

25th September, 1985.

The Editor,  
The Natal Witness,  
P.O.Box 362,  
Pietermaritzburg,  
3200.

Sir,

Well might Dr. Slabbert ask General Malan the other day "What is going on in Angola?". The answer he eventually got, highly disturbing and scarcely credible, was that we were giving "humanitarian" aid to one side in the civil war there.

It hardly sounds like the whole story and probably isn't, having regard to Mr. Pik Botha's embarrassed admissions of the same week that, in Mozambique, we, the Maputo Government, and the world at large have been fed a diet of lies and deception on the South African role there, since the day the Nkomati Accord was signed.

If we have been deceived about what is going on beyond our borders is it likely that we are being told the truth about what is going on within them?

In Cape Town there is no State of Emergency, and so, in spite of the myriad restrictions of press reporting which are now part of South African normality, we know at least something of what is happening there. We know for instance that there is a situation of apparently escalating violence, involving previously peaceful communities, to which the forces of "law and order", the police and the military, appear to have made their full contribution. But of the situation in the 36 magisterial districts to which the Emergency applies we know nothing -- except what the police choose to tell us. And why should we believe them, when we have the example of our Cabinet Ministers before us?

It is extremely ominous that after more than two months of the Emergency a position has not yet been reached in any one of the 36 districts where it can be lifted. If as the Minister concerned has assured us the chaotic situation in Cape Town is not sufficiently bad to justify an Emergency there, are we to assume that it is worse, and even more chaotic, where the Emergency applies? If that is so a large part of our country is in a state approaching anarchy.

For 37 years now the Nationalists' instinctive reaction to most of their problems, regional or internal, has been to try to resolve them by force. That policy has been a disastrous failure on all fronts. If force has proved a failure the only thing left to do is talk. In their different ways the businessmen's visit to Lusaka, the Churches' National Initiative for Reconciliation, and the Convention Alliance are all a desperate recognition of this. Only the Nationalists can't bring themselves to budge. This is understandable, because the only thing to talk about is the complete dismantling of apartheid, and it is not easy to admit that you have been steadily going in the wrong direction for the whole of your political life. But the scrapping of apartheid is really the only subject on the political agenda now.

Start talking about that and the revolutionaries will have the ground cut from under their feet, black children will go back to school, and white students will no longer need to campaign against conscription.

Yours faithfully,

*Peter Brown*  
Peter Brown