A Long Shadow:
THE 1981 SPRINGBOK TOUR OF NEW ZEALAND

Sebastian Potgieter (University of Otago)
Email: potgieter.sebastian@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: In 1981, at the height on the international sports boycott, the South African national rugby team, the Springboks, toured New Zealand. The tour was characterised by violent demonstrations as pro- and anti-tour forces locked horns. South African rugby fans watching the live broadcasts witnessed bizarre scenes: rugby fields being combed for glass shards, fishhooks, and nails scattered by anti-tour protestors; a pitch invasion at Hamilton forcing the cancellation of the Springboks' match against Waikato; the infamous Third Test, where 'flour-bombs' descended onto the field from a light aircraft. The tour is frequently referred to in studies on the sports boycott-era. However, the tours legacy for white rugby is not considered. Using hitherto untapped archival material, this article provides an in depth discussion on the 1981 tour, and in particular how it reinforced white rugby's isolation in the 1980s.

KEYWORDS: Rugby Union, Apartheid, South Africa, New Zealand, African National Congress

Introduction

For much of the latter half of the twentieth century, white South Africa was forced to contend with an anti-apartheid sports boycott. Along with a host of financial and trade sanctions, the sports boycott sought to pressure the white regime into abandoning apartheid, white South Africa's system of institutionalized racial segregation. In particular, the boycott targeted

Sporting Traditions, vol. 36, no. 1 (May 2019), pp. 23–41.
© Australian Society for Sports History, www.sporthistory.org

rugby union, a game traditionally aligned with Afrikaner nationalism. As a result, the Springboks, white South Africa's national representative team, struggled to remain in the international fold and were subjected to large anti-apartheid protests on tours abroad.

Arguably the epicentre of the boycott for South African rugby and the event which virtually ensured their isolation was the 1981 Springbok tour of New Zealand. Since the late 1950s tension had steadily mounted in New Zealand about playing against a country whose racial policies so strongly contradicted their own. In 1981 these tensions boiled over, both in opposition to apartheid and their own National Party government, under Prime Minister Robert Muldoon, who refused to intervene in the tour. For 56 days, between 22 July and 12 September, more than 150,000 New Zealanders protested against the tour, clashing (sometimes violently) with police and rugby supporters. The protests were among the largest civil disobedience campaigns in New Zealand history and culminated in more than 1500 criminal charges being laid against those involved. While the tour was able to run its course (the All Black winning the series by two tests to one) it had exposed rifts in New Zealand society which proved insurmountable to future Springbok-All Black contests under apartheid. There was also a sense that no further Springbok tours could be mounted safely. As it turned out, 1981 was the last official Springbok tour under apartheid.

While the 1981 tour remains a contentious matter in New Zealand, it is treated with amnesia in South Africa. Outside of player autobiographies and general rugby histories there are few references to it. A smattering of scholarly work deals with the tour, but tends to approach it as part of the larger politics of the sports boycott. Notably, little scholarly work deals with the tours legacy for white rugby. In this article, I unpack that legacy. While authors such as David Black and John Nauright contend that the tour helped erode white confidence in apartheid, its material manifestations are rarely considered.[1] Like the Basil D'Oliveira affair for South African cricket, the 1981 tour was instrumental in isolating the South African Rugby Board (SARB).[2] This article also represents the first scholarly work on the tour to draw on the SARB archive, housed at Stellenbosch University. Furthermore, as an Afrikaans speaker I am able to engage with material which has generally presented a language barrier for non-Afrikaans speaking researchers. This material includes the Afrikaans press, which reported heavily on the tour.

1 John Nauright and David Black, Rugby and the South African Nation (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 89.

2 In 1968, the South African born cricketer, Basil D'Oliveira, was refused entrance to the country with the MCC cricket team. As D'Oliveira was 'coloured' the apartheid government deemed his selection as political with the intent to embarrassing them. The affair was detrimental to the image of South African cricket.

Rugby and the Boycott: Historical Overview

Implemented in 1948 by the Afrikaner dominated National Party, apartheid (meaning separateness) sought to maintain white control over South Africa. It did so by institutionalizing racial segregation and privileging whites over the country's other race groups. Blacks, Coloureds, and Asians (all labelled as 'non-whites' by the state) were disenfranchised, deprived of equal opportunities, and in severe cases stripped of their land and citizenship. Broadly speaking, apartheid was delineated into petty apartheid, which entailed the segregation of public facilities and social events, and grand apartheid, which determined matters such as access to land, housing, employment opportunities, and political representation by race.[3]

Laws such as the Group Areas Act of 1950, a cornerstone of apartheid which designated areas where only people of a certain race could reside, permeated into sport to prevent inter-racial contact. International touring teams were also requested to select white players only, as was the case with New Zealand rugby tours of South Africa until 1970. Sport was also organised along racial lines. Rugby, for example, consisted of four controlling bodies, each with their own representative team: the SARB catered to white players, the South African Rugby Association (SARA) to black players, and the South African Rugby Football Federation (SARFF) to Coloured players, while the South African Rugby Union (SARU) was the only non-racial body. An amalgamation of the SARB, SARA, and SARFF in 1977 meant players of colour could legally represent the Springboks, but it took up until 1981 before this materialised (even so there were only two players of colour to represent the Springboks throughout the 1980s).

