

ARTICLE FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES BY DR. F. VAN ZYL SLABBERT, M.P.

What is the significance of the split? Has it cleared the way for the Prime Minister to move systematically towards reform? Will he do so? What is the growth potential of the right wing? Will there be more defections from the National Party? What are the implications for the PFP?

The very fact that these questions are being asked, shows that a shift has taken place. Every now and then in the academic world old established theories are rejected and a totally new approach is accepted. This is called, by some philosophers, "a paradigm shift". In a sense the split has precipitated such a paradigm shift for the conventional analysis of white politics in South Africa. The reason is simple : One of the givens in analyzing white politics in South Africa has been the overriding importance of the unity of the National Party for the leadership of that party. Whatever else can be said, this unity has been sacrificed and no longer exists.

It is perhaps difficult for those not familiar with the Afrikaner nationalist establishment to appreciate the far-reaching consequence of the loss of political unity for this establishment. Already we see signs of tension in cultural institutions such as the Broederbond and teaching establishments and it is difficult not to see the Afrikaans churches, universities and newspapers also being affected. In short, the split precipitated a disintegration and re-organisation of a governing establishment. And because this establishment has been the power centre of Afrikaner nationalism, the quality, intensity and scope of Afrikaner nationalism, as we have known it over the last 30 plus years, must of necessity change as well. What is a good Afrikaner, how he must conform and where his political allegiance must lie can now no longer be answered in a self-evident and easy way for the vast majority of people who regard themselves as Afrikaners.

But why did the split happen? To find a satisfactory answer, it is not enough to examine and re-examine the immediate events surrounding the split, i.e. the caucus meeting, the letter written by Dr. Jan Grobbelaar, the Prime Minister's reaction to Dr. A. Treurnicht, etc., etc. These are simply actors and events conforming to a script written a long time ago.

The truth is that Apartheid/Separate Development, in terms of its philosophy and goals, was simply never on - it was only a matter of time before everyday reality would turn the dreams of Apartheid/Separate Development into nightmares for its supporters as well as for those who suffered its effects. Thus, the dream of separate viable economies has been abandoned in favour of one shared economy; the dream of a radically segregated social life is giving way to increasing social integration; the dream of political partition is giving way to what? - "healthy power sharing"! "What, in heaven's name, is that?" the average National Party member may very well ask.

What are the options available to the Government once it is apparent that its policies have failed? Only two kinds really : repression or reform away from the status quo; confrontation or co-operation in finding new alternatives; domination or negotiating a new dispensation which can enjoy the greatest degree of support. Since 1974 the white opposition has had to come to terms with these options and it led to a realignment. The Government is increasingly being forced to come to terms with these options and the first signs are the internal tensions in Afrikaner nationalism and the recent split.

In all these developments, one of the biggest mistakes that can be made would be to confuse the collapse of Apartheid/Separate Development with systematic reform. The Prime Minister is increasingly being cast in the role of a reluctant reformer because Apartheid/Separate Development is not working. The right wing blames him for it and others wish to praise him for it.



Both sides are misguided. Apartheid would not have worked, no matter who was Prime Minister. It is not Mr. Botha's fault or his achievement. In fact, as recently as this session of Parliament, he has rededicated himself to the central tenets of Apartheid/Separate Development and is determined to salvage as much of it as he can.

One such attempt has been the 1977 constitutional proposals. If ever there was an example of what some academics have called "sham" constitutional reform, this is it. These proposals are hopelessly inadequate to cope with the constitutional demands of the present or the future. And yet, contained in them is a fascinating dilemma for the National Party. Despite their formidable shortcomings, these proposals, for the first time, acknowledge that a future constitution in South Africa will have to depend on the co-operation and support of more than the white population group in order to work. In other words, it is no good to have the 1977 proposals implemented without the support and co-operation of at least the Coloured and Indian groups. And there lies the rub. Could the traditional unity of the National Party be maintained and constitutional proposals presented which would enjoy the support of population groups other than whites? Something had to give - and it was the traditional unity of the National Party - ostensibly because of a ridiculous concept called "healthy power sharing".

