

ARTICLE FOR THE CITIZEN - on the Waterkloof by-election

- Dr. F. Van Zyl Slabbert, M.P.

The Government is attempting to create an artificial sense of urgency concerning the referendum and the constitutional guidelines by demanding answers from its opponents without having formulated the question to which they have to reply. Thus, the PFP is constantly charged to say what it is going to do in a referendum for which the date has not yet been set and the question has not yet been formulated and the Bill, in terms of which the question has not yet been formulated, has not yet been tabled in Parliament.

I think it is the most ridiculous and stupid thing to expect somebody to answer a question which has not yet been formulated.

Whatever the eventual question is going to be for the referendum, I believe it is important to keep four different problems concerning constitutional change distinct, otherwise a great deal of confusion can result.

Firstly, one has to have clarity in one's own mind about what you mean by, and what you expect from, reform. The PFP has spelt out in great detail what it understands under constitutional reform. This is contained in its policy booklet spelling out what the conditions are for a national convention and what kind of constitution the PFP believes to be appropriate for South

Africa. At the same time, the PFP has made it quite clear that reform cannot only involve constitutional reform, but must be accompanied by social and economic reform as well. In other words, the process of reform is an inter-related process involving political, social and economic change. It is from our particular concept and view of reform that we judge the adequacy of attempts at reform on the part of the Government.

Secondly, therefore, one has to judge the Government's constitutional guidelines in relation to genuine and effective reform. Again, the PFP has analysed what is known of these proposals and we have stated our objections in principle to the most obnoxious aspects of these proposals. Thus, we have pointed out repeatedly that the exclusion of Blacks, the entrenchment of racial domination and the persistence with discrimination in the new constitution are very severe stumbling blocks to effective constitutional reform. In addition we have pointed out that there is no indication from Government what social and economic reforms they have in mind which have to accompany the limited constitutional reforms that they have indicated. To the extent that our objections to the constitutional proposals are carried over into legislation, we will obviously have to state these objections as vigorously as possible in Parliament whilst, at the same time, participating in all stages of the Bill (in other words, Second Reading, Select Committee, Committee Stage and Third Reading) in trying to improve the constitutional amendments.

Thirdly, the announced referendum itself. I made the point in Parliament, and it was also made by Mr. Harry Schwarz, M.P. for Yeoville, that the referendum presents the opportunity to the Government, and particularly to the Prime Minister, to act in a statesmanlike manner or simply to play party politics. This will depend on the way in which the question is formulated. If the question is formulated in such a way as to test the support for reform rather than for a particular party's programme, then I believe the Government will enjoy far greater support from all the different communities than if it simply demands an endorsement of its own party political programme. No opposition worth its salt is going to stand around ready to support whatever party programme its opponent puts to the test. On the other hand, the PFP has often made it clear that should there be any attempts at reform it would support the Government in those attempts. But then, obviously, in a referendum the question should be formulated in such a way as to make the demonstration of such support possible. That is why the referendum will have to be judged against the background of the demands for reform and the Government's constitutional proposals in relation to such reforms.

Fourthly, and finally, the question arises as to whether a party participates in a new constitution once it has become reality. This presumably takes place after the Bill has become law and a referendum has been held and it has finally reached a stage of implementation. What does the PFP do when that stage is reached? Does it say "yes" or "no" to participation? In deciding on this question the PFP has to consider three issues : Is opposition

worse off in the new constitution? Is it basically in the same position? Or, is it better off to bring about the kind of changes and reforms which the PFP believes are necessary for South Africa? This question does not only apply to the PFP as an opposition party, but to all other opposition parties coming into the new constitution. Obviously it is possible for a party to work within a constitution which it finds inadequate for the moment but which is the only vehicle or the only instrument available for bringing about evolutionary change. This is precisely what all the parties, including the National Party itself, are doing at present functioning in the existing constitution.

The question that becomes crucial is whether a party is actually worse off as an opposition party or whether it can play no role at all in a new constitution in order to bring about evolutionary and peaceful change. If that is the case, then severe problems will arise as to whether that party has any role to play in a new constitution. This issue will be the final issue to be decided by the Official Opposition in Parliament. It is therefore pointless and fruitless to try and pressurize the PFP to answer this question now when all the other previous stages of constitutional development have not yet run their course.

As long as we in the PFP keep these four issues distinct in our own minds, the Government will be wasting its time and energy in trying to force a premature response from us on issues which have not yet been resolved in the whole process of constitutional development.

I believe, of course, that the outcome of the by-elections will vitally affect the way in which Government will react on all four these issues and that not only the Government but the whole of South Africa will be watching with keen interest to see which way the votes go, not only in the Berge, but in particular in Waterkloof.

Waterkloof is a far clearer test for genuine and effective reform than the outcome of the campaigns in the Berge. In the Berge the Government is desperately trying to reunite the National Party and to prevent the Conservative Party from getting its first representatives into Parliament under their own steam. In Waterkloof the Government is being challenged to spell out clearly whether it is committed to constitutional, social and economic reform and what it has in mind for the future of the country. In the Berge the fight is about whether there should be reform; in Waterkloof the fight is about how fast that reform has to take place. In this sense Waterkloof can give a lead and increase the momentum and tempo for reform.

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20 April 1983