

HENDRIK VERWOERD-TOEKENNING : DR.W.J. DE VILLIERS

Commendatio deur

Prof. H.B. Thom, Voorsitter, Hendrik Verwoerd-Trust  
(Carlton Hotel, Johannesburg, 19 Oktober 1982, 19h30)

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Aangesien dr. Willem Johannes de Villiers aan ons goed bekend is, hoef ek hier nie oor sy lewensloop uit te wei nie. Dit is egter nodig om ter oriëntering net 'n paar hoofpunte aan te stip.

Hy is gebore Vrystater, meer bepaald Jacobsdaller, wat aan die Grey-Kollege in Bloemfontein gematrikuleer en vervolgens aan die Universiteit van Kaapstad in die Ingenieurswese gaan studeer het. Deur toegewyde, suksesvolle studie het hy agtereenvolgens die grade B.Sc. Ing. (Elek.), B.Sc. Ing. (Meg.) en Ph.D. (Ing.) verwerf.

In sy daaropvolgende professionele loopbaan vind ons hom in verskillende hoedanighede en op verskillende plekke werksaam.

Gedurende die jare 1945-1949 is hy ingenieur by die Pretoria-kragstasie; en daarna volg vir hom jare in diens van die Anglo American Korporasie; 1950-1960 by die Rhokana-Korporasie in Zambië, waar hy van ingenieur tot bestuurder vorder; 1961-1964 as raadgewende ingenieur belas met produksie en produktiwiteit van die Anglo American Korporasie se goudmyne; en 1965-1968 as besturende direkteur van LTA Engineering, in welke hoedanigheid hy veral in verband met die voorbereiding van die Cabora Bassa-projek optree.

Daarna het sy verbintenis met SANLAM gekom, waarmee 'n nuwe hoofstuk in sy lewe ingelui is. Gedurende die jare 1969-1970 is hy nywerheidsraadgewer; dan volg sy werk in verband met General Mining en Finansiële Korporasie : 1970 adjunk-besturende direkteur; 1971 besturende direkteur; 1976 uitvoerende voorsitter; en 1980 uitvoerende voorsitter van General Mining Union Corporation.

Inmiddels het sake in dr. De Villiers se persoonlike lewe ook 'n gelukkige verloop gehad: hy het in die huwelik getree met mej. Francina Maria Meyer, 'n huwelik waaruit daar met verloop van tyd drie kinders gebore is. Hy en sy gesin beweeg in 'n ruime kring van gewaardeerde en waarderende vriende.

Dit is enkele hoofpunte uit sy lewe tot nou toe. Ons sien 'n lewe van noeste vlyt, maar nie 'n lewe waarin dr. De Villiers sy arbeidsaamheid net tot sy eie kantoor, sy eie maatskappy en eie omgewing beperk het nie; intendeel, hy het dit oor 'n uitgebreide terrein laat uitgaan.

'n Mens vind bewys hiervan wanneer jy let op die rade, komitees en ander liggame waarin hy diens gelewer het, bv.:

- Verdedigingsadviesraad
- Verdedigingsbeplanningskomitee
- Raad van die Kamer van Mynwese van Suid-Afrika
- Direksie, SANLAM
- Direksie, Suid-Afrikaanse Reserwebank
- Raad van die Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit

Hiermee is geensins 'n volledige lys gegee nie, dog bloot 'n verteenwoordigende monster om aan te dui hoedat daar van hom in nasionale belang 'n verskeidenheid van bydraes gekom het, en ook nog steeds kom.

Dit is seker nie vreemd nie dat hy reeds ruime erkenning en 'n hele aantal ere-toekennings ontvang het. Hieronder vind ons die volgende:

- Ster van Suid-Afrika (Groot Offisier)
- Staatspresident se Dekorasië vir Voortreflike Diens
- Tinie Louw-toekening van die Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut
- Sakeman van die Jaar, 1979
- Man van die Jaar, Financial Mail, 1980
- Orde van die Ster van Suid-Afrika (Siviele Afdeling) in die Groot-Kruis-klas, 1981
- Goue medalje van die British Institution of Mining and Metallurgy, 1981

- Ere-doktorsgraad in die Handelwetenskappe van die Universiteit van Stellenbosch
- Ere-doktorsgraad in Ekonomiese en Bestuurswetenskappe van die Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit

Ofskoon ook die voorgaande 'n blote keurlys is, kan daaruit al gesien word dat erkenning uit 'n verskeidenheid van oorde, met name ook uit die buiteland, gekom het.

Hiermee het ons 'n reeks feite gestel, wat relevant en betekenisvol is, maar wat eintlik nog maar weinig tot die werklike aard en wese van dr. De Villiers se arbeid deurdring; en by 'n geleentheid soos hierdie is dit noodsaaklik om juis hierop te let.

The nature of his work, the manifestations of his thinking - let us take a closer look at these.

Endowed with a keen, incisive mind, he received a sound scientific education, which during the most formative period of his life provided him with an indispensable foundation on which to superimpose and to tackle in a meaningful way the practical problems of his field. It became clear to him that the usual incentive schemes for the development of black labour were seriously inadequate. On his arrival in Zambia he made a thorough study of this problem, and soon came forward with a positive philosophy of sympathetic understanding and practical guidance of the black worker. This proved eminently successful, initially in Zambia and later on also in the RSA, so that black labour became more motivated and more productive.

