

## CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE REBELLION, 1914, FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF GENERAL MANIE MARITZ

General Maritz published *My Lewe en Strewe* in 1939 in which he describes his part in the rebellion of 1914. For various reasons the book is not well known, especially to English historians, and for that reason it is necessary to restate his views. Another reason is that the manuscript of the book recently became available and so a little bit of new light is thrown onto those events.<sup>1</sup> The quotations which follow are taken from the manuscript but the relevant book pages are also given for reference purposes.

In 1913 General Jan Kemp told Maritz of General Smuts's intentions to establish a defence force and to commission a number of former Boer leaders as officers. Maritz's reaction was:

Jan, dis ons kans daardie, die eerste die beste kans.<sup>2</sup>

A short while later Maritz received a telegram from Smuts in which he was offered a commission in the Union Defence Force on condition that he first attended a military course in Bloemfontein. Maritz accepted the commission:

In Bloemfontein was Genl. Kemp, Komdt. Ben Bouwer en ek in dieselfde kamer, Genl. Jack Pienaar het die kamers langsaan gehad. Daar het ons menigmaal so ondermekaar gepraat oor die moontlikheid van oorlog met Engeland, en 'n kans om ons onafhanklikheid terug te kry.<sup>3</sup>

(This section was formerly typed in the manuscript as follows:

Daar het ons so ondermekaar gepraat van hoe as daar oorlog met Engeland kom ons ons onafhanklikheid sal terugvat.)

It is clear that an insurrection was being discussed and that vague plans were being prepared. Maritz continues:

Kort voor die einde van die kursus het Genl. Smuts die Militêre Kollege besoek, en my eenkant geroep en gesê dat hy my in die Noord-Weste wou aanstel as Distriks Staf Offisier. Toe val my by wat hy eendag in Pretoria gesê het, en ek kry dadelik die gedagte dat hulle 'n plan het om Suidwes-Afrika aan te val en te neem. Dit was, as ek dit wel het 1907 in Pretoria op sy kantoor as Minister, dat genl. Smuts my gesê hoe graag hy 'n reis deur Suidwes wou maak en of ek hom sou vergesel . . .<sup>4</sup>

Maritz and his colleagues then arranged that he would get in touch with the Germans when he went to the North-West Cape and arrange with them for ammunition, and that Generals Kemp and Pienaar would do their work in the Transvaal. In 1913, after the course had been completed, Maritz went to Prieska. Smuts had therefore already become interested in

1. The manuscript is entitled: *Manuskrip. Wat is 'Reg en Geregtheid? deur Genl. Manie Maritz.* The book was published by Aurora, Pretoria, in 1939 under the title: *My Lewe en Strewe.*

2. Manuscript page 103. Book page 65.

3. Manuscript page 103. Book page 65.

4. Manuscript page 103. Book page 66.

the territory before the war and the possibility of a revolt had also been vaguely discussed as early as in 1913.

Van Priesska het ek 'n brief met Piet de Wet gestuur aan Gustav Voigts, 'n ou vriend van my . . . In die brief het ek Voigts gevra om aan die Duitse Goewerneur te sê dat hy nie op my moet kyk as Britse offisier nie, en dat ek hoop om met die Duitse hulp, ons ons vryheid (he first had *onafhanklikheid*) weer sou terugkry. Ek het 'n antwoord ontvang, mondelings, dat ons wense waar sou kom. Daar het ons die saak gelaat en vergeet. Dit was vrede en daar was nie die minste gedagte aan opstand of rebellie nie.<sup>5</sup>

In 1914 the German governor got in touch with Maritz through a person by the name of Joubert — a friend of Maritz who was promoted to the rank of captain by Maritz — but we are not told what transpired then. In Pretoria, General Beyers had written out his resignation as Commandant-General but Maritz urged him not to resign as his people were looking to him as their leader even though Botha distrusted him. Clearly, Botha had wind of their plans. Maritz informed Beyers that he had made arrangements with the German administration in South West Africa for arms and ammunition, money, and whatever else they needed, but at the same time Maritz expressed the view that the time was not propitious for a rebellion. All the signs indicated a long drawn-out war in Europe and Maritz was convinced of swift and fierce retribution in the event of an allied victory.

