

Willem Ratte - the Legend

**The life and ideals of a German Boer
in the fight for freedom and justice in South Africa**

by

Claus Nordbruch

**Dedicated to
Zaanzie Ratte,
Christina, Wimpie, Johannes and Maria**

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Introduction

This modest booklet would not have appeared had it not been for the assistance given to me by Mrs Zaanzie Ratte and Mr Horst Graefe. The photographs of the Ombili Foundation were made available by Mr Dawid van der Merwe; those from the fifties to eighties are personal property of the Ratte family, and we are indebted to them for making these available. The remaining photographs were taken by the author. Thanks are also due to my wife Tina for her patient proofreading of the original manuscript.

This first edition was written in five very hectic days and sleepless nights. We ask for the reader's indulgence in this respect; a comprehensive biography of Willem Ratte should not be expected. Neither were the following pages intended to be a comprehensive historical study or a political manifesto. However, I did make a special effort to respond to the request, voiced by many concerned and sympathetic persons, to produce a review of Willem Ratte's life, ideals and influence to date as soon as possible.

The decisive reason for publishing this book is as simple as it is tragic. The South African government under Nelson Mandela is being confronted by a tremendous legal scandal - and it is keeping silent. It is silencing it to death. In the interests of justice and humanity, this silence must be broken. Numerous highly esteemed and serious-minded international organisations and interest groups, but also idealistic individuals have realised the seriousness of the situation, heeded the call of the moment and intervened for Willem Ratte's release during the past weeks. Despite this, the government of the rainbow nation, though claiming to strive for truth and reconciliation, is turning a deaf ear or indulges itself with nothing more than implausible and high-sounding phrases devoid of meaning.

Since his scandalous sentence on 3 May, one of South Africa's best officers has been on a hunger strike. This account endeavours to explain what commandant Ratte hopes to achieve by his self-sacrificing resistance. Whatever course the miscarriage of justice of which Willem Ratte was the victim may take, if the practising of double standards that has by now become entrenched and the suppression of undesirable peoples continue, South Africa will ultimately have only one future - civil war.

Like the Zulus and other peoples living in South Africa, the Boers also wish to live in peace and happiness. Willem Ratte speaks the language of our own hearts. Only one thought underlies this book - freedom!

Dr. Claus Nordbruch
27 June 1996

Table of Contents

Introduction

Childhood days and youth in Germany

South Africa calls

Soldier in Rhodesia

32 Battalion

Civilian, but soldier nevertheless

Fort Schanskop

Sentence and hunger strike: The motive

Reactions

Willem Ratte, the man

Addendum

References

About the author

Childhood days and youth in Germany

Wilhelm Friedrich Ratte was born in the Paarl on 14.2.1948. After Theo and Hermann, he was the youngest son of fitter and turner Wilhelm Josef, born in Recklinghausen, and Hertha (née Stolz), a woman of German-South African parentage and was from Cape Town. After Willem, the couple had a daughter called Elizabeth. Theo later studied fishery, while his brother Theo became an engineer. Both brothers are now living in Cape Town, while Elizabeth has moved to Windhoek. Willem's father died many years ago, but his mother - who is now eighty-seven - is living in Cape Town.

In 1954, young Willem came to know the town where his closest relatives were living and where his father had grown up. Together with his father, the young lad flew to Germany to visit his grandfather Wilhelm and his father's brothers and sisters. These were all living in Recklinghausen, not far from Münster in Nordrhein-Westfalen. As far as the boy was concerned, this family visit was to last for years. When his father returned to South Africa, young Willem spent some time with his uncle Josef, the catholic priest of the town at the time, and his uncle's sister Aunt Dini. However, most of the time he lived with his godfather and godmother Heinrich and Maria Ratte. Willem went to school and did especially well in essay writing; for handwriting, he got full marks only occasionally. Willem grew up, collected stamps and played football enthusiastically. In this religious family, he was naturally given a catholic education.

South Africa calls

One day in 1962, Grandpa Wilhelm wanted to go visiting in South Africa, and asked his grandson whether he'd like to come along. The fourteen-year-old did. So he boarded a plane that was to bring them back to South African soil. Back in his town of birth, Willem continued his schooling in an academic direction in the Paarl, where he matriculated in 1964.

Shortly afterwards, his parents decided to move to South West Africa and settled down in Windhoek. Willem, however, did not join them there at the time; what he had in mind was to study in Pretoria. As there was no national military service at the time, Willem was in fact free to enrol at the University of Pretoria directly after leaving school. However, that was that as far as the academy was concerned. Instead of studying, he became totally obsessed with tennis - he even played at night. Although this did on the one hand soon earn him a reputation as a tennis champion,

on the other hand he concluded his first year with a resounding failure. This academic setback woke him up. Willem, the tennis champion, was to turn his back on Pretoria for many years to come.

He now moved to South West Africa, where he worked in the Grootfontein magistrate's court and on several farms around Otjiwarongo. Towards the end of the sixties, he enrolled at the University of South Africa (Unisa) to study human sciences by mail. His main subjects were Latin, German, History and Political Science. In his free time, he often went on extensive hikes in the veld or into the bush. After successfully completing his studies in 1972, Willem, now twenty-five years old, took up a teaching position at the German School in Windhoek. However, it did not take him long to discover that he was not cut out to be a teacher. It was not that he could not get along with his pupils or that they disliked him. An insufferable jealousy spread amongst the members of the staff which made harmonious cooperation impossible. Many of Willem's colleagues could not stand his enthusiasm and energy. The work he was doing and the social environment could not satisfy him at all; he yearned for a career in which he could achieve a meaningful combination of a sense of duty and responsibility with adventure. This, he felt, he could attain only as a professional soldier.

In 1973, compulsory military service for all whites was introduced in South Africa, non-whites being allowed to join up voluntarily. As South Africa was not in a state of war at the time, that is to say the South African population was not exposed to an acute threat, Willem Ratte was not exactly taken with the idea of becoming a South African soldier. If he had to wear a uniform at all, he thought, he would rather wear it while rendering meaningful service to the nation. Such was young Willem's attitude -one that he maintained for life.

Soldier in Rhodesia

Unlike in South Africa, which was still relatively peaceful and prosperous at this time, a bloody war to the bitter end was raging in Rhodesia, its north-eastern neighbour. Willem did not tell his family of his plans. He told them he was going to settle in Johannesburg, but instead he travelled to Salisbury, the Rhodesian capital, and joined the Rhodesian army as a volunteer. Only after his application had been accepted did he phone his parents in Windhoek to inform them of his latest career plans.

In the following years, Willem Ratte attended the NCO training course of the Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI) with great success, which resulted in his being transferred to the elite unit Special

Air Service (SAS). In this new capacity, he carried out special assignments as a paratrooper. War in Africa, especially the Rhodesian war, can in no way be compared to military confrontations in Europe. Whereas European military actions are characterised primarily by military units occupying opposing positions and by large-scale confrontations over vast areas, in an African bush war it is the soldier personally that matters. Of such a nature were the assignments given to special soldier Ratte. Acting in small units, usually comprising only a few men, their objective was to spy out enemy bases, destroy them and eliminate the enemy. That was the task for which he had been trained and which had been drilled into him. However, there were also enemies that could not be fought with knives or an R1: extremely arduous terrain, the virtually impenetrable bush with its obstinate thorn trees, thirst, unspeakable heat even at night, malaria and bilharzia - not to mention a veritable army of venomous snakes, scorpions, lice and the 'big five': rhinoceroses, elephants, buffaloes, lions and leopards. And on top of all that, a pack of at least 40 kilos on your back at all times. Nor was it only in actual conflicts that one might have to spill one's blood. The despicable lengths to which the terrorist went are illustrated by a 'civil' act - one of an endless list of such cases - which almost cost NCO Ratte his life. Together with Ben van der Merwe, Willem wanted to visit a friend in Samabula. The two men met on a farm and got into their armoured Jeep. The vehicle had hardly moved off when it tripped a land-mine, which completely ripped apart the front third of the Jeep. It was an absolute miracle that the two friends escaped unscathed.

