

ARTICLE FOR THE CITIZEN

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Dr F van Zyl Slabbert MP

South Africa finds itself in a period of constitutional transition. The major problem facing us is how can we develop a new constitution that would enjoy the support and the commitment and the loyalty of the majority of people in this country, and secondly, what should that constitution look like. On these questions there are fundamental divisions between the Government and the Official Opposition. The Official Opposition believes that the only way in which a constitution can be developed that can enjoy such support is by involving all the political interest groups in the country in the process of constructing a constitution. This is what we fundamentally mean when we talk about a National Convention. As opposed to that, the Nationalist Party has, up to the present, brought about constitutional change in a unilateral or one-sided fashion and has had difficulty in getting the cooperation and support of the very population groups for whom such constitutional change was intended.

Now the idea of a National Convention has been subjected to a great deal of distortion and people have been misled by wrong conceptions concerning the role and character or nature of the National Convention.

One of the major distortions is the idea that has been spread, namely, that when a government such as the present government calls a National Convention, it would mean that the sovereignty of Parliament would be undermined or that the Government simply abdicates its power in favour of a National Convention. This is obvious nonsense. When a Convention is called, the Government of the day still goes on governing, still has to administer the budget, see to it that law and order is maintained and that economic development takes place. In fact, it is the responsibility of the Government to create a climate conducive to effective negotiations at such a Convention. That is why it is wrong to argue that a Convention is any way undercuts the sovereignty of Parliament. A Convention stands in an advisory relationship to Parliament and only Parliament has the sovereign power to decide when it wishes to transfer its own sovereignty to another political institution.

A second distortion concerning a National Convention is that it is impossible for different widely divergent groups or individuals from different races to sit down and talk with one another. This is obviously ridiculous because if it is not possible at a Convention, it is not possible in any other situation, whether it be in labour, in industry, in the economy or for the simple purposes of consulting with regard to local government. A Convention is precisely an instrument to allow people who differ amongst themselves to sit down and talk about their differences. A Convention signifies that the people in the country are prepared to talk about their differences rather than fight about them.

The PFP believes that at such a National Convention, its programme and constitutional policy have to be put forward as well and therefore we believe in a federal structure of

government where you separate the powers of the judiciary, the executive and the legislature; strong self-governing autonomous states; an independent judiciary with a Bill of Rights that can be tested by the courts; proportional representation; consensus government by means of minority veto and universal adult suffrage

Whenever we refer to the fact that we stand for universal adult suffrage, other parties attack us for standing for one-man-one-vote and black majority domination. This obviously is not the case. All parties are agreed that adult people should have the franchise. The question is, within which kind of political system can that franchise be exercised without one group dominating another. The Nationalist Party cannot tell us how it is going to do this and therefore perpetuates a situation of white domination.

The NRP simply ignores the question. The PFP, on the other hand, has devoted a great deal of attention to the whole problem of how to prevent domination of one group over another. Constitutionally speaking, I believe that the PFP has devoted far more attention to the problem of domination than any of the other parties. But this is not really the issue.

The major issue is, of course, how can we guarantee that the constitution is going to work. And it is precisely here where I believe that the PFP can give a better answer to the question than either the Nationalist Party or any of the other parties contesting this General Election. We believe that the only guarantee for the workability of the constitution lies, not in the eloquence of the phrases of the constitution, but in the people involved in creating that constitution. To the extent that people have been included in the process of constitution making, that constitution can reflect their commitment and their loyalty. To the extent that they have been excluded, that constitution cannot depend on their loyalty. Let me give a simple example : Should the President's Council recommend that there must be three separate voters' rolls for Coloureds, Asians and Whites but that they have to sit in the same Parliament, if the Government goes through all its various procedures to get this ratified and accepted, that new constitution cannot work if it doesn't have the active and voluntary support of the Coloureds and Asians. So far the Nationalist Party hasn't even indicated that it is willing to hold a referendum for Coloureds and Asians to find out whether they would support a new constitution as well.

The PFP is insistent on the fact that no constitution stands a chance of working if those who are going to be subjected to the constitution are not enabled to participate in creating that constitution. That is why we believe that the PFP has the best answer to the question of how a new constitution can come about and we know from surveys that the vast majority of South Africans of all races favour the holding of such a National Convention. This then as far as the PFP's constitutional and political policy is concerned.

As far as our economic policy is concerned, we believe in the principle of free enterprise and we believe that there should be no legal obstacles on the basis of race preventing a Black man or a White man or a Coloured man from getting ahead in the economy where you have equality of opportunity. It is pointless to spell out the virtues of free enterprise if the benefits of free enterprise are denied to the vast majority of people purely on the basis of race. In fact, that could constitute the biggest threat to free enterprise. There are

laws on our statute book which are contrary to the spirit of free enterprise – for example, the Group Areas Act and the Urban Areas Consolidation Act. These Acts simply meddle with the economy in such a way that it makes it more difficult for a Coloured or Black person to get ahead on the basis of merit than for a white person. This poses a threat to our future economic stability.

As far as our social policy is concerned, we believe that there also, merit and not race, should determine the progress of the individual. That is why we believe in non-discriminatory expenditure on education and that people should have the same quality of education irrespective of the colour of his/her skin.

There should also be a non-discriminatory pension scheme for all people because it doesn't really matter what the colour of your skin is. If you are old and infirm you are in as much need of care and protection as anybody else in the same position.

In short then, the PFP stands for a South Africa where every person is entitled to the rights of citizenship irrespective of race or ethnicity; where there will be no statutory or de facto racial discrimination of any kind; where there will be effective political participation for all without one group dominating another; and where the rule of law will have been re-established so that you would not have arbitrary arrests, detention, banning and the individual would have access to the court and a fair trial.

These are our policies and in this election our theme has been quite simple – for real security in South Africa you need real reform. We cannot get real reform from the Government at this time because the Government is internally divided and does not know how to lead or where to lead at the present moment. Because the Government cannot give us real security by bringing about real reform, one needs real opposition in Parliament that can set the pace for such reform and this has been the task that the PFP has set itself and why we ask the voters to support u.

What about the future? South Africa is poised on a knife edge. We have the potential, the human potential, the physical and natural resources to create a fantastic future for all our people. It is a question of whether we have the will and the courage to do so. I believe it can be done, but then we must all concentrate on what unites us in South Africa rather than on what divides us and if we do that I believe we can look forward to a future here in South Africa in which there will be no fear and hatred, in which there will be no suspicion and anger amongst our people. But if we, as Whites, who have the privilege to vote, prefer to concentrate on that which divides and fragments us, that which leads to anger and hostility between all our people, then I am afraid that the future looks bleak for all of us. The future is not some kind of inevitability. The future is something that is created in the present – it is created by our actions, our deeds and by our aspirations. In a very real sense the future lies in our hands, particularly us who are members of the White electorate because we have the responsibility and the power to create the conditions here in South Africa which can lead to evolutionary and peaceful change and if we do so we will have a future assured for all our children.