

Divisions can be crossed – Meyer

DIVISIONS in South Africa are not so fundamental that they cannot be overcome, according to the Deputy Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Mr Roelf Meyer.

Sharing a platform with the ANC's Raymond Suttner at the "Issues in Transition" series of debates in Cape Town, Meyer said substantial common ground existed between parties, despite important differences over which constitutional and economic models to adopt.

He said the government's vision for the future was a new, united, just and better South Africa.

The practical means to get there included a free market economy, the decentralisation of power to local levels (a federalist constitution model) and proportional representation.

A multi-party negotiating conference would be the start of the process.

Meyer said the government's emphasis was on nation-building and the creation of a stable society based on law and order. There should be freedom of association without any statutory prescriptions.

Simple majoritarianism would not lead to democracy – a "winner take all" framework would lead to instability. Meyer reiterated the government's rejection of a constituent assembly and interim government, but added that the new constitution would have to be approved by the whole population to ensure legitimacy.

Reacting to Meyer's rejection of a constituent assembly, Suttner said it was essential to establish a transitional authority to oversee the movement to a democratic government.

He reminded the audience that the legality and sovereignty of the South African state were not beyond question. The government could not play the role of both player and referee in the negotiating process. If one party could determine the outcome of negotiations it could have serious consequences.

The ANC believed decisions should be taken by consensus; there could be no responsibility for the transition without authority in the decision-making process.

Stressing the urgency for movement towards a new constitution, Suttner said the work needed to be completed as quickly as possible to avoid sabotage.

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Another February speech – 5 years ago

It was five years ago – on February 7, 1986 – that Van Zyl Slabbert, former Leader of the Opposition and now Idasa's director of policy and planning, resigned from parliament. What he said then comes remarkably close to more recent developments in South Africa. This is an extract of his final speech in parliament.

AS THIS is my last speech in this House, I hope honourable members will forgive me when I end with a few general comments about the state of politics in the country.

Let me start by stating the obvious, for the benefit of the honourable Minister of Defence. I am not a radical, a revolutionary, or even a violent protester. I believe passionately in the politics of negotiation. In 1976, 10 years ago, I wrote an article in the PFP magazine *Deurbraak*, entitled "Laerpolitiek Versus Bedingingspolitiek"... In that article I said that there were two forms of siege politics...

I went on to say that the risks of siege politics included the following facts: increasing race polarisation and international isolation, and the fact that this would undoubtedly expand the ideological generalisation of race politics in the Southern African context.

Control over the utilisation of "white violence" would also be the most important problem of the government of the day. What does one do with one's white vigilantes? That is the problem of siege politics.

In this article I proposed the politics of negotiation as an alternative. I said that there was only one way out – we had to negotiate for participation. Two forms of negotiation are possible. Smith's negotiation was a negotiation for capitulation – I do not want that for South Africa. I believe that we must negotiate for participation, but then we must find out who the people are with whom we must negotiate.

I am afraid that this government – I do not say this in any acrimonious sense – does not understand the principles of negotiation, or if they do, they do not abide by them. The dismantling of apartheid has nothing to do with negotiation. It is simply the first step towards negotiation. Apartheid is not up for negotiation. It has to go completely. What is up for negotiation is its alternative. That is where negotiation lies. One is not going to negotiate a position for blacks, coloureds and Asians



Van Zyl Slabbert

within group areas. The government must forget about it! They are not going to do it.

The second point is that reform or constitutional change will never be successful as long as this government insists that it takes place on the basis of compulsory group membership. It cannot happen.

Thirdly – this is an honest conviction of mine and I have said it to the on Minister of Transport Affairs

many times – the tri-cameral parliament is a hopelessly flawed and failed constitutional experiment. It does not begin to solve the problem of political domination; in fact it compounds it. It has nothing to do with effective power-sharing.

THOSE who have come into it, however good their intentions may be – I believe their intentions are good – have slightly eased the harshness of their own domination by administering it themselves. If the government extends the principle of co-optive domination to blacks as it has done to coloureds and Indians, violence and conflict are inevitable.

The search for consensus does not lie in finding co-optive clients. It lies in genuine negotiation with those who can deliver the goods.

Fourthly, I remain an incurable democrat. This motivates my involvement in politics and inspires my vision for the future. I do believe

we can become a non-racial, united South Africa where all its people can participate voluntarily in the governmental institutions of this land.

For 12 years I have tried to pursue this goal inside parliament.

I will continue to do so outside.

We are an artificial political phenomenon in this House. There are members of the NP who differ very little with what I am saying here and with what I feel. There are also honourable members there who belong with the members of the CP. We know that this is so.

However, here we stand, trapped in a ridiculous political debate, while out there our country is bleeding. I do not see how this can continue.

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Roelf Meyer