Maritz and Beyers then decided to advise the government that they were prepared to defend the country if the government wanted to send volunteers to fight in Europe. On the other hand, if the government insisted upon sending conscripts to fight in South West Africa there would be trouble. Acting on instructions from Beyers, Maritz went to see Smuts who informed him that it was his intention to invade South West Africa.

'Ou Manie, ek wil hê dat jy Duitswes moet neem.' Ek antwoord: 'Ja, as die Volk wil, en sê ek moet dit doen, sal ek dit doen'.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequently, at a lunch in the Pretoria Club, Beyers told Botha that the people in the north-west Cape would be highly dissatisfied if they were to be conscripted to fight against the Germans, and that such action on the part of the government would cause trouble.

Daarop sê genl. Botha: 'Ja, Jan het my gesê wat jy hom gesê het, maar hier is 'n klomp delwers wat my vanmiddag kom sien om hulp, maar ek gaan hulle nie help tensy hulle gaan veg nie'.<sup>7</sup>

But Smut's and Botha's attitudes towards Maritz was a wait-and-see one.

Na die ete het genl. Smuts saamgekom tot by die motor en toe hy my groet sê hy: 'Jy weet ou Manie, jy is net soos 'n kaffer-kaptein.' Ek vra: 'Waarom Generaal?' Sy antwoord was: 'n Mens weet nooit wanneer jy

5. Manuscript page 104. Book page 68.

6. Manuscript page 107. Book page 70.

7. Manuscript page 107. Book page 70.

die aanval maak, in die dag of die nag nie!’ Toe sê ek: ‘Nee, generaal, dis daarom nie so erg nie.’

(The book quotes this last sentence as: ‘ . . . dis *dare*m nie so erg nie.’)<sup>8</sup>

Maritz hotly denies that he went over to the German forces.

Daar het nie een van die seuns wat by my was op die slagveld gesneuwel nie, hulle het almal teruggegaan huistoe. . . . Die Regering het ook destyds die storie rondgestrooi dat ek met die seuns saam met die Duitsers veg. Dit is ook onwaar. Ek het nooit saam met die Duitsers geveg nie.<sup>9</sup>

He also denies that he had made arrangements with the German government as early as in 1912 and that large sums of money had been deposited in his name in a bank in Cape Town:

Dit is ’n skreiende onwaarheid. Voor 1913 was ek op Piet Retief, Komdt. van Polisie; na die Opleidingskursus in Bloemfontein (1913) is ek eers aangestel as Luit.-Kol. in die Noord Weste. Toe het ek alleen die vermelde brief aan mnr. G. Voigts geskrywe. Maar daar was nooit ’n enkele woord van onderhandelinge nie.<sup>10</sup>

According to Maritz, therefore, the following facts become manifest:

1. A rebellion had been vaguely discussed before the war as a means of regaining the independence of the country.
2. It was an expression of anti-British feeling: it was *not* an expression of pro-German sentiments.
3. The rebellion was not a spontaneous uprising against the government, nor was it the invasion of a friendly state.
4. Generals Smuts and Botha had clearly expressed their intentions to invade South West Africa with conscripted troops.
5. Generals Smuts and Botha were aware of the trouble that was brewing but they were unable to do anything about it until the rebels showed their hands more clearly.
6. The Germans and South West Africa acted as a catalyst to precipitate the rebellion, but they were not the direct cause of the trouble.
7. Maritz did not go over to the Germans; he did not fight with them, nor did he hand over any of his troops to the Germans.
8. Maritz approached the Germans for help to regain the independence of his country.

J. C. Juta.

8. Manuscript page 108. Book page 70.

9. Manuscript page 120. Book page 79.

10. Manuscript page 122. Book page 80.