As the terrorists kept invading Rhodesia from Mozambique to plant mines and attack farms, special cross-border raids were frequently undertaken. In these years, Willem acted under the pseudonym Willum Butler. In the commemorative book on the Rhodesian SAS we read the following about "Operation Inhibit", which took place on 17 December 1978: "They were now desperately short of water. They had been unable to find any on their long march, and what little remained in their water bottles was very precious indeed. They knew that they would have a real problem if they didn't find water soon. Lieutenant Rich Stannard, his 2 IC, Sergeant Billy Gardner, and the main body of men were to form the killer/ambush group, with Sergeant Dale O'Mulligan and his partner in one early-morning group ... and Sergeant Willum Butler and his partner in the other. The early warnings took up their positions either side of the main ambush group, and Sergeant O'Mulligan had no sooner dropped his pack and settled down to await ZANLA vehicles than his partner whispered that there were civilians approaching. As he looked up, he could see a group of kitted-up ZANLA men sauntering into sight along the rail line. He quickly passed the news to the mission commander, then counted forty terrorists strung out along the rail track. The SAS callsign, caught completely unawares by the walking ZANLA men, watched in the bushes in amazement - and let them walk

by. The new SAS lieutenant knew he had blown it. Rich Stannard cursed himself but knew it would be no use explaining he simply had not been expecting ZANLA pedestrians. He knew his mistake would neither be forgiven nor forgotten. How could he have let such an opportunity pass?" But most of the time Willum, like a good 'butler', served. As a member of the special task force, he served the terrorists what they deserved. In recognition of his outstanding actions, Willum later received the Rhodesian decoration for bravery and continuous performance, the "Wings on Chest".

In 1976 the elite soldier was seriously wounded during an attack on a terrorist camp in Mozambique. One bullet hit him in the right thigh and the other in the left shin, so that he had to be evacuated to the field hospital in Salisbury. During his convalescence, his friendship with a young woman by the name of Aletta de Clerq - who had been one of his and his friend Johan Joubert's acquaintances for some time - grew further. She is an Afrikaans-speaking Rhodesian, of Huguenot lineage, who was employed by a Salisbury bank at the time and often served in the police reserve as a "Woman Field Reservist" in her free time. Some years later, she was to become his wife, and would bear him two sons and two daughters. To this day, their friends still call Aletta Zaanzie. Willem recovered completely; scars are all that remains from his wounds. As soon as he had regained his health, he rejoined his unit. His career as a soldier was his life - he was the genuine born soldier.

The Rhodesian war was lost, for reasons that need not be discussed here. Suffice to say that one essential aspect of the defeat was a factor he was to be confronted with again and again during his life: treason. What was important at this stage was that although the war was lost, NCO Ratte's military career was by no means over. On the contrary; the past six years had equipped Willem Ratte with an almost unsurpassable military training honed to perfection by intensive experience. He now wished to make this knowledge and expertise available to his home country, where things were by no means as peaceful as they had been.

32 Battalion

In 1979, shortly before Rhodesia's so-called 'independence', Willem Ratte left the SAS, returned to South Africa and promptly joined the South African Defence Force. It is not surprising that the South African army was aware of Willem Ratte's abilities as a soldier. He was promoted to lieutenant and immediately assigned to the elite South African unit, 32 Battalion. This combat unit, led by Colonel Deon Ferreira - with whom Willem Ratte got along excellently - was the South African defence force unit that was used the most, and with the greatest success by far, during the

entire battle for South West Africa and in Angola. The battalion consisted entirely of Angolans who had been driven out of their country and were fighting against the communist government's troops. In this military unit, Lieutenant Ratte advanced to officer in command of the select reconnaissance group. In accordance with the aims of this unit, the primary task of Lieutenant Ratte and his men was to find and destroy SWAPO bases. And this -seen from the perspective of the communist terrorists - he succeeded in doing frightfully well. Under Willem Ratte's leadership, this unit within 32 Battalion became not only one of the best known, but also one of the most feared South African combat forces - at least amongst the enemy.

In 1984, Lieutenant Ratte was promoted to captain and acting commander of 1 South West African Salvage regiment. Unfortunately he could not get along with his superior officer, Commandant Willie Snyman, who was given to excessive use of alcohol. After only six months, therefore, Captain Ratte left this unit and had himself transferred to Nepara in the Kavango, where he designed the Spiderweb plan and put it into effect. At this stage, the land-mine war was causing untold suffering in the border area between South Africa and Angola. Willem Ratte was given charge of a special project in the northern province of Kavango which was as clear as it was laudable: clean up and give humanitarian assistance. Within a very brief span of time he succeeded in establishing settlements for the sorely tried natives and putting these under his protection, thus ensuring their peace. None of his proteges were killed while they were in his charge. Once again, there was food, and during this period the children in particular were able to forget the horrors of war. In 1985, Captain Ratte was promoted to major.

In 1987 Major Ratte was transferred to the Cuando River in the Caprivi, where he now trained UNITA soldiers. For a while he served here under Colonel Jan Breytenbach, who was to publicly slander him as "naive and dubious" almost ten years later. However, with Colonel Breytenbach's successor, Colonel Bert Sachser, Major Ratte got along very well indeed, with the result that a large number of Angolans were enabled to cross the border and to go and fight for Angola armed with thorough knowledge. Major Ratte was filled with a sense of mission in that he wanted to give as many blacks as possible an excellent military training. He therefore worked day and night in the firm conviction that he had to train a strong force against the constantly expanding communism and terrorism. He never spared himself, and as a result he once made an error with serious consequences during a training session on land-mines. Major Ratte was giving a demonstration lecture on anti-personnel mines and was explaining the construction, operation and effect of mines. In order to show his class how to deal with this dangerous device, he began to dismantle it. When

he had screwed out the detonator, the over-exhausted front-line officer's concentration lapsed for a fraction of a second, and a careless manipulation caused the detonator to explode in his hand - blowing off the front part of his right thumb and one finger.

Two years later he was transferred to the 5 Salvage Unit of the South African Defence Force. In March 1989, about the time when the UNTAG politics in South West Africa began which forced the South African Defence Force to withdraw and hand over the power to Swapo, Major Ratte set up the Ombili Foundation. His friend from the days of 32 Battalion, Dawid van der Merwe, gave him his untiring assistance.

This unique humanitarian project, a caring foundation to protect the rights of the Bushmen, came into being north of Tsumeb, on the farm 'Hedwigslust' belonging to Klaus Mais and his wife Beate. It must be remembered that the Bushmen are a people in their own right, who have had the misfortune to be exploited as slaves by more powerful tribes time and again. Moreover, their living space is increasingly being threatened and destroyed by industrialisation, urbanisation and tourism. The fact that these last remaining original inhabitants of southern Africa are able to maintain their unique way of life and can survive to this day is due not in the last instance to Willem Ratte's efforts. Furthermore, especially after the withdrawal of the South African forces, South West African idealists came forward and declared themselves willing to support and expand the project. After the death of Klaus Mais, one of the founders, his wife continued the work. Besides horticulture, agriculture and stock farming, the Bushmen's time is occupied mainly by small jobs, craft work and needlework. Most of the completed products are sold abroad, and the Bushmen use the proceeds to buy mainly sugar, soap, tallow, tea, coffee and tobacco. "The hand-made articles", says a pamphlet published by the Ombili Foundation, "take much more time and effort than is generally realised. In the case of baskets, for instance, the palm leaves must first be gathered and worked. As they have a different conception of time than we do and do not live such a hurried life, the Bushmen need days and weeks for preparation and manufacture." This foundation was made possible by, amongst others, generous financial assistance from Germany, including donations by private German individuals and organisations, such as the *Förderungsgesellschaft Afrika*, the *Verein Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe*, the *Deutsch-Namibische Entwicklungsgesellschaft* and the entrepreneur Gerd Brülle, die Ressler couple in Bavaria and the Schwarz family in Heilbronn, to mention but a few. The Ombili Foundation is one of the few internationally recognised African human rights institutions that really safeguard the life and existence of threatened people and has not allowed itself to be taken over and misused by political interest groups.

