

Best Playwright before Grahamstown) was vastly disappointing. In earlier years he has presented at Grahamstown such other striking pieces as Blitzbrecker and the Chicken from Hell (a semi-surrealist triumph featuring the inimitable Jonathan Pienaar as Blitzbrecker) and the moving Dogs of the Blue Gods.

Fraser veers almost enragingly between highly intelligent crafted work to smutty gutter muck which he extrudes with apparent total delight.

Sometimes this has some dramatic point; often it seems intended merely to shock, which it does less and less. But he shows he is concerned with some major philosophical issues, ethics, morality and a doom-laden view of death.



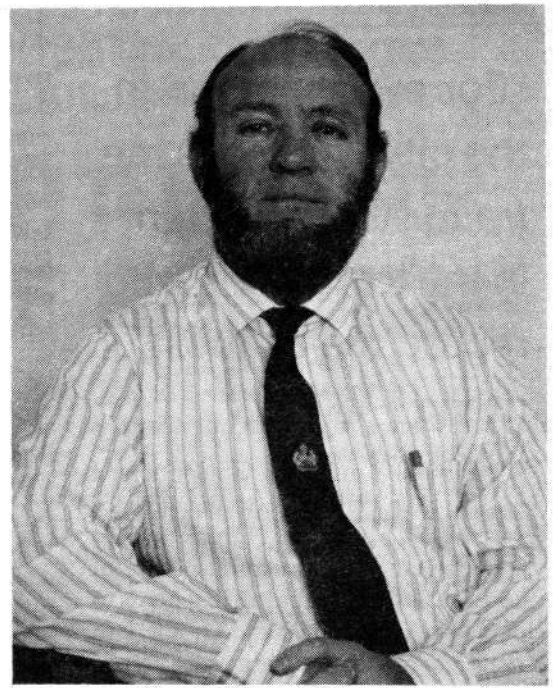
Ian Fraser is at once one of the country's most engaging and infuriating young playwrights.

Lots of people have decided God is dead. But that is a pretty futile putative end to the story. If God is dead what is there to put in his place, if anything? Do we all go around cutting our throats and bleeding on the carpet? It would be interesting to see how Fraser engages this next pretty obvious challenge.

In Dogs of the Blue Gods, Fraser introduced very effectively the issue of free will. Ah so. That has a thousand implications in itself. Meanwhile Fraser remains one of the most promising and also too often just provocative writers. Yet, what talent there is here. It would be a great pity if he accepted the role simply of a limited cult composer.

And a brief halloo and hooray for another triumph at Grahamstown. Paul Slabolepszy is a careful craftsman and a resilient performer. His magnificent performance in The Return of Elvis du Pisanie was superb. I'm not so sure about the text (which he wrote) though. You weren't quite sure at the end if you were wildly applauding the play, the late, doomed Elvis or Slabolepszy. On reflection it was definitely Paul Slabolepszy. He deserved his Big Hand. ●

‘ I didn't join the ANC to protect my future — in fact I haven't really decided what my future is ’



ROB HASWELL SAYS HIS CAREER IS FAR FROM SECURE

This interview was conducted with the former Democratic Party M P by freelance writer JENNY PIENAAR

Q: Was your decision to leave the Democratic Party an easy one for you?

HASWELL: Yes and no. I was very conscious that a lot of people had worked very hard to elect me to Parliament on a DP ticket. But after my election I began to know more about the politics of the country and became more familiar with the ANC and what they were doing. The DP's programme of action as it is written into their constitution called for interaction and seeking of alliances — obviously not with the Nats. To me this meant that we would become part of a broader democratic alliance, part of a coalition government.

Q: Did external political events influence your decision?

HASWELL: When De Klerk unbanned the ANC the idea of a coalition with them became a reality. I began to be part of a group of people within the DP who felt that we should be making more serious contact with the ANC as the other party to the left of centre. Who better than the DP, with their big business support to inject greater econo-

mic pragmatism into the ANC? You can only do that by working with them. We set up a number of meetings and at the end of the day it became clear that there were merely differences of emphasis in the policies.

Q: You are talking about similarities in policy. How do you reconcile the ANC's actions on the ground?

HASWELL: Yes . . . but there are paradoxes on both sides. How many DP members actually practise non-racial, non-sexist policies? How many of them underpay the maid? Are they making attempts to get rid of racism in clubs and institutions in the country? Obviously the answer is no as the great bulk of institutions in the country are in fact racially exclusive.

Q: But you're talking about the man in the street here. Let's talk about the ANC actions within the upper echelons of the organization. Aren't you embarrassed by authoritarian elements like Winnie Mandela and Chris Hani?

HASWELL: It's not a question of em-



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barrassment. I am not a violent person but I’ve been very close to the violence over the last 5 or 6 years. I think one has to understand the structural nature of violence. To believe that all that needs to happen is for Mandela and De Klerk to shake hands and produce a peace accord — we’ve had all that and it’s clearly insufficient. Are the so-called hardliners simply reacting to things as they are on the ground as opposed to others who aren’t? Why is the ANC in the Midlands supposedly hard-line? It’s because they are living in a war zone and they have been for several years.

