

EXTRACTS OF SPEECH BY DR. F. VAN ZYL SLABBERT M PAT THE PFP NATAL PROVINCIAL CONGRESS - 12 OCTOBER 1984THE MILITARY IN THE TOWNSHIPS

I view with extreme concern and disquiet the attitude of both the Minister of Police and the Minister of Defence towards the role of the military and their relationship to the police in coping with the problems of social disturbances and unrest in our Black urban townships. Nobody can have objection to the Defence Force of any country assisting in restoring stability and order in situations of extreme unrest and emergency; in fact, that is why such situations call for the Declaration of a State of National Emergency. But this is something totally different to declaring that the military will, as a matter of course, play a supportive and active role in what is normally regarded as the routine responsibility of the Police Force. Particularly in the sensitive, tense and volatile time we live in as far as our Black urban communities are concerned.

I find it astonishing, to say the least, that the ideological and symbolic significance of introducing the Defence Force in a supportive role to the Police in quelling social disturbances seems to entirely escape the Government. Whatever else can be said about the new constitutional dispensation, it has highlighted as nothing has before, the constitutional vacuum in which Blacks find themselves in urban metropolitan areas. There are no adequate political channels by means of which they can articulate their grievances concerning rents and rates increases, inadequate educational facilities, lack of housing and adequate transport, their opposition and dissatisfaction towards influx control etc. etc. In the final analysis, these are all political grievances which lie at the heart of the discontent in Black metropolitan areas.

We have numerous Government Commission Reports which show quite clearly that these are the underlying structural factors responsible for unrest and the outbreak of riots. Research reports also show quite clearly that the majority of Blacks relate these structural factors directly to the policy of Separate Development or Apartheid as they experience it. Therefore, for the Government to quite blandly announce that henceforth the Defence Force will assist in coping with the unrest in the urban townships, is to cross a very dangerous threshold in our domestic situation.

In the first place, it immediately involves the Defence Force in political conflict, and this has a divisive impact, not only between White and Black, but between White and White as well.

Secondly, it increases militarisation of defence domestically and militates against a spirit of negotiation and consensus politics.

Thirdly, it intensifies the whole controversy around conscription and doing one's military service. Policemen are professionally paid and trained personnel. The bulk of the Defence Force consists of ordinary citizens.

We in the PFP recognise the need for an effective and strong Defence Force in modern industrial societies. We realise that there can be no reform without stability and order. We have repeatedly stated in the past in the difficult situation in which South Africa finds itself with its plural society, a Defence Force has to perform an arduous and sometimes controversial task. This is even more so if the bulk of the Defence Force manpower depends on conscripted recruits from the civilian section. That is why it is so important that the Defence Force should be as neutral as possible in domestic conflicts and in the manner in which it performs its role in protecting the country from external aggression.

I have defended the right of the Defence Force to provide us with a shield against external aggression behind which we would have to bring about political, social and economic reform. I have viewed with alarm in the past the fact that we in the Official Opposition have been given briefings on military exercises across our Borders, where we are simply in no position to judge the necessity, adequacy or merit of what has happened simply through lack of information.

We have always sought such information to the best of our ability and we have tried to establish that the reputation of our Defence Force be beyond reproach. But, if the Government beforehand declares that it is its intended policy to use the Defence Force in future to cope with social and domestic unrest which is normally the preserve of the Police Force, then we in the PFP say, "So far and no further." We simply cannot support this, and we wish to warn the Government that they are playing with fire and they themselves will become the most important agent of polarisation in the country, if they do not reconsider this policy.

MINISTER LE GRANGE AND THE SIX IN THE CONSULATE

I have viewed with growing bewilderment and astonishment the role played by the Minister of Law and Order in relation to the six in the Consulate and the strong supporting cast led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Pik Botha in this regard.

It is very difficult to escape the conclusion that Minister Le Grange must be the secret Publicity Secretary for the UDF. If only we could get somebody who could put us on the world map as quickly as he has put the UDF, the PFP could easily be the Government after the next General Election.

Let us not forget that this whole incident is related to one simple fact, and that is that the Minister of Law and Order has the power to detain an individual indefinitely without trial.

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Funnily enough, he also has the power to declare that he is not going to do so. And I said at the Cape Congress that the most simple way to resolve the whole crisis was to give a public assurance to those six people in the Consulate that he has no intention of detaining them without trial, but he is quite prepared to charge them in a Court of Law, and that they can have legal representation to defend them against such charges. That would have immediately defused the whole situation. Instead, the situation developed into a stand-off between Britain and South Africa, and in the process, the South African Government has succeeded in drawing international attention to the UDF, and in losing whatever little initiative was gained through the visit of the Prime Minister to Great Britain. In fact, we have not only lost face, we have lost honour.

One does not have to support an arms embargo against South Africa or enter into the merits of clandestine purchasing of military equipment to realise that we have done one simple, and I believe, unforgiveable thing in international relations, and that is that we have broken our word. Therefore, in future, we can expect no better from other countries.

No degree of blustering and ballyhooing by Minister Pik Botha on public television can do away with the feeling of shame that I experience when I think of this. In fact, the more often now he appears on television on this matter, the more ridiculous our case becomes. The latest episode was the pathetic attempt to present the dishonourable act of breaking your word as an act of patriotism. How is it possible to conduct foreign policy on such a basis ?