Since its inception, Apartheid generated international unease within the post-WWII climate of significant decolonisation of Africa and the general repudiation of racism. International trade, economic, and sports boycotts became a way to demonstrate opposition to apartheid and attempt to pressure the white regime into abandoning its racial policies. Notably, for countries not engaged in significant trade with South Africa, such as New Zealand, boycotting sport became key in demonstration opposition to apartheid.[4] Sporting boycott's first appeared in the 1960s, gradually making it virtually impossible for South Africa's major sports to compete abroad. Arguably the boycott's first major success was South Africa's expulsion from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1970.

3 For more on apartheid, see Dan O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1996); Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (London: Hurst and Company, 2003), pp. 487–634.

4 John Nauright, *Sport, Culture and Identities in South Africa* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), p. 146.

Cricket, the country's other major white sport (although still drawing a predominantly English-speaking following as opposed to rugby which mostly drew Afrikaners) also increasingly came under fire. As with rugby, cricket was organised along racial lines with only white players (administered by the South African Cricket Union) being able to represent the country.[5] Following the Basil D'Oliveira affair and the subsequent cancelation of the 1968 MCC tour of South Africa, international isolation seemed more certain. An Australian tour of South Africa in 1969 ran concurrently to the violently disrupted Springbok rugby tour of Britain, prompting many Australians to question whether the country should be doing more to adhere to the growing anti-apartheid sporting boycott.[6] By 1970, at a time where South African cricket was widely regarded as the best in the world, the International Cricket Council (ICC) responded to pressure from the Anti-Apartheid Movement and placed a moratorium on all tours to and from South Africa.[7] The 1971 cancelation of a South African tour of Australia (traditionally a strong ally of SACU) amidst fears that the tour would be disrupted to the same extent as the 1971 Springbok rugby tour of Australia, signalled the onset of isolation which would last until 1991.

While most South African sports were boycotted, rugby union was most heavily targeted by the Anti-Apartheid Movement, South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, and in the US by TransAfrica (formerly *TransAfrica* Forum). As white (Afrikaner) South Africa's national sport, it became imperative to isolate rugby if the boycott was to achieve any success. Following the close bond between Afrikaner nationalism and rugby, the international success of the Springboks bestowed 'ethnic self-esteem' and 'symbolise[d] both the actual and potential achievements of the Afrikaner people'.[8] Pro-boycotters argued that isolating the game would put significant pressure on the Afrikaner government.

However, the SARB could not be easily removed from international competition. The International Rugby Board (IRB), formed in 1886, had made South Africa (along with New Zealand and Australia) a full member in 1949. Danie Craven, SARB President between 1956-1992, used his strong friendships forged as an IRB board member since 1956 and its Chairman

5 Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai, 'The coming of Nelson and the ending of Apartheid Cricket? Gatting's rebels in South Africa, 1990', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 33 (2016), p. 1786.

6 Tom Heenan and David Dunstan, 'The dark side of the Don: Bradman, the Board and Apartheid', *Sport in Society*, 18 (2015), p. 1114.

7 Douglas Booth, *The Race Game: Sport and Politics in South Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p. 99.

8 Albert Grundlingh, *Potent Pastimes: Sport and Leisure Practices in Modern Afrikaner History*, Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2013, p. 69; Nauright and Black, *Rugby and the South African Nation*, p. 61.

on several occasions to stave off the worst of the boycott during the 1970s.[9] Generally, IRB members seemed reluctant to isolate South Africa, as only Australia (in 1971) severed its ties with the SARB. South Africa's premier status in world rugby also made it difficult to justify removing the country from international competition without negatively impacting the quality of the game. Along with New Zealand, South African rugby had historically been at the forefront of the code.

The apartheid government were also willing to adapt their policies to protect rugby. In 1967 an All Black tour of South Africa was cancelled after the New Zealand Rugby Football Union (NZRFU) came under fire from its own government for selecting an all-white All Black team. Historically, Māori had been excluded from tours of South Africa, the first instance being in 1927 when the NZRFU informed its provincial affiliates that no Māori should be included in trials for the following year's All Black tour to South Africa.[10] In 1968, South African Prime Minister, BJ Vorster, responded by designating Māori as 'honorary whites', allowing them to join All Black tours.[11] This concession demonstrated that pressure on sport, and particularly rugby, could bring changes to government policy.

Continued pressure from the boycott led to the government reformulating its sport policy in 1971 and 1977. The 1971 'multi-national sport' policy advocated a degree of racial contact, as the country's different 'nations' (races) were permitted to compete against one another. By 1977 steps were taken toward multi-racial sport, but it took until 1982 before this became a legal reality. It must be noted that, while legal, multi-racial sport seldom occurred. As with 1968, however, these changes demonstrated flexibility in government sport policies.

The 1970s saw white rugby encounter the material manifestations of the boycott. Tours of the United Kingdom in 1969/70 and Australia in 1971 drew large demonstrations. During both tours the team were heavily guarded due to concerns that demonstrators would try to harm the team; games were played behind barbed wire. In 1973 New Zealand Prime Minister, Norman Kirk cancelled a second All Black tour of South Africa. Kirk pressured the NZRFU into suspending its ties with the SARB until a merit selected, non-racial Springbok team could play the All Blacks. Craven responded by

9 Douglas Booth, 'Hitting Apartheid for six? The politics of the South African sports boycott', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38, (2003), p. 479.

10 Greg Ryan and Geoff Watson, *Sport and the New Zealanders: A History* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2018), p. 168.