In 1990, Willem Ratte was promoted to commandant. The political tide was turning. The South African troops had to withdraw from South West Africa. For the next year and a half he was stationed first at Phalaborwa, then in Queenstown, his last garrison.

Civilian, but soldier nevertheless

In 1991, Commandant Willem Ratte resigned from the SA Defence Force. In his view, the purpose and meaning of the SA defence force was no longer ensured now. As he sees it, all armies of the world exist in the first place to protect the people. Instead, the defence force was becoming increasingly politicised. Daring crimes committed from the Transkei, for instance, were no longer being countered. Stock thieves or even common murderers and robbers had the temerity to saunter across the border unchallenged, plant bombs on South African soil or to rape and pillage, and then simply disappeared back into the Transkei. The fact that these crimes were being committed under the very noses of the defence force - South African troops were forbidden to take appropriate action - went directly against Commandant Ratte's sense of morality and honour. He objected to his superiors about these deplorable conditions. Since his warnings were disregarded and he himself was not in the position to intervene, Willem drew his own conclusions and left the service. He believed that in these circumstances he could serve his people - who were now themselves under threat - better as an ordinary civilian by means of humanitarian and welfare projects than he could as an officer.

The Ratte family moved to Petrusville, a village in the Northern Cape. Here he could plan the future in quiet. From the outset, he knew what he wanted: to dedicate himself to humanitarian and social tasks across party-political boundaries. His supporters came especially from those circles which were against the take-over by the communist alliance. Under Willem Ratte's guidance, several inter-party groups came into being and spectacular protests took place from 1992 onwards which, when he went to Pretoria for the referendum, attracted attention and made the headlines.

In March 1993, 32 Battalion was disbanded. This was about the time when the new 'non-racist' Mickey Mouse money was introduced into South Africa and the old coins and bills were withdrawn. As the old R1 coin had a high silver content, Commandant Ratte used them in a striking demonstration. In front of members of 32 Battalion, he collected 30 such coins and put them into a small bag sewn especially for this purpose. At the laying up of the colours, Commandant Ratte handed the thirty pieces of silver to the battalion's spokesperson, Louis Bothma, with the request

that they be given to De Klerk. Willie Snyman - not the same as the Commandant Snyman mentioned above - was a member of parliament at the time. In this capacity, he handed De Klerk his wages of treason on behalf of the soldiers. De Klerk, according to reports, was very hurt by this gesture.

Shortly afterwards, Commandant Ratte founded the Pretoria Boer Commando, a local association run on a semi-military basis, which set itself the task of representing the interests of the Boers and intended to prevent a threatening civil war by securing certain strategic, infrastructural and cultural-political sites. Early in the morning of 16 October 1993, Commandant Ratte and his Boer Commando took provisions and other supplies to beleaguered Zulus in Kathlehong. The convoy did not reach the Kwesini hostel, whose tenants were supporters of the Inkatha Freedom Party and who were being besieged by the ANC, without incident. A hurriedly assembled group of policemen and soldiers blocked the road and denied the convoy access to the Phola Park township. The spokesperson of the Inkatha Women's Brigade, Gertrude Mzizi, asked the keepers of law and order whether it now was a basic principle of the 'new' South Africa to refuse people food. The Zulus were living like cooped-up animals here, she said. A spokesperson of the IFP, Arthur van Vuuren, said that the living conditions of the residents were worse than in a jail: they had no medical assistance; taxis with which they could get to work were not allowed, and the railway - the only way of leaving the area - was sabotaged frequently. The government was not doing anything to alleviate these miserable conditions. Finally, the convoy was let through. When it reached its destination, it came under fire from AK 47s. The sniping did not stop when the provisions had been unloaded either. Nevertheless, having achieved their objective, Commandant Ratte and his men left the township without loss of life.

As he knew that the public media, on the one hand, had by and large taken the side of the 'democratic' process of the 'new' South Africa, and that on the other hand the Boers were left alone without any influential, wide-reaching public medium, Commandant Ratte founded a private radio station: Radio Pretoria. He withdrew from this station only after the transmitter was granted a broadcasting licence, subject to certain provisions.

Commandant Ratte then founded a new radio station that was not 're-educated', namely Radio Donkerhoek. This station attracted public attention because it was a highly sophisticated pirate broadcaster. Transmitting in part from moving vehicles, in part from basements, this flexible station broadcast mainly news bulletins. By mid-1994, it had found a permanent site, but was still

broadcasting without a licence. In April 1995 a police task force of at least 100 heavily armed, camouflaged policemen had to be deployed to enable Post Office officials to make an attempt to confiscate the transmitter. Even helicopters had to be used to watch over the raid. Commandant Ratte told the police that Radio Donkerhoek was not going the way of adaptation which Radio Pretoria had taken by mid-April 1995. Radio Donkerhoek was not going to apply for a broadcasting licence because it did not recognise the government. The Donkerhoek people regarded the broadcasting of news bulletins and other material as legitimate, as every nation had the right to freedom of expression without having to ask foreign powers for permission. The radio station, too, was nothing more than a means of freedom of speech. As far as the Donkerhoek crew was concerned, the government of April/May was an illegitimate regime which they did not recognise; therefore the interdict against Radio Donkerhoek was nothing more than an attempt to curtail freedom of speech. The station manager, Edwin Clarke, emphasised that no-one was going to give up the station, and that the personnel would not hesitate to defend Donkerhoek with force, if necessary. Commandant Ratte underlined his resolve with the statement that the equipment would be confiscated only over his dead body - a statement which the press distorted to the effect that he had said he would kill himself and his youngest daughter Maria. After announcing that they would launch an investigation of Radio Donkerhoek, the state forces withdrew without having achieved anything.

An amusing, yet thought-provoking incident which is quite true is the following. At 02:45 in the morning, on Tuesday, 18 June 1996, "Doep" of Pretoria was woken up by the police. Still half asleep, he opened the door to hear policemen tell him that his car had been stolen, but recovered the same night. What had happened? Earlier that night, a black thief had broken into Doep's car and made off with it. Shortly afterwards, however, it was overtaken by a breakdown truck, whose Boer driver was delighted to see the Vierkleur (the flag of the former Transvaal Republic) sticker on Doep's car, but even more at the statement underneath: We support Radio Donkerhoek. Catching up with Doep's car and about to exchange a friendly word, he saw, instead of the Radio Donkerhoek supporter he had expected, a black behind the wheel - something he thought rather suspect. There and then he floored the gas pedal, shot past the car and pulled up right ahead. The thief had no choice but to come to a dead stop, then threw open the door and ran. The Boer radioed the police, who turned up with Doep in their company, gave chase and managed to corner the fugitive. Could one say that the moral of this story is that in uncertain times, a clear expression of a political viewpoint safeguards one's property?

On 7 August 1995, Commandant Ratte laid a formal charge of fifty-threefold murder against Nelson Mandela at the Police Headquarters in Pretoria. Typically, the attorney-general concerned himself with the case against Radio Donkerhoek, but was much less interested in getting involved in the Shell House case - a massacre.

