

ARTICLE FOR "SUNDAY TRIBUNE"

- Dr. F. Van Zyl Slabbert, M.P.

(21 October 1983)

Dear Voter,

We, as privileged members of the White electorate, have come to the end of an exhausting, sometimes heated, and very often confusing referendum campaign. Now, even more so than when it started, I wish to urge you to vote "NO" on Wednesday, November 2nd.

I urge you to do so not because I am "bloody-minded"; not because I do not "care about reform" or because I am indifferent to the "right-wing threat". In fact for ten years I have worked as hard as I could to make reason prevail in the politics of our troubled country; I have urged reform when this present Government refused to believe it was a word in the dictionary and have repeatedly said that the sooner the reactionary right-wing is confronted the better.

I urge you to vote "NO" because I sincerely believe this proposed constitution holds very real dangers for our country and we certainly do not need more problems than we have already. There is the very real danger of increasing racial hostility and confrontation. Time and again, throughout this campaign, you have heard moderate and reasonable Black leaders plead with you not to leave them out in the cold with a "yes" vote; that this

would rob them of the opportunity to persuade their followers that negotiation and bargaining can work. Please, I urge you, heed their voices. Tomorrow and the next day they may no longer be there to listen to.

There is also the very real danger of one-man and one-party-domination in the new constitution. We certainly do not need that in our highly complex and divided society. Consensus and negotiation - yes; but definitely not domination and dictatorial control.

Another obvious danger is that in this new constitution Apartheid becomes part of the constitution and is no longer simply one party's policy. This means you can no longer use the constitution to do away with Apartheid; you actually have to do away with the Constitution before Apartheid can disappear. In other words, this new constitution is less flexible and more rigidly based on Apartheid laws than the present one.

In this campaign many arguments have been put forward which have very little to do with the constitution before us. The question is a very straightforward one : "Do you think this constitution is good enough for South Africa?" - "Yes" or "NO". You are not asked to vote "yes" or "no" to reform; or "yes" or "no" to Andries Treurnicht; or "yes" or "no" to your own "hidden agenda" of hopes and desires which you think some government may implement.

If a "yes" vote is successful the Government can interpret this mandate in whichever way it wants to. Your "yes" says to this N.P. Government : Use this constitution to go ahead with your plan for South Africa. The Government has never made any bones about it that their plan is Separate Development and Apartheid for all South Africans. That is why in this new constitution it is clear that this Government needs the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, the Pass Laws and influx control. These acts are precisely what reform is all about. The Government does not need a new constitution to change these measures. They were brought about by this Government using its majority in the present constitution. If the Government was serious about reform, it could use the self-same majority in the self-same constitution to change these measures. Such a step will certainly be in the right direction and will create a far better climate in which constitutional reform can take place.

It really is illogical to think that if you vote "no", everything will come to a stop. The Prime Minister himself has said that in those circumstances the Government will not proceed with the constitution and will have to look toward "other initiatives". I believe the sooner this happens the better for all of us. These other initiatives must include the urban Blacks, rural Black poverty, housing, job creation, etc.

Finally, please keep in mind that when you vote on November 2nd you are taking part in a referendum in which the vast majority of South Africans cannot participate and yet where the outcome is going to affect all of us deeply. Blacks are going to be affected even more by their exclusion than Coloureds and Asians by their inclusion in the new constitution. Think of South Africa and not of yourself or your own specific group, party or organisation when you vote on Wednesday. I am sure if you do so, you will realise that we are all going to need one another - Black, Coloured, Asian and White - to make our country strong and stable for the future of our children. That is why a constitution which proposes to separate and divide it deserves only one response in clear and unmistakable terms : "NO", thank you!

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