11 Notably, 1968 was the same year Vorster refused to allow Basil D'Oliveira to tour the country with the MCC team. This could be read as testimony to the importance of international rugby to the government, whereas cricket, which still catered predominantly to the country's English population, was not considered as valuable to the Afrikaner nation.

saying: 'I am not going to allow multi-racial trials to take place. If we simply run off and stage multi-racial trials against lawful policy then we become anarchists like the rest of them'.[12]

However, a change in New Zealand government renewed the Springbok-All Black rivalry. The National Party's Robert Muldoon had made sustaining sporting ties with South Africa part of his election campaign, opening the doors for an All Black tour in 1976. Importantly, this tour took place only a month after the fatal shooting of protesting school children during the June 16 Soweto uprising. The tour angered many New Zealanders and contributed to feeling against the 1981 tour, as demonstrator Geoff Chapple notes: 'Nineteen seventy-six was a very emotional year for New Zealand. Much later, during the 1981 Springbok tour, people wondered where the energy came from that suddenly exploded onto the streets…A lot of it began in 1976'.[13] By continuing to play sport with South Africa, New Zealand seemed an "acquiescent partner in the philosophy of apartheid".[14] Sustained ties with South Africa led to twenty-one African nations boycotting the 1976 Montreal Summer Olympic Games due to New Zealand's presence.

Following the boycott, the Commonwealth drafted the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement, to which New Zealand was a signatory. It urged Commonwealth nations to discourage their sporting bodies from playing against South Africa and arguably materialised due to the need to stop Springbok-All Black rugby contests. Black and Nauright contend that '"from the mid-1970s the effort to force the severing of New Zealand-South Africa rugby relations was the single-most important driving force behind the extension of sport sanctions internationally'.[15] South Africa's most revered rugby rival was New Zealand and boycotters hoped that stopping Springbok-All Black encounters would strike a nerve in Afrikanerdom. Louis Luyt, president of the powerful Transvaal Rugby Union during the 1970s, noted that cancelling rugby tours was 'one area where you could really hurt many privileged white South Africans who were still reasonably comfortable despite economic sanctions'.[16] However, despite the Gleneagles Agreement and significant anti-tour feeling in New Zealand, the NZRFU proceeded with its invitation to the Springboks to tour in 1981.

12 'S African rugby chief rejects mixed trials', The Times (England), 22 February 1973, p. 8.

13 Geoff Chapple, *1981: The Tour* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, 1984), p. 23.

14 Les Cleveland, 'The New Zealand Scene', *The Australian Quarterly*, v42 (1970), p. 108.

15 Nauright and Black, *Rugby and the South African Nation*, p. 87.

16 Louis Luyt, *Walking Proud: The Louis Luyt Autobiography* (Cape Town: Don Nelson Publishers, 2003), p. 162.

The Tour

Returning to New Zealand after a sixteen year hiatus, the 1981 Springbok tour drew significant attention and was watched around the world. The team travelled to New Zealand under the guise of being the first multi-racial Springbok team to play the All Blacks. Craven had capitulated and held racially mixed Springbok trials, selecting Errol Tobias as the sole player of colour. It was, however, the large anti-tour movement developing in New Zealand which drew most attention. The tour had become a divisive matter in New Zealand, broadly delineated into two opposing views: either it was believed that sport should be autonomous from political issues and that, as apartheid was a political problem, the Springboks and All Blacks should be free to play one another, or; playing sport against South Africa, and particularly rugby, propped up white confidence in apartheid.

Representing the latter perspective were Halt All Racist Tours (HART) and Citizens Association for Racial Equality (CARE). Their 'Operation Rugby' disrupted the tour for its duration. In Gisborne, protestors strew shattered glass, nails, and fishhooks onto the playing surface, delaying the match. In Hamilton, the Springboks-Waikato match was abandoned after hundreds of protestors invaded the pitch and a pilot threatened to crash his aircraft into the main grandstand. The final test match of the tour, in Auckland, was disrupted by an aircraft dropping bags of flour onto the players.

The tour is best remembered for the heated and bitter conflict between police, protestors, and rugby supporters. While the tour was able to run its course and matches were sold out, it took special riot squads and fortress-like stadiums to prevent protestors from disrupting matches. The tour had a profound effect on New Zealand. Charlottes Hughes contends that it '"let loose a torrent of public and private debate over…the health of the nation, the nature and propriety of 'violence', the system of apartheid and the maintenance of law and order'.[17] Rob Gwyther, a New Zealand columnist, noted that 1981 had likely cost New Zealand its 'innocence'.[18] The tour prompted the largest mass-mobilisation of New Zealand police ever recorded and was among the greatest social disruptions the country faced during the twentieth-century. The events challenged New Zealand's egalitarian image, bringing to the surface questions over domestic racism and the hegemonic role rugby played in society and the gender relations it entrenched.[19]

17 Charlotte Hughes, 'Moira's lament? Feminist advocacy and the 1981 Springbok tour of New Zealand', in Greg Ryan (ed.), *Tackling Rugby Myths: Rugby and New Zealand Society, 1854–2004* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2005), p. 138.

18 'Springbok-toer laat Nieu-Seeland sy 'onskuld verloor' [Springbok tour costs New Zealand its 'innocence'], *Die Burger*, 15 September 1981, p. 6.