Fort Schanskop

When President De Klerk finally broke with traditional South African politics at the end of 1993, established a multiracial Transitional Council which was mainly communist-inspired and thus brought the traditional South African scene to an end, Commandant Ratte made the desperate attempt to draw attention to the sell-out of the Boer by means of a protest action that was to be as peaceful as possible. For this action, Fort Schanskop was selected, which is situated not far from the Voortrekker Monument and commands a beautiful view of Pretoria. On 7 December 1993, at five o' clock in the morning, Commandant Ratte and about thirty of faithful supporters from the Boer Commando occupied this historical fort. Ratte told journalists that the occupation was a symbolic act: "This piece of land is not part of the Azanian structure. It is part of the Boer heritage, and nobody else could claim a right to what belongs to our people." Ratte had neither a violent confrontation with the government nor a coup in mind. His action was much rather a peaceful act of protest.

The Boer Commando was fully prepared to set a clear beacon. They expected the supply of power and water to be cut off before long. In fact, this was done by the SA Defence Force that same afternoon. Ratte's soldiers were armed with licenced pistols and rifles only, as well as a large quantity of ammunition and radios, sleeping bags, dry rations, water canisters, batteries, gas cookers, a generator, medical and other supplies - sufficient, in fact, to keep the fort for many days.

At 8:30 that morning, the black 115 Battalion rushed to the aid of the police. An entire brigade of policemen and soldiers occupied the densely wooded hill and took up their positions. The Northern Transvaal military units were put on the highest alert. Commandant Ratte knew from the outset that the security forces which surrounded the fort could not dare use force against the occupiers without placing themselves in a very invidious political position, and was convinced that he would be able to maintain the occupation for many days. Nobody, with one exception, was hurt during the occupation, let alone killed. At about 10 o' clock in the morning, Percy Bouwer and Werner Theron went out to check the dummy minefield. When they were noticed by two black soldiers of 115 Battalion, they got up suddenly. Both black soldiers got such a fright that one shot the other in the

leg during the confusion while they were running away. This in effect was the only shot that was ever fired in the entire history of Fort Schanskop.

All day long dozens of sympathisers turned up with South African flags and the Vierkleur to demonstrate their solidarity with the occupying force. Some women came dressed in the traditional Voortrekker finery. During the night of 7 - 8 December, however, General Constand Viljoen managed to be allowed access to the occupiers. Viljoen had always been popular amongst the troops generally, amongst other things because, as Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Force, he did not guide his troops from behind his office desk but from the front. Moreover, he was at that stage chairman of the Afrikaner Volksfront, which purported to protect the interests of the Boers and was adamant that it would not allow a take-over by the communists and the ANC. Besides, the Boer Commando was part of Viljoen's Volksfront. Viljoen spoke to Ratte and his men, who for the above reasons regarded Viljoen as sincere and accepted him as their military chief. The general advised them to give up the occupation and promised that the Boer Commando would not be punished. In actual fact, the general put the Boers under his command, something Ratte as a subordinate could not do anything about. Therefore, most of the men decided to terminate the occupation and handed the fort over to the police at 04:07. Their weapons were not confiscated, because, as the police spokesperson Lieutenant Dave Harrington informed the press, "all weapons, without exception, were licenced.". Other men, Jan Bezuidenhout and Raymond Rademan for instance, could not accept this decision. They rather left Schanskop and escaped successfully

Commandant Ratte could not accept the result of the negotiations with Viljoen. They went straight against his conscience. In fact, to him they stank of treason. He was bitterly disappointed and remained convinced that he and his people should have persisted with the occupation in order to mobilise the people and to make all the world aware of what was about to take possession of South Africa. For this reason, Commandant Ratte disappeared from the fort the same night, in pouring rain. And he managed to slip through the massed ranks of the police and the army unnoticed. Some years later, on the 55th day of his hunger strike, when he was asked how he had pulled this off and managed to evade the entire besieging army, the experienced bush fighter modestly replied that he hadn't noticed any sign of these forces. The security forces of the state scurried about in disarray. Assisted by helicopters, military units - according to media reports, at least 150 soldiers including Special Task Force - combed the broken terrain metre by metre for hours on end. The search continued for days - without any success. Commandant Ratte had disappeared into thin air. Even worse: on 10 December, he made a speech on Radio Pretoria in which he confirmed his intention

never to give himself up to the police, because the police were controlled by the Transitional Council, which he regarded as a pawn of the communists. In his speech, he set five conditions for his voluntary surrender:

- First, the ANC Youth leader Peter Mokaba should be arrested and charged with genocide.
- Second, the chairman of the South African Communist Party, Joe Slovo, as well as the military chief of the ANC, Joe Modise, should be charged with terrorism, multiple murder and the disastrous 1993 bombing in Church Street, Pretoria, in which 19 people lost their lives.
- Third, all participants in the murder of the American exchange student Amy Biehl were to be arrested and executed.
- Fourth, those ANC supporters who carried prohibited weapons in public, as shown on video footage filmed by the Inkatha Freedom Party recently, should be criminally prosecuted.
- Fifth, the same excessive and unjustified steps taken by the security forces at Fort Schanskop should be taken against murderers, arsonists, robbers and other criminal elements.

It is well known that these conditions were not met. Commandant Ratte therefore had no reason to hand himself over to the police. Then again, they could not catch him either. The search continued for days, until the brave security forces lost interest and gave it up. Meanwhile, the soldiers of the Boer Commando were fined R100 each and released. With that, it seemed that the matter was at an end.

Sentence and hunger strike: The motive

Two days later, however, the police searched a locked room in the museum. Now Commandant Ratte could not have had any access to the museum rooms, since, in accordance with the regulations, the keys had been in the possession of Ratte's opponent, the South African Defence Force - the patron of the museum - for the entire period. Typically, it was General Viljoen's son Lieutenant-Colonel Piet Viljoen, who as officer in charge was the only person who had access to

the keys. In the room in question, ammunition, land-mines and other items of military equipment were found. Although the state prosecutor could at no time prove that Commandant Ratte had been guilty of the illegal possession of arms and ammunition, this was nonetheless what he was charged with. Willem Ratte stressed that he had had nothing to do with this cache, but he had no illusions about the outcome of the trial either. On 6 September 1994, maintaining that he did not acknowledge the authority of the court, he refused to submit anything in his defence. During the trial, which started the year after, Lieutenant Leon van Heerden, spokesperson of the police's bomb disposal unit, testified that on December of the previous year he had found, amongst other things, hand grenades and ammunition hidden behind bags of oranges and maize. He also testified that he did not wish to connect this find with the soldiers of the Boer Commando. He also admitted that Commandant Ratte had not been present when the ammunition was found. Thereupon Judge MC de Witt adjourned the case several times, until on 3 May 1996 he found Commandant Ratte guilty of being in illegal possession of arms, explosives and ammunition during the symbolic occupation of Fort Schanskop, and handed down an incredible sentence: 20 years imprisonment, of which 15 years were suspended.

This completely crazy sentence inspired the PRETORIA NEWS to observe derisively that De Witt could even have increased the punishment on the grounds of the personal verbal attacks which Commandant Ratte made on him during the trial. In his contentious comment on the case, Alan Dunn, chief editor of the paper, had the gall to observe that Commandant Ratte would now have sufficient time to reflect on the foolishness of the Schanskop action.

After the sentence had been handed down, Commandant Ratte, father of four children - Christina (*1982 in Windhoek), Wimpie (*1984 in Windhoek), Johannes (*1988 in Cape Town) and Maria (*1990 in Phalaborwa) - was put into the maximum-security wing of the Central Prison in Pretoria. Since 3 May, he has been in solitary confinement and on a hunger strike. He had prepared himself for this strike mentally and physically, just as he thinks through and plans all his actions. He read a few books on prisoners who went on hunger strikes out of protest. The Irish prisoners who went without food for weeks and months while protesting in British prisons in the twenties spring to mind. The Malta Declaration of November 1991 by the World Health Organisation forbids doctors to take steps to save their patients if they have made arrangements accordingly. This rule prevails even if the patient should lapse into a coma. And this has been a very real danger since the eighth week of his hunger strike.