Q: *Is what they are saying aimed at coping with violence?*

HASWELL: Yes, I think so. I know it’s an over-worn phrase to say that one has to understand it in context. But it is so — in the context of talking a community through a crisis of life, of helping them. In the context of the 2nd World War Winston Churchill did the same — quite outrageous war talk. The fact is that most white people seem unable to accept that there is a war and the evidence is increasingly that the state security forces are involved. Over 1000 ANC activists have been shot. In spite of this the ANC has suspended the armed struggle, sooner, I felt, than they should have. This is enormously to their credit. People have to accept that there are people being killed and brutalised — under these circumstances what do you say to a community as the whole fabric of their society is being stretched beyond breaking point. Do you make nice speeches in Johannesburg about peace while people are dying in Richmond?

Q: *Are you outspoken by nature?*

HASWELL: If I am I probably get it from my Welsh mother. She was a very open, up front person. If she felt an injustice was being done she would be the first one down to the school or wherever to give the headmaster a piece of her mind. I’ve always had a sense that

if I was going to do something I must get my sleeves rolled up and give it my best. Even in my school days at Highlands North — we were a small school and our rugby team was small. We knew that if we were going to win we would have to rely on our own resources — lift ourselves up by our bootstraps. I think I’ve always kept this sense of having to live off my wits. I’ve always stood up for what I believe in.

Q: *Your shift to the ANC has been called a cynical career move — positioning yourself advantageously for a change of government?*

HASWELL: I understand people reacting initially in this way but it is based on a misconception of what the ANC is and how it operates. I have no position whatsoever within the ANC. In a way the 5 of us are actually high and dry. I didn’t join to protect my future in fact I haven’t really decided what my future is. Maybe I could’ve sat tight in the DP and become spokesperson for local government. If I hadn’t ruffled feathers in Scottsville I think I would have been assured of being re-elected onto the Council. Some thought I might be the next mayor. I think a number of things suggest that if I had been motivated purely by what’s best for me, for my family, for my career, then in fact joining the ANC was quite the opposite as it has generated enormous pressure, uncertainty and abuse. My career is far from secure. There is no free ride. To be either a national, regional or local candidate for the ANC I am going to have to prove myself.

Q: *Was your decision to leave the DP a rather rash, emotional one?*

HASWELL: No. I had to weigh things up. I knew I had a lot to lose. Without wishing to sound arrogant I was a fairly big fish in a fairly small pond. I have a wife and a large family. They go to school and to church here and it would have been difficult for me to act rashly. I discussed it with my closest friends and family. I was compelled by my commitment to building a new South Africa. I was already committed to doing that when I joined the DP so it’s not as if I woke up one morning and changed my mind.

Q: *With hindsight, how would you evaluate your position? How effective do you feel you are now as an MP, a Councillor and family man?*

HASWELL: As an MP I represent the whole of Pietermaritzburg, beyond the artificial boundaries and I have been

doing that since ’89. That has always been my commitment and how I saw my role as an MP. We have to stop talking about people who are white rate payers and others who are non ratepayers. We are interdependent and we must acknowledge that everyone contributes to the city. The stayaway illustrated that. When someone walks into your office you can’t say “Excuse me, are you on the voters roll?” I continue to argue for what I believe is best for the country and for Pietermaritzburg. I continue to represent the city, not just white Pietermaritzburg, but the city’s interests as a whole and I continue to raise local issues where possible. I am an Independent Member, I don’t represent the ANC. I haven’t changed dramatically. I am still advocating the same things.

As a Councillor — when people expect me to advocate white interests over black interests — I think they’re unlucky. I represent the interests of the whole city not a fragmented “whites only” sector. We have an apartheid city which banished poor, black people from living in the city and we must now repeal those acts. We know that these people will choose to live close to their work and we must be prepared to deal with this reality. Again, I have always felt this way. In the end you must be judged by your actions rather than words.

From a family point of view it was traumatic to go through the onslaught that followed the public announcement of my decision. Sure, I regret that my family has been subjected to such abuse. It is different to be criticised for what you have done. But when criticism is based on phobias and myths you wonder what people are so afraid of and if the fear is within themselves. Still, we are a normal, active family and we have all got on with our lives.

It is easy to feel sorry for yourself and perhaps I should have been more sensitive to their needs. But when I weigh up what we have been subjected to and compare it to what families in and around Maritzburg have been subjected to — houses burnt down, families shot and brutalised, then our experience pales into insignificance.

Since I have appeared on TV I am now recognised in the townships. For every person in Pietermaritzburg who calls me “traitor” there are 10 in the townships who regard me as their friend. It has been a warming experience to be accepted as a fellow South African. If only more people would grasp this simple truth — that this is the beloved country and that we do love it. ●