19 Rachel Jean and Owen Hughes, *1981: A Country at War* (Auckland: Frame Up Films, 2000).

In South Africa, the tour was treated with incredulity. The Afrikaans press frequently reported that protests were a communist plot bent on destabilising South Africa and formed part of a greater total onslaught against the country. Protestors were labelled communist trouble makers who were anti-rugby. Nevertheless, there was a feeling that the tour had likely put an end to Springbok-All Blacks contests as they were known. The tour was broadcast live on South African television screens — a first for the country — allowing whites to see what was unfolding. Many were shocked by the levels of hostility from an old ally. Shortly after the Springboks defeated the All Blacks in 1976 (barely a month after the Soweto uprising) a South African observer remarked: "Thank God for the All Blacks, at least disaster has not taken to the rugby field yet".[20] The events of 1981 demonstrated the short sightedness of this claim.

Fighting for Survival: White rugby during the 1980s

For white rugby the new decade held some promise. In comparison to the previous decade, 1980 and 1981 were busy years for the Springboks. Test matches were played against France, the British and Irish Lions, and the South American Jaguars, Ireland, the USA, and the 1981 tour of New Zealand was eagerly anticipated. The casual observer could be forgiven for speculating that rugby sanctions were softening. However, following the 1981 tour the Springboks were not involved in any official tours until 1992 when the boycott was lifted.

Although it was not the first 'demo' tour, 1981 had long lasting repercussions. The international audience had witnessed the mayhem sporting contact with South Africa could attract. The Springboks became an 'economic and symbolic liability' and policing costs alone became prohibitive.[21] It seemed unlikely that the Springboks could tour abroad without attracting potentially violent anti-apartheid demonstrations. In 1982 the Gleneagles Agreement was reinforced by the Brisbane Code of Conduct, making Commonwealth nations who played against South Africa liable to punishment. Ultimately, 1981 gave rise to the notion that no further tours could be mounted safely, contributing significantly to South African rugby's post-1981 isolation.[22] Upon the Springboks' return home, Craven assured the media that the tour had been a resounding success and was adamant that the All Blacks would return to South Africa in the near future.[23] While

20 'Springbok victory shines in darkening S African scene', *The Times* (London), 7 August 1976, p. 5.

21 Rob Nixon, 'Apartheid on the Run: The South African Sports Boycott', *Transition*, vol. 58, no. 1, 1992, p. 81.

22 Nauright and Black, *Rugby and the South African Nation*, p. 90.

23 'Tweeduisend wag Bokke in [Two thousand await Boks]', *Die Burger*, 30 September 1981, p. 1.

he was not willing to concede that the tour had been a mistake, Craven anticipated repercussions. For white rugby, the tour ramifications were protracted over the 1980s. In an attempt to offset potential problems, the SARB explored several initiatives it hoped would prevent isolation. These initiatives were usually short-lived, ineffective, and generally left the SARB in a worse-off position.

Freedom in Sport and Free Nation New Zealand

Shortly after the tour concluded, the SARB entered into an agreement with the Dublin-based organization Freedom in Sport (FIS) and Auckland-based Free Nation New Zealand (FRENZ). Both organisations had supported the tour and saw sporting contact as a vehicle for positive social change. They claimed that the tour was evidence sport had unjustly become an arena to contest political problems. Speaking to the SARB in 1982, FIS founder, Tommie Campbell, outlined the purpose of his organisation:

> We believe sport should be removed from the political arena, it should not be … subjected to selective political and moral dictates. Freedom in sport means the individuals choice to play or not to play in any country and against a team of sporting individuals.[24]

Similarly, FRENZ, an offshoot of the 1981 pro-tour organisation Stop Politics in Rugby, took up the mantle of FIS in New Zealand. Writing to the NZRFU President Ces Blazey in 1982, FRENZ chairperson, Yvonne Wilcox, stated that they sought to 'uphold the right of the individual to have freedom of choice about where a person wishes to pursue a sporting interest, and against whom and to promote non-political and non-racial sport worldwide'.[25]

In the wake of the 1981 tour both organisations worked closely with the SARB, who they regarded as the principle victim of politics in sport.[26] Following the tour, FIS and FRENZ ran something of a public relations campaign on behalf of the SARB, attempting to counter hostile media emanating from the UK, New Zealand, and Australia. However, they were hampered by lack of funding and frequently asked the SARB to find a South African sponsor for their initiatives. It is unclear whether any funding emerged, but seems unlikely considering that FRENZ were still scrambling for funds by the time of the proposed 1985 All Black tour of South Africa.

---

24 SARB Archive, Stellenbosch University. Collection VII: SARR Sake, Box Politiek in Sport/Apartheid, Speech delivered by Tommie Campbell in South Africa titled 'Boodskap: Mnr Tommie Campbell, Stigterslid, Freedom in Sport', 1 August 1982.

25 SARB Archive, Collection VII: SARR Sake, Box Politiek in Sport/Apartheid, Letter from Yvonne Willcox of Free Nation New Zealand to Ces Blazey, 15 February 1982.

26 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Unclassified document 'Craven in Crisis? By Paul Dobson', 1987.