On Monday, 6 May, Commandant Ratte was transferred to the Zonderwater prison, 50 kilometres north of Pretoria. At that stage Commandant Ratte advised through the spokesman of the Correctional Services, Koos Gerber, that he wished to see no-one except his attorney and his trusted doctor. Only weeks later did he allow some people to see him. However, he refused to see his wife and children, because, as he said, wished to anticipate any possibility that his resolve might be weakened.

On 13 June, late in the morning, the author was waiting in the visitors' room to be allowed to see Willem Ratte once again. After a while, the duty officer entered and told him to return in two hours' time, as the premier of Gauteng province, Tokyo Sexwale, had turned up, and such high visitors were naturally given precedence. When the author returned after the appointed period and was waiting in the visitors' room again, the same officer informed him that Commandant Ratte was no longer in Zonderwater prison, but had been transferred in the meantime. Needless to say that the premier had, of course, never been there at all; in any case, it is to be doubted that Commandant Ratte would have agreed to receive him.

What had really happened? The authorities were afraid of Ratte's violent liberation by his supporters. Contrary to the Geneva Convention, which stipulates amongst other things that a prisoner is declared unfit to be transported if his health is too poor to allow this, Commandant Ratte had been taken back to the maximum security wing in Pretoria by helicopter at about 11:30, without prior consultation with his doctor or attorney. Since then, that is where prisoner 96623970 in cell C 1 has been whiling away one day after the other, governed only by his own iron discipline.

Commandant Ratte explains his motive: The legal system of the day is measuring with double standards. While presumed or actual crimes committed by Boers or Zulus are heavily punished, criminals who are members of the ANC or the Communist Party are going free - or are not even charged. Obvious examples of this are the bomb that exploded in Church Street, Pretoria, in 1983 and the Shell House massacre of 53 Zulus in Johannesburg two years ago. The bomb attack, in which whites as well as non-whites lost their lives, was nothing less than a repugnant act of terrorism with complete disregard for human life. The terrorists deliberately planted bombs in a busy Pretoria main road with heavy vehicle and pedestrian traffic, with the specific intent to kill people irrespective of their race or political convictions. The man who pushed the button was Ronnie Kasrils. There is also evidence that Nelson Mandela personally gave the order to fire at the protesting Zulus. FW de Klerk, as state president at the time, prevented the police from acting

immediately and also interfered with the subsequent investigations. In reality, the perpetrators of both crimes, that is to say those responsible behind the scenes, have not been brought to book to this very day. *And that is the Achilles heel of the present regime. They know exactly what they were party to, and now they are trying to get off unscathed by distorting justice. Dear friends, stay on their heels!*

Commandant Ratte's hunger strike is not only a protest against a corrupt legal system. Above all, he wishes to awaken his nation. Boers have lost their freedom and are now living under the supervision of a soviet-type system which is now revealing its true face to Willem Ratte. Willem Ratte's demands are fair and legitimate. At issue is the right of nations to self-determination, the only basis on which people can co-exist in justice, peace and charity. Millions of people in Europe and the Near East demand nothing else than this. Millions, including Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians, White Russians, Croatians, Slovenians and many more have attained this worthy state. Sometimes through bloody struggles. Commandant Ratte is not calling up the Boer nation any more than is internationally permissible. Moreover, Willem Ratte has never in his entire life called for violence. So far, violence has only been used against him.

Reactions

In the first weeks after the verdict, the media did not have much to say about it. By the middle of May, the chairman of the Conservative Party, Ferdi Hartzenberg, insisted on a meeting with Nelson Mandela to discuss the Ratte case.

- On 25 May, former members of the officers' and NCO corps under the leadership of their spokesperson, Louis Bothma, started with the protest actions that followed almost daily. The former elite soldiers came from all over South Africa - one from as far afield as Zambia - in order to display their solidarity with their erstwhile commander. When (white) policemen refused the protesters, who were accompanied by the press and TV crews, permission to march on to the grounds of the seat of government, they assembled at the Hertzog memorial and read out their petition, which they then handed to a representative of the Department of Justice (who appeared with rainbow promptness). The representative promised to pass on the appeal. The proceedings were then concluded with the singing of the 'old' national anthem, The Call of South Africa. In their appeal to their former superior, they asked Willem Ratte to abandon his hunger strike. The former brothers in arms of 32

Battalion said: Willem, your death won't benefit us nearly as much as your life. We want to see you again, but not in your coffin.

- On 26 May, about 300 family members and friends of Ratte, including members of the Boer Commando and 32 Battalion, congregated at Zonderwater prison for a prayer meeting which they concluded with The Call of South Africa.
- On 27 May, the police announced that Commandant Ratte was too weak to attend the hearing on the illegal operation of Radio Donkerhoek. The case was postponed to 28.10.1996.
- On 28 May, the chairman of the Freedom Front, Constand Viljoen, discussed the matter with the Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar. In the course of the discussion, Viljoen warned that Commandant Ratte would turn himself into a martyr if he died in prison. Omar indicated that he was aware of the situation.
- On 29 May, Nelson Mandela announced that the requests and demands around Willem Ratte would be given priority and that he would have an answer ready soon.
- On 31 May, celebrated as Republic Day in non-communist South Africa, more than 100 supporters of the Verwoerd Freedom Offensive assembled in Verwoerdburg. They demanded the release of Commandant Ratte and burnt the official flag of the 'new' South Africa during their protest. Masses of 'old' South African flags were waved, including the Vierkleur.
- On 5 June Robert van Tonder, chairman of the Boerestaat Party, warned the authorities not to make a martyr of Commandant Ratte. The unthinkable sentence imposed on Willem Ratte had exposed the entire legal system, he said, and made it laughable at the same time.
- On 6 June a committee for Commandant Ratte's release was formed. Almost 100 representatives of the leading Afrikaans cultural organisations and parties gathered in Silverton and established the inter-party committee Red Willem Ratte (Save Willem Ratte). The meeting started with a reading of a letter from Willem Ratte, in which he made it clear that he would never subject himself to the regime, that all protests and actions taken to get

him released were to be peaceful and that he was prepared to end his hunger strike only on certain terms, namely:

1. Either FW de Klerk, Ronald Kasrils, Nelson Mandela and Constand Viljoen are criminally prosecuted for defeating the ends of justice (Shell House), murder (Church Street) and sabotage (institution of the transitional government and the 1994 elections),
2. or all those who have acted on the basis of political convictions and have been sentenced for this are declared innocent and released,
3. or our people are given back, somewhere in South Africa, their freedom which has been stolen from them and of which they are still being deprived.

The committee, which consists of seven spokespersons (Bert van Rensburg, Frits Meyer, Edwin Clarke, Willie Snyman, Raymond Rademan, G. Venter and the chairman, Colonel Dawid Grobbelaar), sees itself as an association not aligned with any political party and whose slogan is the release of Commandant Ratte, an objective to be achieved by means of increased pressure on the government brought about by international press statements, mass protests and peaceful, in other words non-violent means. The message addressed to President Mandela was that if Commandant Ratte was not released unconditionally before 15 June, mass action was to be reckoned with. To the Boers, Grobbelaar said that if they, Willem Ratte's friends, did not appear in their thousands, the government would simply ignore them. Besides, this would mean that the people had capitulated.

- On 7 June at about 08:30, Mrs Zaanzie Ratte and her four children handed a petition to the Swiss embassy. The Swiss diplomats were accommodating and friendly. The document that was presented read as follows:

"When, in December 1994, President De Klerk finally broke with traditional South African politics and assembled a transitional government, my husband, Wilhelm Friedrich Ratte, and a handful of faithful followers occupied the museum Fort Schanskop, near the Voortrekker monument, without using any violence. My husband did not wish a violent confrontation with the government, neither did he wish to execute a coup. His deed was

rather a peaceful act of protest in the name of humanity and concern. Nobody was killed or even hurt in this occupation. After a few days my husband returned the museum to the state security forces. As agreed, he and his men were not punished.

