

No 3

BUSINESS DAY - 18/7/86

DR F VAN ZYL SLABBERT

The other day while I was waiting for the State of Emergency to "normalize" things, I thought about the difference between thinking and talking. In such times one realizes that people can think things which they cannot say, but unless there is something wrong with them, it is not possible to say things which they cannot think. Part of the attempt to "normalize" things by means of the State of Emergency is to prevent people from saying some of the things they are thinking. Of course it is not possible to know to what extent they have stopped thinking what they are not allowed to say.

For example, the man who reads the editorial Comment on the radio every morning - is he really saying what he is thinking, or the news - how reliable is the information? And those empty spaces in newspapers - are they about what people are thinking, but cannot say? How do editors cope in their editorials with what they know, but cannot say? How many people in this country are thinking the same things that cannot be said?

I pretty soon discovered that all this thinking can become very subversive. It is better to talk about things that people do not think about too much.

Like at the dinner party the other evening, one of the up and coming young captains of industry said: "They should have hung Mandela right at the start. All this would have been solved."

2/...

"Hanged", his wife said. "Huh ?" he said. "Hanged, not hung" she said. "What's the difference?" he asked. She winked at me, "I cannot help it, ever since university I have been hooked on English" "Yes", I said, "I can see how it can become a problem". "In fact", the captain said, "this country is finished. There is no hope. Too many of them and too few of us. No way we can keep up the standards. That is why I never supported you and your party." "But", I countered, "we cannot be held responsible for the birth-rate. Population increase is a given that faces any government". "Right", he said, "that is why I support the government. Don't get me wrong, I love this country. It has been good to me." "But how is the government coping with the population increase?" I asked. "They are not", he said, "they are going to hang on as long as possible." "And then?" I asked. "Well then the time will come to pull out. Don't get me wrong, it is not for me, it is for the kids. You know what I mean ?"

I wondered how many people were thinking what he was saying; how many supported the government, and if most of them did, what the point was of "normalizing" things with a State of Emergency. Maybe it is better not to think about such things too much. It becomes too depressing.

Instead it is better to be constructive than destructive; to behave positively rather than negatively; to be hopeful rather than pessimistic; to look forward rather than backward, upward rather than downward, and if you can do all these things at a time when your country

country/...

burns and you cannot even play Monopoly with its currency, you will have discovered the secret of coping with the State of Emergency. Sit on a fence with both ears on the ground and be devastatingly bland in the face of all controversy. "And that, my boy" as the old one said, "is the whole kettle of fish in a nut shell".

---o0o---