It was Craven's understanding of apartheid, however, which proved a major obstacle. Craven saw apartheid as a set of laws which led to social and economic discriminatory practices and that if these laws were removed, apartheid ceased to exist. He did not understand that removing apartheid entailed universal franchise, majority rule and a totally new political dispensation.[27] Following the 1977 merger of the SARB, SARA, and SARFF and the removal laws which segregated sport, Craven believed apartheid had been removed from rugby. He could not understand why rugby could not return to the international arena as the sport had complied with boycott demands. Craven believed that the continued hostilities toward South African rugby stemmed from foreign governments and media who were ignorant to the changes which had been implemented.[28] This made FIS and FRENZ alluring to the SARB, as they presented an opportunity to inform the outside world of their supposed misguided hostility.

The political situation post-1981 led the SARB to join with FIS in hosting an International Rugby Media Congress in 1983. Essentially, the Congress was to act as a smoke screen to world media, portraying the South African game as integrated. The SARB and FIS invited journalists and media personal from around the world to come to South Africa and see for themselves the progress in 'racially integrated' rugby. Craven distrusted the press and the Congress certainly reflected the SARB's anxieties about its international future.[29] The negative publicity brought on by the 1981 tour had not subsided by the time of the Congress and continued to plague the SARB, threatening to scuttle any prospect of a sympathetic hearing of racial integration let alone any future tours. Nonetheless, Craven and Campbell persevered, insisting the Congress would correct the misinformed opinions of the international media. Writing on the need for the Congress, Craven stated:

> we were prepared to face the facts as they existed in 1983 – not 1973 or 1976 or 1979. It was obvious to us that rugby and many of the other sports played in our country had become the hostage of anti-South Africa policies. Added to this, the fact that large sections of the media were unaware of the changes that had and were taking place, we decided to afford them the opportunity of seeing for themselves the true position.[30]

27 Grundlingh, *Potent Pastimes*, p. 111.

28 SARB Archive, Collection VII: SARR Sake, Box Media, 'The International Rugby Media Congress: A Pictorial Report', undated, p. 1.

29 Paul Dobson, *Doc: The Life of Danie Craven* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1994), pp. 231-233.

30 SARB Archive, Collection VII: SARR Sake, Box Media, 'The International Rugby Media Congress', p. 1.

The fifty-five international delegates who attended the conference were transported around South Africa to demonstrate rugby's integration. However, some observers questioned how South African sports-administrators could demand democratic rights for their athletes when their government denied rights to millions of blacks. The lack of integration at school level also raised concern. Speaking at the conference, Craven obtusely commented that 'it is not a crime to be born a South African', prompting one observer to remark that this seemed to be at odds with the reality in South Africa, where it was practically a crime to be born black.[31]

Ultimately, the conference did not yield the desired results. 'The rewards were well hidden if they existed at all' commented rugby historian Paul Dobson.[32] It was hoped the conference would lay the groundwork for proposed tours to South Africa by Wales, Australia, France, England, the British and Irish Lions, and New Zealand. However, of the six earmarked tours only England made the journey. The political pressure was too intense for the others.

In the wake of 1981, it seemed that Craven felt the SARB needed additional aid to prevent isolation. He no longer seemed confident in his friends in the IRB's ability to provide tours as they had in the 1960s and 1970s. However, trying to market South African rugby as non-racial was not feasible as true non-racial rugby was regarded as inextricably linked to a non-racial society. Ultimately, neither FIS nor FRENZ could change the image of the SARB as an exponent of apartheid ideology. By attempting to exonerate the SARB from apartheid, FIS and FRENZ espoused views that lacked currency around the world. These organisations centred their campaigns on the SARB's claims that apartheid was removed from rugby. However, they were naïve to the fact that in a racially stratified society like South Africa, sport could not be equal until the social conditions from which participants came were equal.

'Without the All Blacks, it's just not rugby': The 1985 All Black tour

The SARB's relationship with the FIS and FRENZ petered out by 1986 following the cancellation of a proposed 1985 All Black tour of South Africa. The tour was proposed shortly after the 1981 tour concluded, astonishing many observers. However, 1981 had left rifts in New Zealand society which proved insurmountable. The anti-tour demonstrations had been the

31 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Report sent from Tommie Campbell to Alex Kellerman titled 'Report for the Manager of the SA Rugby Board', 19 June 1984; SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Letter to Danie Craven from the Dundee College of Technology Student Association, 11 July 1984.

32 Dobson, *Doc*, p. 233.

largest civil disobedience campaign in New Zealand history. Police reports emanating from New Zealand suggested that demonstrations would pick up where they left off should the 1985 tour go ahead, something which even FIS and FRENZ conceded as a possibility.[33]

The 1981 tour had strained New Zealand society, adding to existing racial, social, and economic tensions.[34] Speaking to the Dominion in 1984 on the 1985 tour, Ann Hercus, New Zealand Minister of Police, warned that 'the cost is too high — and I am not talking about the millions of dollars such a tour would again cost the taxpayers'.[35] The social rifts following the 1981 tour were still very much part of society by the time the 1985 tour question came about. The Auckland Star predicted that 'New Zealand's own simmering racial tensions' would ensure that any future tour would once again descend into chaos.[36]

Shortly before its scheduled departure the tour was cancelled. Two Auckland lawyers lodged an appeal in the High Court against the NZRFU's decision to tour on the grounds that it disregarded the Union's constitutional requirement to promote, foster and benefit rugby in New Zealand.[37] The presiding Judge Casey ruled against the NZRFU:

> The interest of the public and of the nation in not having the tour go ahead is a most potent factor … The tour is contrary to a clear direction from the Government because of the harm it would do to our national interests; to the unanimous resolution of the Parliament for the serious harm it would do to New Zealand's interest at home and abroad …[38]

The cancelation was perhaps the first time the repercussions of 1981 became evident for South African rugby. The 1981 tour had played a large part in turning opinions in New Zealand against the 1985 tour. Incidents of violence and unrest in the build-up to the 1985 tour were attributed to antagonism that still existed towards police in the wake of the 1981 tour.[39]

33 SARB Archive, Collection Newspaper Clippings, 'Police Fear Result of South African tour', *Dominion*, 19 October 1984.