The positive results of his leadership are characteristic not only of his years with Anglo American, but also of his time with General Mining. It is significant to note that after his return to South Africa in 1961, Anglo American at its headquarters in Johannesburg gave him special responsibility in the area of production and productivity and, in fact, allowed him a free hand to introduce methods and techniques with a view to improving efficiency.

After he had joined SANLAM, and had become Managing Director of General Mining and Financial Corporation, Dr. De Villiers initiated a comprehensive programme of policy review and, true to his philosophy regarding the utilisation of labour, also a full re-assessment of the training and education of the Group's employees, 70 000 black and 10 000 white. Dramatic evidence of the validity of his management concepts was provided by the financial results achieved by the Group: e.g. during the ten years of his leadership its capitalisation value on the Stock Exchange rose from R69 million to R1 828 million, its profits before tax from R17 million to R406 million, and its dividends from R4 million to R118 million.

Dr. De Villiers readily shared the benefit of his experience and knowledge with others. This was done in lectures, seminars and conferences, when he spoke to businessmen, engineers, students and employees; and also in his writings, which include a variety of articles and books.

He makes no secret of the fact that he is keenly interested in the work of the French business and management specialist, Henri Fayol, and that in the development of his own ideas he is specially indebted to Fayol. His labour and management philosophy has, indeed, been profoundly influenced by the scientific thinking of the Frenchman.

Those wishing to share the wisdom of Dr. De Villiers in the relevant fields, would be well advised to consult the books which will always be inseparably associated with his name. Two are well known at Afrikaans-language universities: Beginnels van Gedesentraliseerde Bestuur, and Die doeltreffende Benutting van Menslike Hulpbronne in die Republiek van Suid-Afrika. To these a third book has been added, entitled Handleiding vir Toesighouers, which is based on the former book and is intended to impart knowledge of management skills to supervisors.

In a recent reference - by an anonymous author - to his books I found this statement: "The basis of Dr. De Villiers's approach is that increased productivity, growth, and job satisfaction may be obtained only by reinforcing the so-called mechanics of management (investigation, estimation, planning and organising), as well as the improvement of control at all levels of management". This is both clear and succinct, and laconically stresses the main points of his reasoning.

Having said this about the nature and character of his work, we can now briefly summarise its significance.

We have taken cognizance of his university education as well as his activities in the practical field. It is often said that our universities are too theoretical in outlook and teaching, and up to a point this may be true. However, it must be borne in mind that the universities are by no means institutions for technical training, and that their primary duty is to concern themselves with fundamental study and research, to foster critical observation and judgment, and generally to open the mind in different disciplines. The ideal is, of course, that in the individual the scientific university education will be supplemented by practical experience, so that the complete social or economic leader for society can be produced. It is primarily a matter of a healthy combination of fundamental theory and principle on the one hand, and practical experience and application on the other.

Dr. De Villiers has proved this in a striking way. I think it is fair to say that without his university education, he would not have become the man we know today; whereas the same would have been the case had he not, with an open mind and open eye, gained such a vast amount of practical experience.

The significance of the work of Dr. De Villiers from the more practical point of view, stems from its value to our mining industry. He has made a contribution to the improvement of company profits; and to an increase in the share of shareholders in the form of higher dividends and an appreciation in capitalisation value.

Incidentally he has helped in various ways in securing benefits to the Government and country, e.g. an increased tax income, provision of additional jobs, and stimulation of industrial production forces. While we reap these fruits today, it is gratifying to know that they will also be there in the future, undoubtedly for many years to come, so long as the relevant industrial activities are carried on in this country. The contribution by Dr. De Villiers has been a contribution to individuals and to the country as a whole; and, in addition, not only to this country as such, but also to other countries with which we are aligned in economic interests.

Hiermee is die betekenis van dr. De Villiers se werk in hoë mate gekonstateer. Daar bly egter nog een sy daarvan oor wat nie onvermeld gelaat kan word nie, t.w. die besondere betekenis daarvan uit Afrikaneroogpunt.

Die Afrikaner het, in vergelyking met sy Engelssprekende medeburger en menige Europese immigrant, in die sakelewe 'n agterstand ondervind. Maar dr. De Villiers, jong Afrikanerseun van die Vrystaatse platteland, het op 'n buitengewoon gespesialiseerde gebied gestyg tot 'n posisie waar hy deur almal as hoogstaande deskundige erken word. Vir die jeug van Suid-Afrika, insonderheid die Afrikanerjeug, moet dit tegelyk belangwekkend en besielend wees. Ons kan met vrymoedigheid sê dat dr. De Villiers toegetree het tot die uitgelese kring van manne wat die bewys gebring het dat die Afrikaner, as die geleentheid hom gegun word en hy bereid is om hard te werk, die potensiaal het om bo uit te kom; en bowenal die bewys dat hy in die proses niemand enige nadeel berokken nie, maar eerder tot die geluk en welvaart van almal bydra.

As ek na die akte van die Hendrik Verwoerd-Trust kyk, sien ek dat die Hendrik Verwoerd-Toekenning gemaak word "aan die persoon wat buitengewone diens van nasionale betekenis gelewer het." Aangesien dr. Willem Johannes de Villiers, na die mening van die Raad van Trustees, aan hierdie vereiste voldoen, het die Raad besluit

om genoemde toekenning aan hom te maak.

Dit doen my genoeë om aan die besluit van die Raad nou uitvoering te gee.

JOHANNESBURG  
19 Oktober 1982

*H. B. Thom.*

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(H.B. THOM)