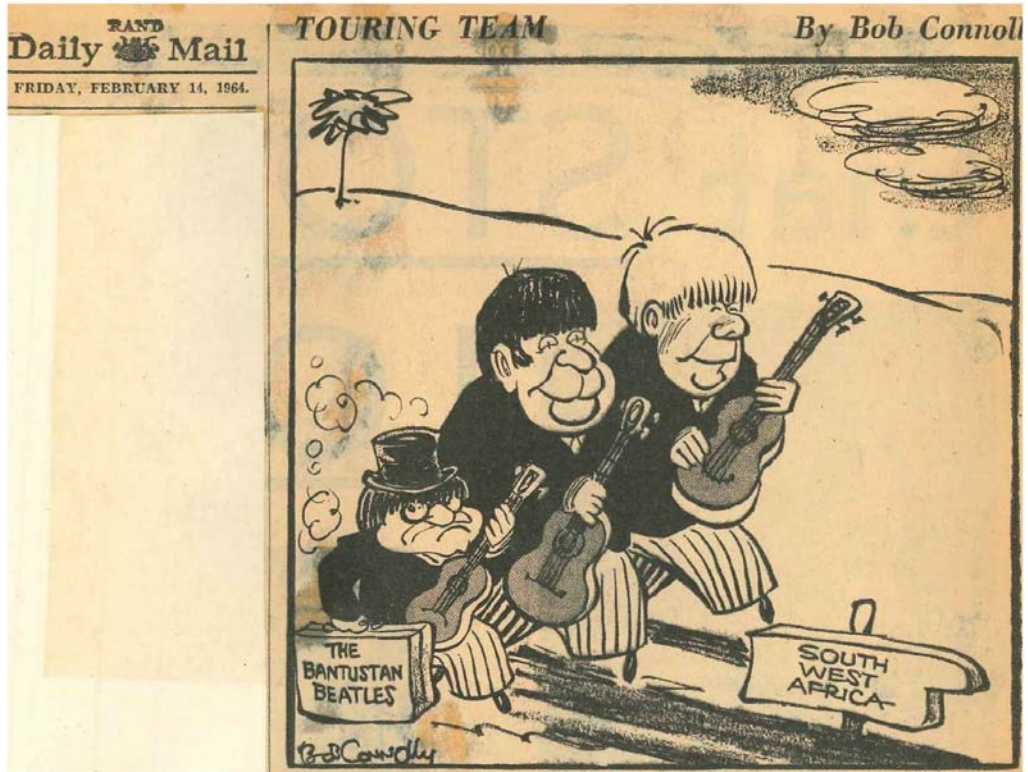




Figure 14. David Marais, *Cape Times*, 17 January 1964.

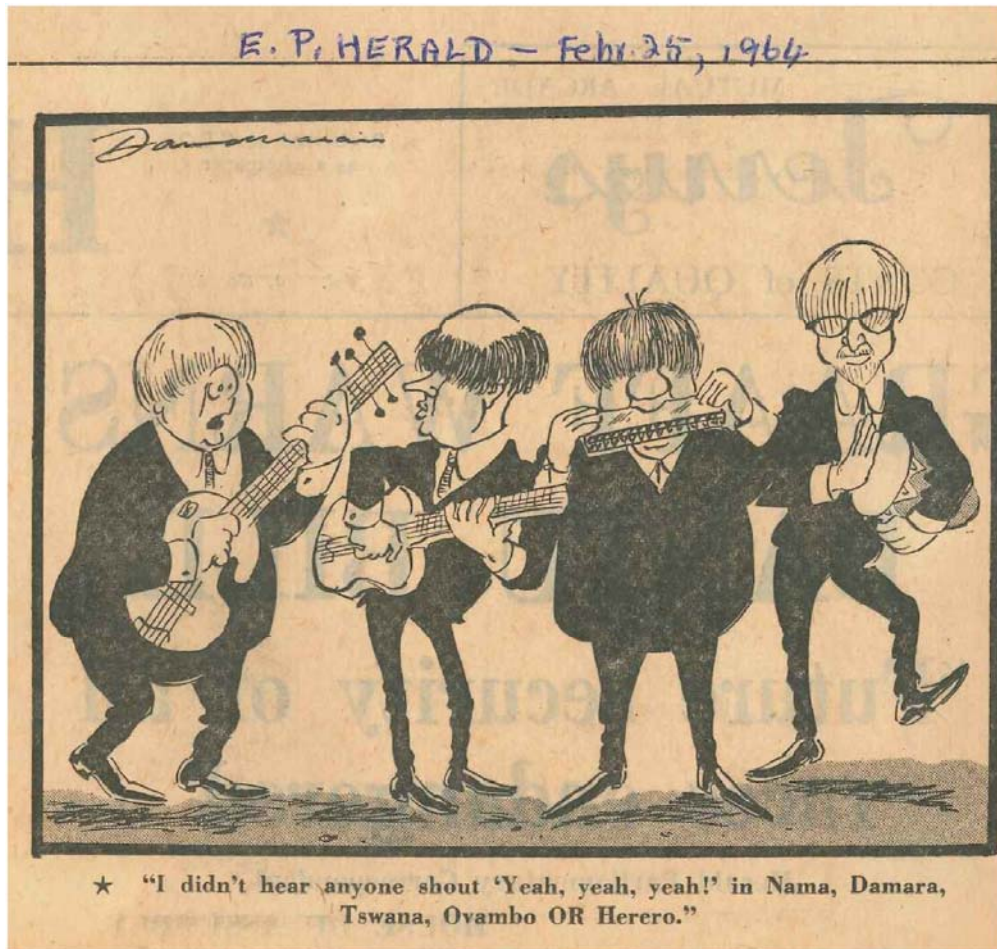
Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