34 SARB Archive, Collection B, Box B3: Korrespondensie van Norman McKenzie, 'Warning over tour strain', *New Zealand Herald*, 28 February 1985.

35 SARB Archive, Collection Newspaper Clippings. 'All Black tour cost too high — Hercus', *Dominion*, 17 October 1984.

36 SARB Archive, Collection B, Box B3: Korrespondensie van Norman McKenzie, 'Peoples Story of 81', *Auckland Star*, 1 December 1984.

37 Dawn Oliver and Jorg Fedtke (eds.), *Human Rights and the Private Sphere: A Comparative Study* (Auston, TX: Routledge, 2007), p. 312.

38 Finnigan v New Zealand Rugby Football Union Inc. (No 2) [1985] 2 NZLR 181, pp. 186–188.

39 SARB Archive, Collection B, Box B3: Korrespondensie van Norman McKenzie, Unclassified newspaper article titled 'Reaping 1981 Seeds', undated.

Perhaps most tellingly, though, was the absence of unanimous support for the tour amongst New Zealand's rugby unions, as had been the case in 1981. The Auckland Rugby Union (ARU), one of the country's biggest, was first to oppose the tour, but was soon followed by North Harbour, Poverty Bay, Otago, Taranaki, and Waikato. According to the ARU:

> We believe that if the tour proceeds we will see a trend which emerged during 1981 of a falloff in support from parents and teachers, and therefore a consequent falloff in boys playing rugby. Since 1981 active support has remained at earlier levels. For too long rugby administrators have taken the traditionally complacent view that rugby will always remain the pre-eminent sport. This can no longer be assumed.[40]

For many white South Africans, the cancelation likely further reinforced anxieties over isolation. For rugby, the cancelation meant a continued lack of exposure to top flight international competition, limiting the extent to which the game could develop. A rapidly deteriorating political situation in South Africa around the mid-1980s also made it unlikely that there would be international rugby in the near future.

The 1986 Cavaliers Rebel Tour

In their desperation to secure international competition, the SARB resorted to 'rebel' tours, which were unsanctioned by either national governing bodies or the IRB. South African cricket relied on similar tours to survive isolation during the 1970s and 80s. International cricketers had been lured by significant financial incentives to tour South Africa with unofficial cricket teams from Australia, England and the West Indies. In 1986, the New Zealand Cavaliers rugby team toured South Africa. The team was, bar two players, the full All Black side which were meant to tour South Africa in 1985 and were even referred to as the All Blacks by the South African press. The Cavaliers were led by Andy Dalton, who had captained the All Blacks in 1981, and coached by All Black legend Colin Meads, a vociferous supporter of the 1981 tour.

While the SARB endorsed the tour, it could not be seen to be extending invitations to individual players as this would discredit the Board. Accordingly, the tour was jointly sponsored by Yellow Pages, a telephone directory company, and Volkskas, a South African bank. The SARB was to assume full authority over the tour once the team arrived, unless the tour caused any problems at which point it would be taken over by the sponsors.[41]

40 SARB Archive, Collection B, Box B3: Korrespondensie van Norman McKenzie, 'Two Rugby Unions Say Drop Tour', *New Zealand Herald*, 6 December 1984.

41 Luyt, *Walking Proud*, p. 165.

The players left New Zealand without informing their government, the NZRFU, or IRB. Once news broke of the tour, the participants claimed to be travelling as individuals and as a private, non-representative side. Once in South Africa, the Cavaliers were under constant police surveillance and protection. There were concerns that the tour could be violently disrupted as 'terror attacks' had increased since the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's principal liberation movement, initiated its civil disobedience campaign in 1985.[42] However, no such actions took place and the tour progressed uninterrupted.

The tour brought the SARB into disrepute with the IRB. Once the news broke, the IRB insisted that the Cavaliers be sent home, but the SARB refused. Craven retorted that '"to stop this trip would be such a deep disgrace that no man in his right mind would ever do such an injustice to South Africa'.[43] Furthermore, it was speculated that the Cavaliers were paid to tour, contravening the IRB's amateurism regulations. While it is still disputed whether payment occurred, it seems likely when considering that players from the 1987 South Sea Barbarians rebel tour of South Africa were paid.[44]

Rebel tours, particularly the Cavaliers tour, proved costly to the SARB. While Dobson contends that the Cavaliers tour "save[d] South African rugby from the slough of despondency into which it had been dropped in 1985", its ramifications were notable. The tour soured the SARB's relationship with the IRB, whose authority as world governing body was undermined by rebel tours; the IRB swiftly outlawed unsanctioned tours.[45] The Cavaliers also drove a wedge between the SARB and NZRFU. The next time the Springboks and All Blacks would play each other would be in 1992, by which point apartheid was in the process of being dismantled. Any thoughts that South Africa would be eligible to compete in the first Rugby World Cup in 1987 were thoroughly dispelled by the rebel tours.

