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ARTICLE FOR "LEADERSHIP SA" by DR. F. VAN ZYL SLABBERT, M.P.

"SOUTH AFRICA : THE PITFALLS, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF REFORM"

There is only one overriding and central issue of concern in
the socio-economic and political situation in South Africa :
the quality and pattern of Black/White co-existence. This
will determine :

-   the prospect of relative peace for the future;
-   the possibility of growth in the economy;
-   the likelihood of stability in transition; and
-   the probability of manageable urban, industrial development
    in our cities and metropolitan areas.

It matters not one whit how sophisticated one's analytical
framework - whichever variety of Liberal, Marxist or Pluralist
approach is used to grasp the situation - the quality and pattern
of Black/White co-existence will be the common problem to be
addressed and any reform at any level which ignores this funda=
mental fact, simply wastes precious time and energy. It could
not be otherwise because a situation that has been deliberately
structured on a racial/racist basis over decades can only be
deracialized through systematic reform or else the response will
be in exactly the same racial/racist terms in which it was origi=
nally structured.

On an irrational, instinctive level this dilemma of Black/White
co-existence has been the life-blood of demagogic White politics
for decades. That is why, election after election, "swart gevaar"
("black peril") politics has been an infallible recipe for success.

(Besides, no-one has ever won a seat by concentrating on the "Coloured" or "Asian threat" to Whites). To clinch the success of this type of campaign, the White voter's support is demanded by promising the impossible, i.e. that White security will be protected by maintaining the status quo and by making no concession to pressures that entail the sacrifice of White privilege and exclusivity.

However, one does not have to be a demagogue or a racist to appreciate the cardinal nature of Black/White co-existence in South Africa. A dispassionate look at demographic and urbaniza= tion patterns; the demand for, and supply of, labour; the problems of job creation; as well as the land-population patterns tells the story quite simply enough. If the present modus vivendi between White and Black does not undergo some radical alteration as a result of reform initiatives, a very desperate society is going to be the outcome.

That is probably why there has been such an enthusiastic response to even the most timid signs of reform from the Government. And, if rhetoric is the measure of such intentions, lately there have been such signs in abundance. Even this should be seized upon as a possible sign of hope and not simply be dismissed out of hand. It is a truism, no less compelling in its validity for being one, that the prospects for relatively violence-free reform lie in the interaction of White initiative and Black response. But then the initiative, on all levels, will have to come from Whites who, at present, effectively monopolize political and economic power.

After all, no government, especially a minority government, wilfully initiates a revolution. That is why, no matter how cynical one may have become, one simply has to sit up and take notice when the government of the day repeatedly indulges in the rhetoric of reform.

In this respect, the opposition parties, including the Official Opposition in Parliament, may have been at odds with the prevailing climate or mood for reform - particularly as manifested amongst certain sections of the White community. There may have been a tendency to question too quickly the sincerity of promises rather than wait for the consequences that give effect to them; a tendency to doubt intention rather than wait for the practice which may flow from it. After all, it is not uncommon, even with the best of intentions, to be misguided and if a large step for the governing National Party still turns out to be too small a step for the rest of South Africa, it may have been taken with the overall good in mind in the long run. That is why, when considering reform, it is best to stop questioning bona fides otherwise politics simply becomes psycho-analysis. Conversely of course, it is equally dangerous to exude a false optimism about the course of reform simply because one is convinced of the sincerity of those who claim they wish to bring it about.

But then, how does one judge the adequacy and success of attempts at reform? To wander into the quagmire of party political rela= tivity in order to find criteria in terms of which to judge the desirability and acceptability of attempts at reform would be

equally frustrating and pointless. I believe it is possible to
escape this treadmill of infinite regression and to stop howling
at one another from our preferred and very often mutually exclusive
value positions. A start would be to recognize that the accepta=
bility, adequacy and success of reform does not, and cannot, depend
on one group alone in South Africa. It must at least lie in the
dynamic interaction between White initiative and Black response to it.

This statement is by no means as obscure as it reads at first glance.
South Africa is one of the best researched countries in the world
as far as its conflict potential and the prospects for reducing it
are concerned. For decades, we have been bombarded endlessly with
"five-minutes-to-midnight" scenarios - so much so that the pendulum
is beginning to swing away from "when is it going to happen" analyses
to "why has it not happened yet". That "something" is still going
to happen does not appear doubtful to most observers and "crunch-
talk" at upper middle-class dinner tables is still one of the best
centre stage grabbers. South Africa remains a risk consultant's
paradise for the time being. But, despite all the anxious and
sometimes gleeful huffing and puffing over "end-game" strategies,
a lot of useful and reliable information on the predispostions,
fears and preferences of the average White, Coloured, Asian and
Black South African has become available from these research
reports.