Two days later, however, the police searched a locked room inside the museum. My husband had no access to this room, as the keys had been in the possession of the South African army, the patron of the museum, for the entire period. In the said room land-mines, ammunition and several items of military equipment, amongst others, were found. Thereupon my husband, although the state prosecutor was unable to find any evidence to support it, was accused of illegal possession of arms and ammunition. My husband convincingly testified that he had nothing to do with this find. Nevertheless, he was charged and on 3 May, after a trial of two and a half years, he was sentenced to an effective imprisonment of 5 years on the basis of 'indications'. On the same day, my husband, the father of four children between 5 and 13 years old, embarked on a hunger strike in order to protest world wide not only against this disproportionate sentence, but also against the current very dubious jurisprudence (...) My husband is everything but a racist. His life is governed by an express Christian humaneness which, as an officer, he put into effective practice. Neither the black soldiers of his unit nor the natives, who owe him an immense debt of gratitude, have forgotten him. As an example of practical humaneness, the Ombili Foundation may be mentioned here, of which he was one of the founders. This is a welfare foundation to protect the rights of the Bushmen. It is not in the last instance because of this engagement that these original inhabitants of southern Africa were able to retain their uniqueness and survive to this day.

In the name of humanity and justice, and as far as this lies within your power, I entreat you to intervene in the matter of Wilhelm Ratte. Time is of the essence. My husband, who never during his political actions killed or even hurt anyone, will die soon unless international pressure is brought to bear against the despicable sentence and he is released."

By 09:00, Mrs Ratte wanted to present the same text to the German embassy. But instead of inviting her into the building, as is customary amongst civilised people, a conversation could be conducted only via the intercom. They left Mrs Ratte and her four children standing in the street, pretending that Mr Ambassador was in Cape Town at the moment. In reply to a question whether the acting ambassador would receive Mrs Ratte's petition, the answer came - after a while - that the latter did not issue comments. With that, the family were left standing outside in the street.

This scandalous conduct could, of course, not be taken lying down. A written objection was addressed to the embassy by return as well as to its head office, the department of foreign affairs in Bonn. Within hours, the German Embassy's permanent representative, Alexander Petri, tendered a full apology:

"I was in an urgent meeting, immediately after which I had another appointment outside the embassy. In the middle of this meeting I was merely informed that there was 'somebody' outside who wished to speak to me in connection with the Ratte matter. Unfortunately I was neither told that a petition was to be presented, nor that Mrs Ratte had come in person. I assure you that if I had known this, I would obviously have interrupted the meeting and would have received Mrs Ratte personally for her to present her petition. I would be very much obliged to you indeed if you would offer my apologies to Mrs Ratte for this incident. I will pass your petition on to the Department of Foreign Affairs as a supplement to your recent letter to Dr Kinkel."

Could one believe this apology? Zaanzie Ratte did - at first. However, the lousy behaviour of the German diplomats was confirmed subsequently: despite two further requests, nothing more was heard from the honourable representatives of the "most freedom-minded constitutional state ever on German soil". Such behaviour, typical of Germans from Bonn, cannot be described in other words than it is: painful and shabby.

- On 8 June, more than 600 friends of Willem Ratte in over 150 cars blocked the Pretoria-Krugerdsorp highway for more than two hours and demanded the unconditional release of Commandant Ratte.
- On 10 June, Dullah Omar contended that he as Minister of Justice could not interfere in the matter concerning Commandant Ratte, as the latter had been duly and legitimately sentenced in a court of law.

In the evening of the same day, over 100 friends of Willem Ratte streamed into a Pick 'n Pay branch shortly before closing time and loaded a vast number of shop trolleys with provisions and other products. With brimming trolleys, they then descended on the tills, piled the provisions on the tables and handed out leaflets containing demands for Willem Ratte's release in 'payment'. No products were damaged or removed from the premises; with

TV cameras and journalists watching, business was merely brought to a dead stop. And everyone knew what it was all about.

- On 11 June, Nelson Mandela deemed it necessary to tell the media that he condemned, in the strongest possible terms, the 'radical right-wingers' and their attitude of putting demands to him.
- On 12 June he even thought it necessary to suggest that he could not intervene in the Ratte matter before all legal remedies had been exhausted. The fact that exhausting all remaining legal avenues would take months and that Commandant Ratte would have died long before then was something the president adroitly did not mention.

Indeed, by mid-June a possible option for Commandant Ratte's release emerged from parliamentary circles: If he started eating again, the deadline date for general amnesty might be considered. How merciful! Willem Ratte is a man of deeds, a man who stands by his word. It is well known that there are hardly any such wonderful people around any more these days. Who would be surprised when Commandant Ratte calls out the flunkies of the system: "No! The date for the general amnesty is moved to the year 1994 first, and thus all political prisoners are released, and then I will start eating again; not the other way around!"

- On 13 June, the provincial newspaper THE CITIZEN, which is distributed in neighbouring countries as well, wrote that the issue of Commandant Ratte was developing into a great dilemma. That Ratte had at that stage managed to maintain the hunger strike for five weeks already showed that he was a man who distinguished himself by exceptional determination. He was even prepared to give his own life in protest against his excessive sentence. The government could afford to ignore protests thus far, but it could not afford to have Commandant Ratte die in jail. It would be advisable for President Mandela to take notice of the behaviour of his own followers and their allies, especially since the ANC had come to power. The comment ends with a plea for Willem Ratte's release, as the Commandant's death would have serious consequences.¹⁰ The majority of the letters to the editor endorsed this view.

In the evening of 13 June, some 100 friends of Willem Ratte who were annoyed at the reports published in BEELD, RAPPORT and the PRETORIA NEWS protested in front of

BEEELD's editorial offices. Analogous to the historic stacking of rocks at Paardekraal, they burnt the 'new' South African flag, which they had taken down from the adjacent Department of Transport just before, on a pile of large rocks they had collected.

That same day, the PRETORIA NEWS carried what was probably the meanest and most defamatory report of the entire press campaign around Commandant Ratte so far. Following an interview conducted with Zaanzie Ratte by the news team of Carel Lessing and Lynne Altenroxel the previous day, the paper alleged that the prisoner's wife distanced herself from the way in which her husband's friends were attempting to effect the Commandant's release. That statement was a lie. Zaanzie Ratte demanded an immediate apology as well as an appropriate correction. Neither appeared, however.

- On 14 June, the German weekly JUNGE FREIHEIT observed that, for the first time since the 1994 general election, the Boers in opposition would again come to the fore en masse, and that the fatal party-political rift seemed to have been overcome. "The joint action for Willem Ratte across party-political boundaries could herald a new era in the Boers' struggle for self-determination (...) Should Ratte die in prison, an escalation of the protest cannot be excluded." On the same day, the South West African daily DIE REPUBLIKEIN wrote that the National Association for Human Rights, based in Windhoek and maintaining close ties with Amnesty International, was demanding the immediate release of Willem Ratte. Other international human rights associations, according to the report, had now also become involved in the matter.

