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ARTICLE FOR "SUNDAY TIMES"

- Dr. F. VAN ZYL SLABBERT, M.P.

I think the time has come for some-one to say to the Labour Party that it cannot have its cake and eat it. In the Sunday Times of 29 May 1983, a member of their Executive, Mr. Carter Ebrahim, says the following about the National Party's new Constitution Bill :

- "it is a reform initiative of the NP"
- we must all help to "build a powerful centre with the NP"
- the NP has decided to move from "white leadership to equality"
- Mr. P.W. Botha has "chosen the road to reform"
- The "reformists have gone as far as they dare" and we should not "make demands of the Government which are impossible to meet".

In the "extra" Rapport of the same day, the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Mr. David Curry, says that :

- The Constitution Bill "will not work. Just like the CPRC it is also going to be a failure".

- "We regard the draft Bill as an interim measure. It is not real reform. Real reform must still come".

- "We must go in there and apply pressure towards realizing the end goal which we believe in".

In addition, the Leader of the Labour Party has said of the Government's proposals that the "best thing about them is that they cannot work" and that the Labour Party's purpose is to go in and wreck them and call the bluff on Apartheid.

What exactly is the Labour Party's position? Does it regard the new deal as a step in the right direction or must they go in to wreck it? Does it want to block a "step in the right direction" or do they believe it is "a step in the right direction" to go in and wreck the new constitution?

I have refrained from voicing any public criticism of their actions because I understand the difficulty of the position in which they find themselves and because I have always respected and been friendly with the leadership. But, after repeated contradictory statements on their "stand" as well as barbs and snide remarks aimed at the PFP, I believe we need some straight talking. The country that this Government is making a mess of is as much ours as theirs and no matter how much more they or their leaders may have suffered than us, the "white liberals",

inconsistency remains inconsistency and bungling knows no colour bar.

The position of the PFP is quite straightforward and uncomplicated. We reject the Constitution Bill because we believe it is a step in the wrong direction to :

- give powers to a President in a constitution geared for dictatorship
- allow racism to be a formal legal pre-condition for participating in the new constitution
- condone the entrenchment of one-party domination in South Africa
- accept Black exclusion as a pre-condition for Coloured and Asian inclusion.

It matters not one whit whether to a large extent the same objections apply to the present constitution. It is indefensible to compound these deficiencies in a new one. Furthermore, participation in the new constitution does not depend on one's objections in principle to the new proposals. Participation will depend on whether the constitutional role of opposition, all opposition, can be exercised or not. The Labour Party made a tactical "boo-boo" at Eshove by deciding to participate before they knew what they were going to participate in. In other words, they sacrificed whatever little bargaining position they might have had.

A final word to Mr. Ebrahim : Stop knocking "white liberals". You are a liberal yourself although not a white one. In any case, the philosophy is more important than the colour - always has been! The PFP has never had "the ambition" to be the "last exclusively white government" to "usher in a new era of full democracy". We would, of course, be happy to play that role but just as happy if anyone else did it before we could do so. Also, we have never claimed to be the "conscience of white South Africa". Poppycock! We appeal to Mr. Ebrahim's, and anyone else's, conscience as well. Finally, to claim that "certain Coloured, Indian and Black leaders" are taking a lead from the "PFP's obstinate refusal to recognize the strategic nature of the Government's current actions", is the worst possible insult to these people and inverted racism of the nastiest order.

Please, Mr. Ebrahim - it is not necessary to knock "white" or any "liberals" in order to justify a questionable political strategy or to search for new allies. Rather explain your Party's position. Do you agree with Mr. Curry that this new constitution cannot work and is not real reform but still insist that it is a step in the right direction? What in heaven's name does this mean?

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