Even at this stage in our history one thing is abundantly clear.
The majority of people in each group still does not want violence
or bloodshed or the destruction of the other to become the

precondition for maintaining or changing the status quo. In other words, there is scope for reform to become acceptable and viable. The question is : <u>What kind of reform?</u> The answer is fairly straightforward. Whatever reform is attempted, despite the differences of race, culture, levels of industrialization or education between the different population groups, such reform must concentrate on what is commonly desired amongst us if it is going to be understood and accepted. It does not matter whether such reform takes place in the political, social or economic arena of South Africa. Put negatively and perhaps more force= fully :

- Reform must not undermine the <u>right of citizenship</u> of any one South African - White, Black, Coloured or Asian - in relation to another.

- Reform must not <u>exclude any group from the process of consti=</u> <u>tutional bargaining</u> on racial or ethnic grounds.

- Reform must not place or maintain any <u>racially discriminatory</u> <u>measures</u> in the way of a Black, Coloured, Asian or White person's economic progress or opportunities.

- Reform must not increase or maintain <u>social deprivation</u> among groups in the areas of education, welfare, housing, transport, etc. - i.e. the responsibility of the State, in looking after the welfare of all the people, should be seen to be non-discriminatory.

All this is so not because these conditions form part of any party's programme or policy but because research report after research report has shown that these issues relate to the hopes and aspirations of the vast majority of South Africans - White, Black, Coloured and Asian. Why are these hopes and aspirations common to all despite other differences? Again, research and analyses irrefutably demonstrate that the average South African, whether White, Coloured, Asian or Black, experiences the economy as an <u>integrated</u> system of opportunity and material advancement and the polity as <u>one</u> system of effective decision-making which fundamentally affects the ordinary individual's life chances.

No amount of spreading ideological icing sugar over the differen= tiated economic and political structures created by the Government for the various racial/ethnic groups has diminished this awareness amongst the average White, Coloured, Asian or Black South African. On the contrary, the apparent and increasing failure of precisely such differentiated structures has strengthened, rather than weakened, this awareness. Consequently, any attempt at reform which ignores these feelings or in fact tries to exploit them, is bound to increase, rather than reduce, the conflict potential of South Africa regardless of how sincere the intentions may be of those who attempt such reforms. In short, reform which tries to ignore, circumvent or avoid the cardinal importance of future Black/White co-existence in South Africa is dangerous and inadequate and may eventually compound the very problems it sets out to resolve.

At present the Government's attempt at reforming the constitution of South Africa holds the centre of attention. One can look at this attempt both from the process of constitution-making as well as from the content or package of the proposals themselves. I will come to the process presently, but as far as content is concerned, the guidelines of the National Party, presented at their Bloemfontein Congress, envisage a powerful Executive President together with a Parliament consisting of three chambers – one for Whites, one for Coloureds and one for Asians. Effectively, the President will be elected by 50 members of the dominant party in the White chamber (for the time being, the National Party), and the President will have a predominant role in appointing a Presi= dent's Council. This President's Council will change from being a purely advisory body to being an executive body and will basically play a deadlock-breaking role in decision-making. The present President's Council has just made more detailed recommendations to give effect to the Bloemfontein guidelines, which, if accepted, will shift most of the Parliamentary work to standing committees which will have a constitutionally entrenched racial proportion of 4 Whites : 2 Coloureds : 1 Asian serving on them, and where each chamber can decide whether it will allow opposition parties to serve on such committees. And so one can go on.

Intellectually, the underlying philosophy of the President's Council's recommendations represents the crudest bastardization imaginable of the logic of consociational democracy. It is academically simply too embarrassing to take seriously. But then, it may be argued, constitutional reform

is not an academic exercise but a political process. This is
obviously so. But then again, we should be spared all this pseudo-
intellectual rationalization concerning the presumed virtues of
consociational democracy for South Africa. The Coloured population
is not a voluntary segment generating its own leadership to bargain
on its behalf as a collective entity - it is an involuntary associa=
tion of people classified by the Population Registration Act.
Proportional representation means exactly what it says and to
entrench it constitutionally in order to maintain White dominance
contradicts what it means. To talk of a grand coalition of elites
when all that is happening is that the White government is willing
to co-opt clients from the Coloured and Asian population groups to
assist it in running the new set-up, is simply indulging in
fantasy. A consociational democracy is born out of the reality
of the political process in a country; it has never been grafted
onto an unwilling status quo and it is not going to happen here.
In fact, any attempt to do so may finally destroy whatever merits
a consociational arrangement could have had for the South African
co-existence problem.