- On 15 June, the first day of the seventh week of Commandant Ratte's hunger strike, between 2 500 and 3 000 friends of Willem Ratte gathered in Pretoria and marched, in a sea of South African, German, Flemish and Dutch flags, including the Vierkleur, to the Central Prison and demanded the release of Commandant Ratte partly by singing freedom songs and partly in speeches. A typical feature of this mass meeting - which had been organised in only a few days - was that all significant interest groups of the Boers had buried the hatchet and were pulling in one team. Similarly, the tremendous international solidarity with Commandant Ratte and the Boers was conspicuous: petitions from various cultural and political Boer associations were presented to the prison authorities, including memoranda from the German, Flemish, Dutch, South West African and English groups. The German petition contained, amongst others, the following words:

"We, representing the major part of the German population of South Africa, declare our solidarity with the demands of Willem Ratte, whose mother tongue is German as well. Our conviction has nothing to do with any party-political stand. Our involvement is rooted solely in the realisation that, more than ever before, double standards are being applied in South Africa. While murderers and robbers who claim to have fought a political fight for freedom are not prosecuted these days, but are even elevated to the highest positions, a man such as Willem Ratte, who in the course of his truly political and peaceful protest in December 1993 neither killed nor even wounded anyone, nor even committed any traffic offence, is punished with a completely disproportionate sentence on the basis of suspicions and assumptions. We have not forgotten the terrorist attacks such as those in Church Street, Pretoria, in 1983 or the base Shell House murders in Johannesburg in 1994, nor shall we ever forget them. What is right must stay right! We have not forgotten either what Willem Ratte has done for South Africa and what he is still enduring for all of us. Like the Boers, the Zulus and other peoples in South Africa, the German people also wish to be free and to live in peace and happiness. Ratte puts the language of our hearts into word. In this realisation, we support the movement SAVE WILLEM RATTE. More than ever before, and above everything else, one thought unites us with the Boers, and that thought is Freedom!"

- On 18 June, Nelson Mandela stated in the Senate that Willem Ratte had to sit out his full term of five and a half years, and that it was time that the Commandant came to terms with his fate and prepared himself accordingly. He would not be blackmailed, either.

Referring to the Commandant's claims, Dullah Omar said, in a parliamentary debate on 19 June which was broadcast on television, that this claim that President Mandela should be charged was "an insult to our people and for all who had fought for democracy in our country". The demand that the persons listed should also be charged with the crimes he (Ratte) had mentioned was also an insult. These were all "people who had helped to bring democracy to our country" and who had given all their energy to bring democracy about.

Omar, who after all is the Minister of Justice, is adopting a remarkable attitude to a constitutional state. What he is saying, in effect, is that those who have caused the current state of affairs in South Africa are about as unassailable as the court jesters of bygone days. Regardless of the methods employed to realise and introduce the ideal of 'democracy' - murder, necklacing, blackmail, sabotage and other criminal acts - the perpetrators go free

because they pursued, so to speak, the lofty ideal of 'democracy'. But at the same time, those who opposed the establishment of this state of bliss are being prosecuted and punished. The terrorist Robert McBride, for instance, was convicted of the bomb attack in Magoo's Bar in Durban as well as threefold murder. Not only was he pardoned in the course of the 'reconciliation', he even got a seat in Parliament, occupies the position of acting director in the Department of Foreign Affairs and is awaiting a diplomatic post abroad. The 'new' South African jurisprudence, the measuring by two standards, resembles the caprice of a banana republic rather than the pursuit of justice.

- On 20 June, the London DAILY TELEGRAPH pointed out that Willem Ratte was determined to die for the human rights of the Afrikaner.
- On 21 June, while the author was talking to Willem Ratte in the visitors' cell, the door was unexpectedly opened and an officer of the prison personnel entered. He apologised for the interruption and informed the Commandant that Pik Botha had asked to call on him, and wished to know whether he would see him. The Commandant's face, still friendly just a moment before, darkened immediately, and straight away came the answer that there could be no question of a visit by Botha. With this message, the officer left the cell. After a while, the Commandant smiled again.

In the evening, about 100 friends of Willem Ratte demonstrated for the Commandant's unconditional release at the Jan Smuts international airport. They blocked the access roads to the international departure terminal with their vehicles.

- On 23 June the chairman of the parliamentary committee on correctional services, Carl Niehaus, speculated about rumours to the effect that Commandant Ratte was not subsisting on water and electrolyte at all, but was also taking glucose in order to prolong the hunger strike. Niehaus capped this virtually unbeatable instance of rumour-mongering when he finally expressed doubts whether Commandant Ratte was on a hunger strike at all.
- On 26 June, the 54th day of his hunger strike, Commandant Ratte was so weak that he could no longer get up to receive his visitors in the visitors' cell behind reinforced glass and steel bars. He was wearing several jerseys and a woollen cap and was wrapped in blankets, and was able to speak for a short while only, and very softly at that.

Some concerned people are taking exception to the Commandant's inflexible attitude and think he is committing suicide, which will benefit no-one but the regime. It has correctly been said that as far as the effort to get Commandant Ratte released is concerned, the legal remedies have not been exhausted, nor are they excluded. A question that has kept coming up was why Willem Ratte has not applied for bail. When this question was put to him in the middle of June, Ratte's answer was as admirable and understandable as it was tragic:

"South Africa is being dominated by a foreign, mainly communist regime which I do not recognise. I am not being detained because of a criminal offence, but because of my political conviction." Indeed, the severity of the Commandant Ratte's sentence is comparable to that the punishment meted out for a serious crime, for instance robbery, rape or murder. Under certain circumstances, such capital offenders are often granted certain concessions, such as release on bail. Commandant Ratte refuses to be put into the same category as such antisocial elements! Willem Ratte has not committed any offence, and he does not want the benefit of concessions that may be granted to such criminal elements. Incidentally, amnesty or a pardon fall into the same category. No, the real criminals, together with De Klerk, Kasrils, Mandela, Viljoen and many others, form the government or are representatives in parliament. Their criminal foot soldiers have been released in their thousands by De Klerk and Mandela. Today, South Africa has the highest crime rates in terms of murder, theft, robbery, rape and car hijacking. Outside its own monetary area, the rand is not worth a penny. Unemployment has never been this high. South Africa has degenerated into a third-world country. And yet - or perhaps for that very reason - there are two factors that are linked directly to Commandant Ratte.

In the first place, there is Mandela's incomprehensible inability to act like a statesman. Whatever one's attitude to the current regime may be, internationally it certainly is not held in high esteem. One fails to understand that Mandela is displaying so little finesse in public. How much prestige, how much political mileage could he score if he acted like a true 'reconciliation politician' and released Commandant Ratte unconditionally, acknowledging that the latter was a victim of political justice! Instead of which, Mandela is deceiving himself and others and pretends that the matter is out of his hands. Well, Mr President had better familiarise himself with the constitution of his own country, because the constitution most certainly gives him the right to intervene. Instead, he behaves like a child. He complains to the media that some people address him by his surname and not as president. Apart from the fact that the authorised spokespersons of the RED WILLEM

RATTE committee address President Mandela as such, verbally and on paper, and Mandela is therefore grumbling about some louts who have nothing at all to do with the above-mentioned committee and who are acting purely in their own capacity and as private individuals, it must be acknowledged here that Mandela today indeed occupies the post of president. Acknowledging this fact does not by any means imply that one has to like him or his allies.

- On this 26th of June, Willem Ratte made a prepared declaration in which he said:
"If I were to come to the conclusion that the other available legal options are as twisted as Magistrate De Witt's mis-sentence, then I would rather continue with my hunger strike. The Azanian regime, with the blood of so many innocent black and white people on its hands, without the guilty persons being prosecuted, must first correct its double standards before its verdict and declarations can have any credibility.
What I can no longer ignore, however, is the requests of my own people. If it can be proven that the appeal to me to end my hunger strike by accepting bail is supported by a large majority of my patriotic countrymen, I will comply with it - provided that the campaign against the glaring injustice being committed not only against myself, but against our entire People, will be continued outside with all the means at our disposal."

