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DR. F. VAN ZYL SLABBERT MP
LEADER OF THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

What a great pity that the opportunity was lost. It will not come together quite like this again: the expectations, the media hook up, the genuine good will and hope that somehow he could pull something out of the hat for us, and for the world for that matter.

Nobody was more responsible for raising the fever than the Government itself. There stood Solarz, after his interview with Foreign Minister Pik Botha, looking like a man who had just stepped out of a time-machine, and the Foreign Minister smiling like someone who had got away with something naughty. From that moment on the speculation started and the Government did very little to stop it, on the contrary, they fanned it, nurtured it and encouraged it. Pik Botha's smiling confident return from Vienna saying it all.

And can we be blamed for hoping against hope? The townships are burning, hostility is increasing, the economy is in a mess and the outside world is using us as the best available free kick to release their own domestic tensions. The moment of truth must have struck home for many when the State President interrupted his speech several times to engage an inaudible heckler in the audience.

How out of touch can one be with the mood of the moment.

And yet he made virtually the same speech which had the country buzzing after the opening of Parliament. That speech was and still remains a significant departure from old style apartheid or separate development : the abandonment of Black urban - rural linkage, moving away from separate citizenship and influx control, etc. What was wrong then this time ? A number of things : the first time he told the world what we were moving away from, this time we wanted to know where we were moving towards. Also a number of very unhappy things had happened since the first speech : escalating unrest resulting in a partial state of emergency, increasing international violence and condemnation. All this makes greater clarity about our destination so much more urgent. This is a difficult spot for a government to be in - responding to and under pressure. But what takes a manageable step to get ahead of the game today, becomes a quantum leap tomorrow - (the difference between the Tiger and Lancaster House for Ian Smith of old Rhodesia, for example). The first big mistake then was a golden opportunity missed to get ahead of the game.

The second one is an old one for the Government from which it somehow refuses to learn.

That is to open shop without making sure whether there are any customers. They did it a number of times this year, e.g. they announce a forum without clearing it with any significant Black leader to find out if he will serve on it, so it just floats around on an unfinished political agenda. Surely if the State President was going to come with some earth shattering announcements, it would make sense to call in some high profile Black leaders, tell them what they have in mind and gauge their response beforehand. If it is not acceptable to them, why bother to go ahead.

Instead, they brief Solarz and America and Britain in Vienna, while Buthelezi flies to Israel for a fortnight in the very week that the State President is supposed to turn the world upside down. It simply makes no sense.

The third thing wrong has been wrong for a long time as well. Despite the State President's recommitment to reform and negotiation, which any sane person would welcome, the impression is still left that the Government thinks it can go it alone. "We will not be pushed around". "We will decide what to talk about when, where and how". "Nobody tells us what reform and negotiation is all about"., etc. Reform and negotiation is a two-way process. The Government can talk itself blue in the face about its merits but unless significant sectors of the population accept the reforms and there are some heavy weights on the other side to

other side to / ...

negotiate with, they might as well brush up on their solitaire. It is a simple lesson really : find out what the heavy's want to talk about; see if you are prepared to engage and then start promoting reform and negotiation. In other words, the Government and the people will negotiate reform or we will drift into seige. The Government will have to discover that it is not greater than the people over whom it governs because one thing has become dramatically clear this year - that is that the people have discovered that they are greater than their Government. How we all cope with that discovery will determine whether negotiation and reform stand a chance of success - not belligerent tub-thumping at party congresses.

One thing is becoming clearer by the day. A new initiative born amongst the ordinary decent peace-loving people of this land is desperately needed. On the one hand we have the hesitancy and ambiguity of Government in the face of escalating crises; on the other, increasing violence, looting and arson in the townships. The pace of reform cannot be set by mob rule nor by Government's intransigence. Somehow between these two forces the people of this land, from different communities, cultures, organizations and movements have to start a joint initiative. Despite our pain, our scars and our anger, there is still more that unites us than divides.

Let us get together.