One of the real dangers of the Government's attempt at constitu=
tional reform is precisely what I am indulging in now : that is
to be side-tracked into an irrelevant and extremely limited
debate. Side-tracked away from the central and cardinal issue
of South African life : the quality and pattern of Black/White
co-existence. This can happen because the Government's proposals
make it quite clear that Blacks are to be excluded from the new

constitutional arrangement. Why? Because, it is argued, they
(the Blacks) have historically developed along different consti=
tutional lines and adequate constitutional provisions have been
made for them.

Is this true? Let us briefly consider the constitutional arrange=
ment for Blacks.

The theory goes more or less as follows :

  - that eventually there will be no Black South African citizens;

  - that the various Black tribes must experience constitutional
    development and eventual soverign independence in their
    different homelands which comprise approximately 13% of the
    land surface of mostly the rural hinterland of South Africa;

  - that, as far as possible, Blacks who are not gainfully employed
    outside the homelands should either be removed to the homelands
    or prevented from coming to the urban areas;

  - that, at the same time, these homelands have to be developed
    on all levels of the economy to the fullest extent in order
    to provide for their citizens;

  - that, once all the homelands have taken independence, there
    will be a fully fledged Confederation of States with the RSA
    being a member, where matters of mutual concern could be
    discussed without any one state taking any binding decision
    on any other member state;

-   that, because of these assumptions about Black constitutional
    developments, it is fully justifiable to exclude them from any
    further constitutional development in the rest of South Africa,
    since adequate provision has already been made for them and all
    that remains is to find a new constitutional arrangement for
    Coloureds, Asians and Whites.

The instruments to give effect to this theory are :

    A ruthless system of influx control to the cities; forced
    removal and relocation of people to the homeland areas; and
    a heroic, but so far futile, attempt at decentralizing and
    deconcentrating industry to these homeland areas.

The consequences of the policy so far have been :

    Rural over-population and economic underdevelopment;
    destruction of environmental and other rural resources;
    unsystematic planning for urbanization in the urban centres;
    an increase in rural poverty and unemployment with an inten=
    sification of the pattern of urban migration.

The final result, whatever the intention of the policy, will
undoubtedly be :

-   By the year 2000, 93% Whites, 92% Asians, 86% Coloureds and
    75% Black will have been urbanized;

- This implies an increase in total urban population from 12 million to 40 million in 18 years; and, of these, 34 million will be Black;

- If the homelands policy is to be 50% successful, all jobs, social services, infrastructures, etc., will have to more than double to maintain the minimal and grossly inadequate developmental levels which exist at present.

- As far as jobs are concerned, this means that Blacks will be coming onto the job market at the rate of 201 000 a year - 103 000 from the homeland areas and 98 000 from the so-called "White areas". In the last 15 years, a total of some 150 000 decentralized jobs have been created - just over one half of one year's requirement. The majority of those have been in the border areas which, in effect, have been, and still are, part of the major metropolitan areas.

- Even a 50% success rate for homelands as far as jobs, social services and infrastructure are concerned, is not possible. But even if it were possible, the total Black urban popula= tion would still more than double from 11½ to 25½ million people.

- Therefore, in the next 20 years, more housing, more jobs and services will have to be created than in the last 300 years.

But jobs, services and housing are vitally affected by the annual budget passed by Parliament. The new Parliament, according to the Government's proposals, will have deliberately excluded Blacks because "adequate constitutional arrangements" would have been made for them in the homelands in the rural hinterland of South Africa. Therefore the population group undergoing the most rapid process of urbanization, namely the Blacks, will have the most underdeveloped constitutional structures to cope with the socio-economic realities in which it finds itself. Is a more breath-taking flight from reality possible? Square this dream with the reality described by Dewar and Ellis :

> "The overriding realities of the urbanisation process in South Africa, therefore, are that in the next 22 years there will be a flood of migrants to the urban centres of the Republic on a scale hitherto unprecedented in this country; that the vast majority of these migrants will be poverty-stricken; and that the major pressures will be exerted on the largest centres, particularly the four major metropolitan areas (the PWV region, Durban-Pinetown, Cape Town, and Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage)." [1]

The question is often posed : Is there an alternative to influx control and the present constitutional reform that the Government is attempting? Isn't what the Government is doing the most that can reasonably be expected? Of course not - and, yes, there is an alternative to both influx control and the present process of constitutional reform. In fact, no acceptable or adequate consti=

tutional reform is possible without the complete abolition of both influx control and the forced removal of people. The two are intimately related and just as it is impossible to graft a new constitution for Coloureds, Asians and Whites onto the status quo where the Group Areas Act is entrenched, so it is impossible to get Black co-operation and support for a new deal whilst influx control is still implemented.