The Cavaliers tour severely tainted the SARB's image. In 1987 when the England Rugby Football Union considered lifting their ban on contact with the SARB, they insisted Craven first provide them with a statement on whether unauthorised fees had been paid to the Cavaliers, as well as that the SARB had taken legal steps to prevent such tours in future.[46] Writing to the

42 Grundlingh, *Potent Pastimes*, p. 105.

43 Paul Dobson, *Rugby's Greatest Rivalry: South Africa vs. New Zealand, 1921-1995* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1996), p. 180.

44 Grundlingh, *Potent Pastimes*, p. 107.

45 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Newspaper article sent to the SARB executive from Alex Kellerman, 9 January 1987, titled 'Tour Compensation Introduced', undated.

46 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Newspaper articles sent from the SARB to the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, 17 April 1984.

South African London embassy in December, 1986, Craven requested that they emphasize that the Cavaliers tour was a mistake when speaking to the press about South African rugby.[47] An invitation to the Wallabies to tour in 1988 was turned down largely due to the controversy surrounding the rebel tours, along with concerns that Australian players would be paid to tour.[48] Controversy also raged in England in 1986 over a touring social team from South Africa. English players refused to play them out of moral conviction, coaches threatened to resign should their club play the tourists, and threats were made that matches would be violently disrupted, resulting in the cancellation of several matches. The English press linked these objections to the lingering hostilities in the rugby world towards the Cavaliers tour.[49]

While the Cavaliers tour briefly revived South African rugby, Craven could not have failed to understand that this revival would be short-lived unless there was a steady stream of tours. In the absence of regular international competition, many South African players were accepting lucrative contracts from northern hemisphere clubs. Coinciding with the cancellation of the 1985 All Black tour was a flight of local talent to overseas clubs, demonstrating the diminished allure of representing the Springboks. Top Springboks Ray Mordt and Rob Louw (both of whom were part of the 1981 tour) were amongst the notable players who defected to the northern hemisphere, switching codes to play professional rugby league, perhaps demonstrating their disillusionment with rugby union.

Failing to curb the flight of talent to the north threatened the viability of the SARB's domestic competition, the Currie Cup. The SARB had relied on the Currie Cup to keep rugby at a high standard in the absence of international rugby.[50] However, with many top players leaving South African shores the competition rapidly diminished in quality, resulting in fewer spectators attending matches. Spectators were less inclined to make a costly and time-consuming family trip to stadiums for matches which no longer boasted top quality players. This had financial ramifications for the SARB

47 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Letter from Danie Craven to Philip Moolman of the South African Embassy in London, 12 December 1986.

48 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Newspaper article sent to the SARB executive from Alex Kellerman, 9 January 1987, titled 'Australian RFU may be split over SA tour issue', *Argus*, 31 December 1986.

49 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Letter to Danie Craven from the South African Embassy in London, 12 December 1986, with attached newspaper article titled 'Demonstrators planning to disrupt Hedgehogs tour', *The Times* (London), 3 December 1986.

50 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Letter to Danie Craven from the South African Embassy in London, 12 December 1986, with attached newspaper article titled 'Park cancel visit by Cape Town side', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 December 1986.

and its unions, who were dependent on the gate fees collected at matches. A decline in revenue for the SARB in turn curbed their ability to finance tours, upgrade rugby facilities, and host coaching clinics.

Fearing that rugby was losing its place as the preeminent sport in South Africa, the SARB approached several marketing agencies it hoped would reinvigorate domestic rugby. However, these agencies all returned to the lack of international competition as the central feature affecting the quality of, and interest in, the South African game.[51] One agency also outlined that in a changing South Africa, rugby still carried racial overtones of apartheid, making it less appealing both internationally and domestically.[52] Worryingly for the SARB, rugby was also no longer considered the obvious choice of sport for school children, particularly as games like cricket, tennis, and golf were becoming ever more popular amongst Afrikaners, and often offered better reward for their efforts.[53] A successful Rugby World Cup in 1987 also removed some of the gloss from Test matches and reduced South Africa's significance to world rugby. One journalist noted:

> In popular terms rugby has moved on from the time when its highest expression was the tour in which one International Board country crossed the equator to play another. In future, it will be a World Cup in which dozens of countries are involved.[54]

In short, rugby supremacy was no longer decided in climatic test series, but at a multi-team tournament format from which South Africa was excluded.

The 'African Initiative': The SARB and the ANC

From 1987 onward Craven adopted a new approach, becoming highly critical of the Nationalist government and apartheid. The SARB had failed to ward off isolation during the 1980s, perhaps forcing Craven to change how he dealt with the situation. It is unlikely that Craven suddenly underwent a deep paradigm shift (in 1990 he was still warning against equal voting rights for blacks). More likely he was forced to recognise that South African rugby would remain a pariah as long as apartheid existed. Craven came out strongly against the government, calling for reform. He singled

51 SARB Archive, Collection A14: Bemarking van Rugby, Box A14.1: Manuskripte. Die Agentskap vir Reklame en Bemarking, 'Suid-Afrikaanse Rugby – Waarheen?', 13 March 1986.