Another unsuccessful attempt by the NP government was a visit in February 1964 to South West Africa in the hope of convincing its native population of the merits of the homeland policy. In response, the *Rand Daily Mail* ran a cartoon on 14 February 1964 on 'The Bantustan Beatles', Verwoerd, De Wet Nel and Abrahams, complete with hairstyles and guitars in hand (see Figure 15). The visit was not a success and the *Eastern Province Herald* of 25 February 1964 depicts the realisation that the physical disguise was not enough to gain support for separate development (see Figure 16). In the cartoon, Verwoerd laments that they did not hear anyone shout 'Yeah, yeah, yeah!' in the indigenous languages of Nama, Damara, Tswana, Ovambo or Herero. The wording is made to reverberate with the chorus 'Yeah, yeah, yeah' of the Beatles hit song 'She Loves You', with the cartoon making clear that neither had the NP been a hit nor were its members loved.



**Figure 15.** Bob Connolly, 'Touring Team', *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 February 1964.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.



**Figure 16.** David Marais, *Eastern Province Herald*, 25 February 1964.

Source: UPA, I-2-17 M.D.C. de Wet Nel Collection.

## Conclusion

The value of cartoons as sources of cultural and social history is evident. In their drawings, cartoonists expertly capture the prevailing attitudes, fads and fashions, from the ordinary and commonplace to the significant events of a specific time in history. Judging from the number of cartoons inspired by the Beatles and space travel, it is clear that their impact on the public's imagination was significant. Cartoonists used these events to grab their readers' attention and, with literary conventions such as irony and contrast, managed to ridicule and criticise the government's policies.

While the cartoons did lay bare how impractical and costly the implementation of the homeland policy would be and how the black population's basic human rights were violated, to what extent were they able to influence government decision making? As the proverbial jester in Verwoerd's court, were they able to keep 'the powerful humble, and governments accountable'?<sup>87</sup> Although the English press has had a long history in South Africa and a wide readership, by the late 1950s and early 1960s it represented only a minority of voters.<sup>88</sup> This



limited its ability to be ‘serious player’<sup>89</sup> in South African political decision-making. Verwoerd and his successors B.J. Vorster and P.W. Botha would clamp down on press freedom,<sup>90</sup> and censorship<sup>91</sup> considerably hampered journalists’ ability to highlight ‘where society’s problems are, even when some might prefer to look away’.<sup>92</sup> The implementation of the homeland policy as part of the more encompassing apartheid policy continued. The dire consequences that the cartoonists so vividly predicted came to fruition: the country’s economy was crippled not only by the exorbitant cost of implementing and maintaining the various Bantustans but also by the growing international sanctions. The black population was left impoverished and demoralised, with growing frustration and anger towards the white minority government.

The dismantling of apartheid only began in the late 1980s. This begs the question of whether the English press was truly effective in its criticism of the ruling party. According to several scholars as well as former newspaper editors, English newspapers, due to their commercial interests and their white perspective,<sup>93</sup> ‘did not always sufficiently challenge the workings, policies and activities of the apartheid state’.<sup>94</sup> These scholars claim the notion of the English press as ‘the public representative of black interests’<sup>95</sup> is, in fact, a myth.<sup>96</sup> William Hachten and Anthony Giffard propose that even though the English newspapers reported on the ‘human suffering brought on by apartheid legislation’, this occurred not necessarily out of moral obligation: rather, events such as prominent people committing suicide after being arrested under the Immorality Act 1969 or people being left homeless after evictions under the Group Areas Act 1966 made for sensational headlines, which in turn would boost sales.<sup>97</sup> Several scholars agree that the English-language newspapers ‘wittingly or unwittingly, often played a role in legitimising and centralising the system of apartheid’.<sup>98</sup> According to Hilton Kolbe, K. Owen and Eric Louw, the English-language newspapers ‘were weak and fearful, lacked integrity and honesty, and failed in their duty as public watchdog’, as they would ‘almost without embarrassment shift [their] line to fit the prevailing views of [the] political elite’.<sup>99</sup> In fact, they ‘grew fat on the machinery of apartheid’.<sup>100</sup> This view was supported by black journalists who saw the liberal press as ‘a token opposition, inextricably [sic] and unacceptably bound to the state’.<sup>101</sup>

Such severe condemnation from academics and journalists of the press that operated in the first two decades of NP rule fails to understand the context in which the English press operated, ‘the role it played and the limitations of that role’.<sup>102</sup> In a submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997, the Independent Newspapers (largely reflecting the English press) maintained that they had no reason to apologise for past deeds. On the contrary, they tried ‘hard to challenge and evade the restrictive laws’<sup>103</sup> and, according to Harvey Tyson, former editor of *The Star*, should be proud of what they achieved as they had been the ‘most consistent’ in their campaign against apartheid.<sup>104</sup> Elaine Potter argues that the English press became such ‘an effective dissenting voice against the government’ that, in reality, it became the ‘official opposition in South Africa, replacing the weak and ineffectual voice of the English speakers in parliament’.<sup>105</sup> As the anti-apartheid struggle gained momentum, the English press coverage became even more ‘extensive and inclusive’, ‘providing South Africans with news which they needed in order to become informed citizens, able to decide for themselves the bankruptcy of the apartheid system and to search for alternatives’.<sup>106</sup> As the press is a ‘potentially powerful avenue available to those opposing the government’, it was and still is ‘an especially significant institution in South Africa’.<sup>107</sup>

## Notes on contributors

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