An alternative to influx control, however, depends on accepting the following elementary truths :

- It is a fallacy to believe that influx control stops people from coming to the cities; it tries to do something to them once they get here, not before they arrive.

- Also, whether a man is unemployed in the rural or urban areas makes no difference to the degree of his unemployment. You do not solve unemployment problems by relocating people to the rural areas out of sight of the urban areas.

- Whether a family has no shelter in the rural or urban areas has no influence on how wet they get when it rains.

Therefore, an alternative to influx control should have, at least, the following elements :

- Acceptance of the reality of urban migration and development of a rational urbanization policy. In other words, use of

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resources to accommodate people in the urban areas, not to harrass or persecute them once they are there.

63(b) - The immediate cessation of all forced removals of people and the break-up of family life. A married man with his family is a far more stable urban dweller than a married man without his family.

63(c) - The limitation of construction, by the State, of sub-economic housing units for every family that comes to the city, and specifically houses that people cannot afford. Instead, the State should project into the future and plan to set aside land for low income emergency housing. It should accept that people will, and can, build their own homes and that basic facilities as well as site and service conditions should be provided.

63(d) - Non-interference with the informal economic sector. The Government should accept that it will not be possible for the private and public sectors to create jobs at the required rate and should, thus, allow people to seek self-employment and sustenance.

63(e) - An attempt to redirect people, as rationally as possible, to where jobs are or to where the least over-urbanized conditions exist.

- Development of a vigorous policy of rural and environmental renewal in order to improve agricultural resources and food production. Above all, avoid overcrowding or over-exploiting natural resources. In time people may drift back to the rural areas when conditions there improve.

- Encouragement of decentralization and deconcentration of industry as much as is economically feasible. This should not, however, be seen as a panacea or alternative for a syste= matic urbanization policy.

- Above all, the realization that an alternative to influx control is a multi-pronged strategy where no simple formulae can be found to cope with the consequences of decades of mismanagement and lack of planning.

However, for the Government to accept this alternative means that it must also accept another fundamental fact of the South African situation, and that is that a Black man is as entitled to citizen= ship as any other person in this country. He is going to be as permanent a member of the urban metropolitan environment as any other person in South Africa and he will be as subject to the political decisions taken by Parliament that will affect his life as any other person. Despite his differences with other groups, he has in common with them the need to improve his material position and to protect and care for those who are his responsi= bility. Once this is accepted, one realizes that there is no defensible reason whatsoever for Black people not being as free as White, Coloured or Asian people to move around in search of jobs and shelter.

But, to accept that a Black man is also a citizen just like any=
body else in this country, is to accept that the existing consti=
tutional arrangements for him are hopelessly out of touch with
reality and totally inadequate to cope with his demands. And,
to accept that, is to accept that he has to be involved in this
whole process of constitution-making that is taking place at the
moment. It is precisely here that the Government's attempts at
constitutional reform break down hopelessly and pose a threat to
the peaceful future of us all.

I said that I would also refer to the process of constitution-
making and I do so in conclusion. If it is so that the central
issue concerning a relatively peaceful future for South Africa
is the quality and pattern of Black/White co-existence, then all
reform - and especially constitutional reform - should address
itself to this problem. Rather than having a White government
working out a limited constitutional plan in its own backroom
that excludes 70% of the population and then having it ratified
by its own congresses and being bound by them to this plan, and
thereafter trying to sell this plan to the other communities that
are supposed to benefit from its implementation, it would be far
more sensible to engage in the following process :

- make a <u>Declaration of Intent</u> stating that it is the Govern=
  ment's intention to negotiate a new constitution with repre=
  sentatives of <u>all</u> population groups that will not allow the
  domination of one group over another, that will not tolerate
  any form of statutory racial discrimination, and that will

provide for equal citizenship for everyone irrespective of race or ethnicity;

- get a <u>mandate</u> from the party and the electorate to invite other leaders to negotiate such a constitution;

- <u>create a climate</u> conducive to negotiation by removing obstacles to negotiation such as influx control, the Group Areas Act and other racially discriminatory measures;

- form a <u>multi-racial commission of inquiry</u> to demonstrate, realistically, how to get rid of inequality in education, income and welfare on a racial basis;

- then, <u>call a constitutional conference</u> where political leaders who have been freely chosen can begin to enter into negotiation and bargaining.

Such a process will not have a more traumatic impact on White politics than the present one has had and will have a far greater probability of success. This will be so because the stage will then have been set for creative interaction between White initia= tive and Black response that could result in a secure future for us all. And that, as I said at the outset, is what it is all about.

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1) Dewar, D. and Ellis, G., <u>Low Income Housing Policy in South Africa</u>, 1979, p.24.