52 SARB Archive, Bemarking van Rugby. .

53 SARB Archive, Collection A14: Bemarking van Rugby, Box A14.1: Manuskripte, D&O Bemarking en Promosies, 'Suid Afrikaanse Rugby: 'n Voorstel aan die Suid Afrikaanse Rugby Raad', 1986.

54 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, 'Rugby nears its South African sticking point', *Independent*, 9 September 1987.

out the Group Areas Act as 'white South Africa's greatest sin', but qualified his statement by maintaining that the racial separation was an evolutionary process and did not need to be enforced.[55]

Craven released a new year message in 1987 — the first time he had done so — in which he called for the scrapping of all apartheid laws and for pressure to be applied on the government to implement change more rapidly.[56] The message provoke outrage, particularly from Andries Treurnicht's Conservative Party which viewed rugby as one of the traditional bastions of white power and a bulwark of apartheid.

Craven's new political initiative was cemented in 1988. The 'African Initiative', as it became known in the SARB, comprised a set of three meetings between the Danie Craven, Louis Luyt and various members of the exiled ANC executive in Harare, Zimbabwe. The meetings where chaired by Thabo Mbeki (future South African President) and facilitated by former Springbok captain, Tommy Bedford and later by Chris Laidlaw, a former All Black captain and New Zealand High Commissioner in Zimbabwe during the meetings. Bedford, a relentless critic of apartheid, had informed Craven that the ANC had speculated that the liberalisation of rugby could help break the political deadlock in South Africa, while also paving the way for a potential return to international rugby.[57]

In attendance too was Ebrahim Patel, President of the non-racial South Africa Rugby Union, as the meetings aimed at merging the interests of black and white rugby bodies under a single banner. An amalgamation between the two rugby bodies could potentially reopen the doors to international competition to South African rugby. Despite having relatively few numbers, SARU was internationally accepted as representing true non-racial rugby in South Africa. However, SARU also suffered from the boycott. In 1984 the South African Council of Sport (SACOS), to which SARU was affiliated, pleaded to the United Nations to adjust its blanket ban on international coaches working in South Africa as their sporting unions were in dire need of quality coaching. A merger between the two rugby bodies could potentially alleviate pressure from the boycott, or so Craven thought.[58]

55 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Newspaper article sent to the SARB executive from Alex Kellerman, 9 January 1987, titled 'Tour Compensation Introduced', undated.

56 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Unclassified document 'Craven in Crisis? By Paul Dobson', undated.

57 Luyt, *Walking Proud*, p. 169.

58 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Newspaper article sent from the SARB to the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, 17 April 1984, titled 'SACOS plea to UN on coaching', *Sunday Times*, 1 April 1984.

The meetings culminated in a joint statement being released by the SARB, SARU, and ANC, highlighting the two rugby bodies' intentions to amalgamate into one non-racial body.[59] The statement caused outrage in South Africa and photos of Craven walking into the arms of the 'terrorists' incensed many whites. Craven's actions were condemned by Fritz Eloff, Deputy President of the SARB, and others on the Board's executive who maintained that their organisation should not be seen to be negotiating with terrorists.[60]

The government also condemned the meeting. The historical significance of rugby to the Afrikaner nation left the government feeling humiliated that Craven had placed his faith in the ANC over the National Party. Despite holding numerous secret talks with the ANC in the 1980s on a post-apartheid political dispensation and the release of Nelson Mandela, State President, P.W. Botha labelled Craven a traitor and threatened to seize his passport. Craven's response was that he was doing what he believed to be right for rugby and that unification should be vigorously pursued.[61]

Conclusion

The 'African Initiative' marks the furthest reaches the shadow of 1981 cast over white rugby. Hereafter the road South African rugby followed was dictated by different forces. The 1981 tour played a key hand in forcing the SARB to the point where it engaged with the ANC. The ramifications of the tour had gradually isolated the SARB throughout the 1980s to the extent where it had to take radical steps. Following the tour, the SARB tried to cast itself as a non-racial rugby body which had removed apartheid from its ranks in hopes that this would keep the SARB on the international circuit. By making use of FIS and FRENZ, the Board sought to correct what it believed to be misinformed media reports on the state of rugby in South Africa. These attempts brought little success and were generally dismissed as 'window-dressing' as the SARB were unwilling to change. The cancelation of the 1985 All Black tour also revealed the damage the 1981 tour had caused, as it had played a significant role in having the 1985 tour terminated. Out of desperation to secure some international rugby, the Board relied on rebel tours which only further isolated South Africa rugby as they now fell afoul of the IRB for attempting to attract tours through financial incentives. The now all but certain disappearance of international rugby made it difficult

59 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, 'Joint statement of the South African Rugby Board, the South African Rugby Union and the African National Congress: Harare, Zimbabwe', 16 October 1988.

60 Luyt, *Walking Proud*, p. 178.

61 SARB Archive, Collection C2: Craven, D.H., Box Rugby/Politiek, Statement by the Executive Committee and recommendations to the Board on the African Initiative, undated.

to sustain quality rugby in South Africa as the top players departed for the northern hemisphere to see out their careers. This substantially diminished the quality of South Africa's domestic Currie Cup competition and had a detrimental effect on the white population's interest in rugby. It was from this position that Craven took the Board down a different road and engaged in talks with the ANC and SARU in hopes that it would alleviate the pressure on South African rugby. Ultimately then, scholars of the sports boycott-era have not paid sufficient attention to the extent to which the 1981 tour reinforced the isolation of the SARB during the 1980s.