It has often been argued that National Party unity and systematic reform were irreconcilable. One could have either the one or the other, but not both. But there is a third possibility: No unity and "sham" or no reform. The last possibility is the most dangerous of all because it would simply alienate those against reform and frustrate those who are in favour of it even more.

Now that the split has happened and the right wing mobilizing with even greater intensity, what are the National Party and the Prime Minister going to do? There appear to be three possibilities open to him.

In the first instance, he can try to stop the haemorrhaging to the right by fighting them on their terms. The strategy would be to give minimal ideological content to the split by saying that there is no deviation from policy; that the Treurnicht group was simply "obstinate", "disloyal", etc., etc. The goal would be to re-establish as much National Party unity as possible and this would be accompanied by a minimum of constitutional reform - "sham" or real.

The second possibility would be to persist with limited constitutional reform based on some variation of the 1977 proposals and present the split as a necessary sacrifice for reform. The hope would be that the right wing defection would be limited in scope and containable in an electoral sense. This possibility holds definite risks, not only for the National Party, but for the country as a whole. To appreciate this, one must identify the fundamental flaw in the 1977 proposals. This is the assumption that it is possible to work out a constitutional arrangement for Coloureds, Asians and Whites separate and different to one for Blacks. This assumption is carried right into the composition of the President's Council and, because of this and despite the best intentions in the world, the President's Council and the 1977 proposals could increasingly become part of polarization politics and not negotiation politics. Therefore, if the Government persists with this second possibility, the following are the dangers :

- (a) For the National Party. The average Nationalist will want to know : "Why the split?" The only logical answer must be : "Look at the degree of co-operation we have managed to get from the majority of Coloureds and Indians". This



seems highly improbable as these two population groups are unlikely to let themselves be manipulated in a constitutional development that will be interpreted by blacks as a "ganging up" against them.

- (b) For the Country. Even if the Government is successful in getting the support of a significant number of Coloureds and Indians, the cost could very well be that Blacks would have been polarized beyond the point of reasonable negotiation politics.

In both cases, the overriding question will surely be : "What was the point of it all?" and for the traditional Nationalist : "Is this what we sacrificed our unity for?"

The third possibility would be for the Prime Minister to apply the logic of : "In for a penny, in for a pound" and to pursue genuine and systematic reform. The strategy would be to go for the moderate centre, not in white politics, but in the total South African political spectrum. This would mean that all population groups - Blacks, Coloureds, Asians and Whites - will have to be locked into the same constitutional process. It will also mean that the right wing will have to be confronted and not placated. In particular it would mean that the unity of South Africa, rather than the unity of the National Party, will have to be re-established.

Whichever of these possibilities is going to be pursued (and I am fairly convinced that the Government is going to vacillate between the first and the second for the time being), the right wing has no option but to give as much ideological content to the split as possible. Every tentative step towards any level of reform will be presented as a sell-out of white self-determination. Even the Prime Minister's timid flirtation with the concept of power sharing is already being paraded as white betrayal.

The politics of racial outbidding has been given a new momentum by the split and it is going to take strong nerves in Government not to succumb to it. The PFP, as opposition, knows very well what it is like to go to voters and demand short-term sacrifices to achieve long-term goals. It is perhaps the most difficult political message to sell and one is always vulnerable to demagogues and political opportunism. Even if the Government is only half serious about reform, it will find itself on that lonely road. But even if it is not serious at all, those who suffered from the split and others in the right wing will try to force it onto that road.

The role of the PFP in all this is more clearly defined than before. The split has made genuine reform more probable but by no means inevitable. The temptation to read more into the split than is warranted, will be great. Again, we will find people forcing their own hidden agendas into Mr. P.W. Botha's intentions. As an Afrikaner, I am not confused by the events. The Afrikaner establishment is turning in on itself and, for the time being, the long knives will be flashing. It would be a serious error of judgement to confuse this in-fighting as a struggle for reform. It is essentially a battle for control of a new establishment. And this battle is taking place at a time when the need for genuine reform has never been greater. The PFP dare not slack now in bringing pressure to bear for such reform. Ostensibly, the split was precipitated by a concept central to our political philosophy : power sharing. Now, more than ever, it remains the task of the PFP to persuade, cajole and support all persons, movements and institutions who can assist in making that concept and the philosophy behind it, part of the everyday constitutional structure in South Africa.