Willem Ratte, the man

We recall that NCO Ratte left the Rhodesian SAS in 1979 and joined the South African Defence Force. Aletta de Clerq stayed on in Salisbury. It was a long time before she heard from Willem again. Finally, towards the end of 1980, the phone rang. What Willem and Zaanzie discussed is nobody's business, but basically it was something like salvage work again - only much more romantic this time. The operation was successful, as his operations mostly were. In March 1981 he flew over to Zaanzie for 24 hours and asked for her hand in marriage. They married in December 1981, and since then Zaanzie has been living a life full of excitement, but also full of hardship, as the wife of one of the most significant officers the South African defence force has ever had.

In most of the press reports, Commandant Ratte and his followers, or those who worked for his release, are slated as "right-wing radicals". This designation is as incorrect as it is deliberately misleading. Willem Ratte was never organised into any political party; he never made any party-political statement or allowed himself to be bound by any such party. In South Africa, as it is elsewhere, the concept of right-wing radicalism is a 'killer' argument used for no other reason than to slander the opponent and thus eliminate him. Commandant Ratte is neither a terrorist nor a Neo-

Nazi. Neither is he interested in any *coup d'etat*, as is evident from his peaceful protest in 1993 and from the work he has done for several local radio stations since then.

Really serious media therefore use the term Boer instead of the deprecating term. This, after all, is how Commandant Ratte regards himself, and this is the population group most of his supporters belong to. In any case, the concept of 'Boer' seems more appropriate than the term 'right-wing radical'. Since the olden days, we have always referred to the Anglo-Boer War, not the Anglo Right-wing Radical War. We refer to the historical republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State as Boer republics, not as Right-Wing Radical republics. And, of course, we eat boerewors, not radical right-wing sausage.

In his book *They live by the sword*, Jan Breytenbach describes Willem Ratte as a South African of German extraction and a soldier par excellence, who acquired his love of special assignments while he was with the SAS and carried them out in exemplary fashion. However, after the occupation of Fort Schanskop, Commandant Ratte - according to Breytenbach - turned into a "naive and dubious politician". Subsequent objective historical research will show that it was Broederbonders (such as Breytenbach?) inter alia who were dubious and out of touch with reality, and not historically aware idealists such as Commandant Ratte.

Willem Ratte is anything but a racist. His life is governed by a definite humaneness which he effectively put into practice as an officer. Willem Ratte was almost idolised by many Ovambos, but especially by the Bushmen. They still speak of him with the highest esteem, quite apart from the fact that the hungry Zulus who were exposed to the terrorism in Kathlehong certainly have not forgotten Willem Ratte's assistance.

Willem Ratte's friends, and here this means in the first place the *RED WILLEM RATTE* committee as well as the German-language information paper *DER SÜDAFRIKA-DEUTSCHE*, which appears several times monthly, calls up responsible and freedom-loving people all over the world in thousands, probably tens of thousands of letters, faxes, pamphlets, press releases and telephone calls to storm the media in the struggle for the freedom of Commandant Willem Ratte. The call has not gone unheeded. Editors, reporters and journalists are already intervening on his behalf, as are human rights organisations such as Amnesty International in Bonn and London and the National Association for Human Rights under the helpful leadership of Mr Phil ya Nangoloh. Many media in all civilised countries are now reporting on Commandant Ratte and his struggle for the self-

determination of the Boers and the restoration of the constitutional democracy in South Africa. However, the present situation offers no reason to cease our efforts. In order to effect the release of Commandant Ratte and to get the law of nations (which applies to the Boers as well) internationally recognised, we must redouble our efforts! The survival of millions of oppressed people in South Africa is at stake. At issue are freedom and justice in South Africa.

Addendum

As a young man, Willem Ratte gave up the secure job of a teacher to follow his calling to fight communism. He joined the Rhodesian Defence Force, where he was later taken into the SAS. His years of outstanding service later earned him the "Wings on Chest". When Rhodesia was handed over to a communist government, Wilhelm joined the South African Defence Force and was assigned to the reconnaissance wing of 32 Battalion, whose commander he became. His outstanding courage earned him the highest esteem and respect of his fellow-soldiers and of the officer in command, and gave him an unequalled reputation. When South West Africa was also handed over to communism, Willem - then a commandant - became the officer in command of the training wing of 5 Reconnaissance Regiment. Not long afterwards, when he saw what political fraud was going on, he left the army.

In 1993, Wilhelm was invited to take command of the Pretoria Boer Commando Group. Here he took upon himself the struggle against the threatening foreign and communist take-over of South Africa, which was subtly allowed and furthered in our beautiful country by the National Party through political deception.

Wilhelm played a major role in the establishment of Radio Pretoria, which began broadcasting on 18 September 1993. While he was responsible for the protection of Radio Pretoria, Willem also started selectively training a Task Force for several special protection tasks.

With the foundation of the Freedom Alliance in 1993, of which the Volksfront, the Inkatha Freedom Party and Bophutatswana were members, Willem showed that he seriously intended to cooperate with anyone who believed in self-determination and was opposed to communism.

A group of Inkatha members was trapped in the Kwesini hostel, located in the ANC stronghold of Kathlehong. Willem called up the Boer Commando's Task Force in order to assist the trapped Zulus. At first light one Saturday morning, about 30 men under Willem's command went into Kathlehong, their pick-ups loaded with food and medical supplies. AK 47 bullets whistled over the trucks. One bullet passed through a canopy. The situation in the hostel where the Zulus were besieged by the ANC enemy was awful, but great was the delight on their faces when they realised what was going on.

During this same period, Commandant Ratte also planned the action to be taken when the non-elected Independent Transitional Council would come into force on 7 December 1993. Fort Schanskop was given special attention, because it had been built with Boer labour to defend the old Boer republic and therefore has strong emotive value to the Boer. After much reconnaissance and days of planning, as a symbolic act of protest against the institution of the undemocratic, so-called Independent Transitional Council, the fort was occupied under Commandant Ratte's leadership on 7 December 1993 - the day on which the Boer people were deprived of their freedom by the treason of the National Party. Willem was never captured after he had left Fort Schanskop. After the occupation, he continued with his work at Radio Pretoria.

In March 1994 he decided, of his own free will, to cooperate with the former SAP in the matter of the occupation of Fort Schanskop and invited the investigating officers to take down his declaration. As a true leader, Commandant Ratte took all the responsibility on himself.

In May 1994, Radio Pretoria was shut down. To Willem, it was totally unacceptable to listen to or to crawl before the Azanian regime. Three months later, the free, Christian and independent Radio Donkerhoek began transmitting. This station has now been broadcasting for two years.

The Schanskop trial started in 1994. Without accepting the authority of the new government, Commandant Ratte did attend the hearings punctually. On 3 May 1996, Magistrate MC de Witt sentenced him to 20 years and six months in prison. Willem promptly went on a hunger strike, which he only ended 57 days later after an appeal by his people.

Willem has proven that he will allow nothing to stand in the way of his fight for his people. He was prepared to sacrifice his life on the altar of his people so as to reunite them after the rift caused by treason. Willem always gave thanks to the Heavenly Father and acknowledged that it was Christ who gave him strength.

I am honoured and privileged to be called "my friend" by him.

Raymond Rademan
June 1996

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About the author

Claus Nordbruch was born in Germany in 1961. After he left school, he volunteered for a career as an officer in the German defence force. For four years, he served in various infantry battalions, until - having risen to the rank of lieutenant - he resigned because of insurmountable differences of opinion with his employer.

In 1986 he emigrated to South Africa with the intention of joining 32 Battalion. However, an enormous espionage scandal that broke about the same time put paid to this possibility. Nordbruch then decided to study in Pretoria. Between 1987 and 1991, he read German, history, criminology and biology at the University of Pretoria. In 1995 he took his doctorate at the University of South Africa (UNISA) with a dissertation on the concept of duty.

Two scientific books and one literary essay have appeared in Germany from the pen of Dr Claus Nordbruch so far, and he has written a number of essays for German and South African human sciences journals. By the end of this year, he will publish his latest research on freedom of opinion in Germany.

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