

PIETERMARITZBURG CHAMBER OF COMMERCE24 OCTOBER 1983DR. F. VAN ZYL SLABBERT, M.P.

1. Successful constitutional change can never come about by one group imposing its solution on the rest of the country.
2. Even now we do not know what the support amongst Coloureds and Asians is for this new deal, nor when and how the Government intends testing it. We do know that moderate Black leaders reject this constitution out of hand because of Black exclusion.
3. All this is a clear sign that this proposed constitution is not the result of negotiation and consensus but one party's plan for the rest of South Africa.
4. The Government attempts to promote this constitution as a major step towards reform. In fact, it is a very limited and inadequate form of constitutional change and it is questionable whether it represents reform at all. There are many kinds of reform which can and should be brought about without and even before constitutional change is brought about. For example, the Government has the power to remove racially discriminatory legislation; it does not need

a new constitution to bring it about. A typical example is the Group Areas Act. If the Government finds it necessary to placate the right wing before this constitution becomes a reality, it is going to find it necessary after it becomes a reality. There is nothing in the new constitution that will give it the courage that it does not have now to bring about reform.

5. The debate around the referendum campaign is both confused and confusing for many voters. There are a number of popular misconceptions which cloud the issue for the average voter :
  - (a) We are not asked to vote for or against reform on November 2nd, but for a constitution which could make it more or less difficult to bring about. I believe it will prove an obstacle to effective reform.
  - (b) We are not asked to vote for a "hidden agenda" which we hope the Government will or will not implement. The Government and the Prime Minister have made it quite clear that there is no such hidden agenda.
  - (c) We are not voting for a change of government on November 2nd. Whatever the outcome, the present government will still be in power on November 3rd.

(d) We are not voting for a political party on November 2nd.

A "yes" or a "no" is a vote for or against the constitution for whatever reason and the Government is free to interpret it in whichever way it suits itself.

(e) I also wish to appeal to the Minister of Internal Affairs

to reassure voters that their vote will be secret on November 2nd. Many voters wrongly believe that because the voting procedure is different to that in a general election there is no secret ballot.

(f) Voters have to say "yes" or "no" to the implementation of the constitution approved by Parliament during the August session of this year. This is the only question before them.

6. I believe voters should vote "NO" because :

(a) This constitution has the potential to increase racial hostility between White and Black to such an extent that whatever limited co-operation is established between Coloured, Asian and White, will be inconsequential by comparison. The overall disadvantages for race relations will be far greater than the possible limited advantages.

(b) It also constitutionalizes the racial policy of one political party and will therefore become a source of enduring conflict. For the first time racially discriminatory acts such as the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act cannot be scrapped without changing the constitution of the country itself. This makes the new constitution even less flexible and more rigid than the present one.

(c) This constitution greatly strengthens the position of one political party and its leader and in key areas of decision-making allows one-party and one-man domination in South Africa. At a time when we need more devolution and decentralization of political power there is a centralization of political power which I believe is both unnecessary and dangerous for effective conflict resolution.

7. I believe a successful "yes" vote will see a government with a divided White electorate behind it :

(a) first attempting to get some measure of participation, if not support, from even more divided Coloured and Asian communities with a more united and hostile Black community looking on;

(b) then going ahead and attempting to implement an essentially unworkable and badly constructed constitution. This will take a great deal of energy and resources which are urgently needed for more deserving areas of reform.

All this will simply serve to highlight one simple truth and that is that this constitution does not address itself to the central problem of South African political, social and economic stability : White/Black coexistence. The test question is uncomplicated : Will this constitution make it easier to come to grips with this problem? There is available, and increasing, evidence that the answer is unquestionably "NO".

8. A successful "NO" vote does not mean that all our problems will be solved and a bright and wonderful future will await us. I cannot make any such extravagant claims. It will mean that the Government and the rest of the country will be forced to come to terms with the real issues of reform sooner rather than later. By going back to the "drawing board" I do not naively believe that the Government is going to rush towards writing out yet another worthless constitution. It means that the Government will have to assess what the real priorities for reform are and, as the Prime Minister said, what "new initiatives will have to be taken". Anyone who cares to take the trouble will realize that these initiatives must lie in the areas of Black urbanization with the attendant problems of housing,

education, job creation and a political infrastructure to ensure stability.

In short, a successful "NO" vote will simply say : Do not waste our time with worthless and shortsighted constitutional experiments. Get back to the real job of reform.

--- oOo ---