

RONDEBOSCH TOWN HALL1 AUGUST 1983DR. F. VAN ZYL SLABBERT, M.P.

MANY PEOPLE HAVE DECIDED ON THE MERITS OF THE CONSTITUTION PLAN WITHOUT HAVING STUDIED IT OR EVEN READ IT. IN FACT I HAVE FOUND, ALMOST WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THAT PEOPLE'S POSITIVE SENTIMENTS ABOUT THE PROPOSALS ARE ALMOST DIRECTLY RELATED TO THEIR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CONTENTS OF THE BILL. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MORE PEOPLE GET TO KNOW ABOUT THE CONTENTS OF THE BILL, THE MORE CONCERNED THEY ARE ABOUT THE IMPACT IT WILL HAVE ON RACE RELATIONS AND INTER-RACIAL CONFLICT IN SOUTH AFRICA.

A LOT OF THE PROPAGANDA BEING MADE IN FAVOUR OF THE BILL IS BASED ON A KIND OF HOMESPUN COMMON SENSE PHILOSOPHY WHICH SERVES TO OBSCURE THE CONTENTS AND REAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE BILL. IN FACT ONE CAN CONDUCT AN ENTIRELY INDEPENDENT DEBATE ON THE VALIDITY OF SOME OF THE HOMESPUN COMMON SENSE OBSERVATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN OFFERED. FOR EXAMPLE :

- (A) "AT LEAST THERE IS SOME MOVEMENT". MOVEMENT AS SUCH CAN BECOME PROBLEMATICAL ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE STANDING ON THE EDGE OF A CLIFF !!
- (B) "THE BEST THING ABOUT IT, IS THAT IT CANNOT WORK". NOT A NICE THING TO FIND OUT ON YOUR FIRST PARACHUTE JUMP !

(C) "IT BREAKS THE LOGJAM" PRECISELY WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A DAM WALL BURSTS AS WELL.

(D) "AT LEAST WE CAN NEVER GO BACK" IF THEY SAID THIS TO THE FIRST ASTRONAUTS THERE WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN A MOON LANDING.

THESE COMMON SENSE OBSERVATIONS DO NOT REALLY SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THE BILL, BUT MORE ABOUT THE SENTIMENTS AND DESIRES OF THOSE MAKING THE OBSERVATIONS. PEOPLE WANT TO FEEL POSITIVE AND OPTIMISTIC ABOUT CHANGE. ANY NORMAL PERSON WANTS TO "TAKE A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION", "BREAK UP A FRUSTRATING STALEMATE" AND NEVER GO BACK TO AN UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE. BUT WHETHER THIS IS GOING TO HAPPEN IN THE PROCESS OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WILL NOT AND CANNOT DEPEND ONLY ON OUR DESIRES AND SENTIMENTS BUT ON HOW THE NEW CONSTITUTION WILL AFFECT THE POLITICS AND LIVES OF THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA.

OTHER ARGUMENTS WHICH ARE OFFERED IN FAVOUR OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS AND WHICH HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH THE CONTENTS OF THE BILL, ARE THE FOLLOWING :

(A) "THE P.M. HAS SPLIT HIS PARTY BECAUSE OF THE PROPOSALS AND DESERVES SUPPORT IN A REFERENDUM". EVEN IF THIS IS SO, AND THIS IS DEBATABLE, THE SPLIT DOES NOT BLESS THE BILL WITH INFALLIBILITY OR MAKE IT APPROPRIATE TO OUR PROBLEMS. IN FACT, PRECISELY BECAUSE OF THE TRAUMA OF THE SPLIT, THE OPPORTUNITY SHOULD BE SEIZED TO COME FORWARD WITH THE BEST POSSIBLE DEAL FOR ALL SOUTH AFRICANS.

(B) "THE P.M. CANNOT GO ANY FURTHER AT PRESENT", WHY NOT?
THE LIMITED AND INADEQUATE CONSTITUTIONAL PLAN HAS NOT STOPPED
THE HAEMORRHAGING AS A RESULT OF THE SPLIT. THE NATS ARE
BLEEDING AND THE ONLY WAY THIS CAN STOP IS WITH GENUINE REFORM
CONSOLIDATING THE MODERATES AGAINST THE RIGHT WING.

(C) "A NO-VOTE IN THE REFERENDUM WILL STRENGTHEN THE RIGHT WING"
NONSENSE! NOTHING IS GOING TO STRENGTHEN THE RIGHT WING MORE
THAN A YES-VOTE WHICH WILL INTRODUCE A NEW CONSTITUTION WHICH,
ACCORDING TO DR. VAN DER ROSS, HAS THE QUESTIONABLE MERIT THAT
THE BEST THING ABOUT IT IS THAT IT CANNOT WORK. IN SUCH
A CHAOTIC SITUATION EMOTIONS AND PREJUDICES RUN RIOT AND CAN
BE EXPLOITED BY ANY KIND OF DEMAGOGUE.

I WANT TO APPEAL TO THE VOTERS OF SOUTH AFRICA : DO NOT BE LULLED
INTO A FALSE SENSE OF OPTIMISM AND SECURITY BY SUCH FACILE ARGUMENTS.
FOR YOUR OWN AND YOUR CHILDREN'S SAKE : STUDY THE BILL; GET TO
KNOW AS MUCH ABOUT ITS CONTENTS AS YOU CAN AND THEN DECIDE FOR
YOURSELF AS RATIONALLY AS POSSIBLE WHETHER YOUR HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS
AND ALSO THOSE OF THE MAJORITY OF SOUTH AFRICANS CAN BE MET BY
THIS BILL. THE PFP HAS STUDIED IT IN DETAIL AND MOVED COUNTLESS
AMENDMENTS TO IMPROVE IT AND OUR VERDICT STILL REMAINS UNSHAKEN :
NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR SOUTH AFRICA !