

No 2
ARTICLE FOR BUSINESS DAY

20 June 1986

DR F VAN ZYL SLABBERT

I saw Pik Botha being interviewed by Ted Koppel saying there was complete freedom to criticise the Government.

He is talking arrant nonsense. The next morning the headlines in the local morning newspaper read "Reporters Arrest confirmed by Bureau", and "Tell us What is Going On".

For me the greatest shock was when I sent my regular column to a newspaper group and one of their newspapers phoned me very apologetically and said they would rather play it safe and not publish it because in terms of emergency regulations it could be seen to be subversive and inciteful. Nothing in the article had not been said many times before but suddenly it could not be said again.

What I fear most of all is that Whites are going to be bamboozled into acquiescing and or supporting one form of totalitarianism in the hope of avoiding another.

A fearful apathetic hope that maybe if one does nothing things will come right, or rather the devil you know than the devil you don't.

Let us understand one thing very clearly : There is nothing new or creative about what is going on now.

Regimes announcing states of emergencies throughout time have used the same rhetoric and justifications that our present one is using. Blank spaces appeared in newspapers, ignorance thrived, people disappeared and through it all the Governments have assured us that

us that / ...

"things are actually much better than they have ever been before." In fact, if one thinks about it, one actually needed a State of Emergency to reach this happy state of affairs.

It is at times like these that all of us who cherish freedom and individual liberty must fight against the mental paralysis which comes with repression. The worst thing to do is to succumb to a sense of historical inevitability and at the same time secretly pray for a miracle. The secret really lies within ourselves - in our work, our family, our community. What values do we really believe in; what kind of society do we really want to live in? If we are denied freedom of speech, then let us re-affirm its importance amongst ourselves. If we are denied freedom of association and movement, then where we can meet, let us cherish those values..

In all the great literature against repression and denial of human liberty the one thing that runs through it like a golden thread is the durability, the toughness of the human spirit. No matter how long it takes, or how many suffer, people somehow never give up on their desire for freedom. The same thing is happening right now in South Africa.

On the evening of the 15 June, I was sitting together with about four thousand other people on the island of Goreè about 3km from Dakar. Goreè was a slave island in the old days where they fattened them up and auctioned

3/...

auctioned / ..

them off for export to distant countries. Next to us was James Baldwin, the American author during the civil rights struggle. We were listening to a music festival.

I remember him saying earlier that his grandfather was one of those slaves. The actual slave house is a traumatic experience. Not so much the small oppressive dungeon-like cells or even the weighing room where you had to weigh at least sixty kilos for export, but that last final opening to the sea through which the slaves had to go to be shipped out.

Baldwin has a delightful sense of humour and an irrepressible spirit. "Yes", he said, "they sent my granddaddy through that hole and thought that was it. Here I am right back on the spot where he left, having a ball."

It is this kind of resolution that no repression can eventually cope with.