

A BLACK VIEWPOINT ON THE SPECIAL PSC ON THE STATE OF THE NATION -

by PAT LEBETHE

From April 7 to April 11, the Anglican Bishops, representatives of the clergy and laity, together with other resource persons, met at Hammanskraal St Peter's Conference Centre, to take a realistic look at the State of the Nation at this time when the country is sinking deeper and deeper, into irrevocable crisis.

To my mind the tone of the conference should have been deadly serious throughout, because under discussion were:

- The fate of a people, who are intelligent, industrious and responsible but had never been given the chance to run their own lives.
- The deaths in detention and protest marches of people who were tired of being dictated to by foreigners in the land of their birth.
- An education designed for their children to make of them a slave-nation that would serve the interests of the Whites.
- The deprivation of a peoples citizenship by evil, illegal and immoral means, tokenizing of their country into tribal entities headed by tribalised "governments".

The creation of these "homelands" has brought in its wake a flood of misery and suffering. Among them is the migratory labour system which breaks up Black families resulting in juvenile delinquency, illegitimacy and prostitution.

As a result of the creation of these homelands, Black people are denied freehold rights in their country, and even the backlog in housing in the locations is encouraged to make them feel uncomfortable in the urban areas and thus speed up their trek to the homelands.

Squatter camps like Unibel, Werkgenot, Modderdam Road and others spring up out of the need to protect and keep under one roof all that is dear to him.

There is also the ever present thorn of unemployment - the last to be hired and the first to be fired as the South African dictum goes.

Unemployment like all other blemishes in the South African scene has been caused by the intransigent, dogmatic and unrealistic outlook towards life that has characterised the policymakers of this country since 1948 and beyond.

With all this and many more crucial issues, I must confess I was disappointed by the overall performance. It became clear that despite what happened since June 16, 1976, white South Africa, significantly the White section of the Christian Church in South Africa, had seen nothing and learnt nothing.

I purposely stress "the White section of the Christian Church in South Africa" because although we profess in our Eucharist that "we who are one body partake of the one bread" we must admit we are a divided Church, a divided society, a land divided against itself. We have lived apart for so long that it is virtually impossible to be on the same wavelength.

This came up time and again during some of the discussions, like when a White delegate said part of the problem with Black education was that a great majority of Black teachers had a drink problem.

/He did not know until he

He did not know until he was told that for the most part the poor teachers were forced to drink excessively out of frustration. It has been stressed in some quarters that White South Africa needs to be educated about the plight of their fellow-countrymen, but I strongly begin to have doubts whether this is not another exercise in futility.

Educationists will bear me out that you can only teach someone who is keen to learn, and White South Africa doesn't want to know about the plight of the Black man. She doesn't want to be bothered with "native problems". It is for that reason that she pays taxes so that the police force and the Department of Plural Relations can handle that problem.

It is for that reason that I believe we operate on different wavelengths. For instance when we talked of the Education crisis, to us Blacks we were talking about hundreds of children in school uniforms throughout the country, mowed down by bullets, hundreds more in detention, with their parents not knowing whether they were alive or dead, some hundreds more in neighbouring countries living as refugees.

It is with this in mind that you can understand why someone else can discuss this issue in a clinical fashion, why just because an hour ago he was talking to his wife over the phone and she had just told him that little Jimmy and Sandra were fine, she had taken them to school with their lunch packs. This is South Africa - the land of the privileged and the underprivileged.

One grievance always brings to light other interrelated grievances. I personally do not enjoy discussing these grievances with whites because besides being embarrassing, they make me seem pathetic and in search of pity and I believe I have pride and dignity. In any case, why must we always be telling whites how much they hurt us as if they do not know, after all they happen to be part of the problem that compounds the complexities of our lives.

This brings to mind another issue which cropped up during the discussion on family life. Admittedly the burning issue here was how to circumvent the racist laws that make mockery of Black Christian family life by the creation of the migrant labourer, Efflux and Influx Control, squatter camps, and the backlog of housing for Blacks in urban areas.

When one grievance is discussed, it always brings to light other related grievances. It was while discussing grievances in Black family life that problems such as prostitution, illegitimacy and juvenile delinquency came up.

Some of the White delegates gleeed in highlighting these blemishes in the Black community, as if these characterised the Black social structure, forgetting that in the murky white areas of Langlaagte, Mayfair and Doornfontein you can find White prostitutes, tramps, juvenile delinquents, drug addicts, alcoholics and several "orphanages" throughout the country whose real orphans comprise barely 3% of the inmates. It will probably shock whites to discover that we know these things about them, forgetting that our mothers and sisters permeate their domestic situations and cook and clean up in these supposed orphanages seeing and hearing all that goes on there. This is not meant to be a mudslinging exercise, the principal idea was just to clarify a few murky points, although I am aware that my point may be misconstrued and misinterpreted in so many ways.

/During the discussion on the

During the discussion on the findings of the group dealing with Politics, some people's blood pulses shot up when the issue of one man one vote was discussed. It has never ceased to fascinate me how most Whites go on the defensive when this issue is brought up. It's all right if White teenagers, drunks, prostitutes, and 'wont-works' decide my fate, but it doesn't seem alright if I have to decide their fate.

Ian Smith said one man one vote would not happen in his lifetime, but before his lifetime was 7 months old from the time he had made that statement, he agreed to it. So it can't be that bad after all!

Our delegate stood up during the proceedings to say Marxism should not be invited to the fireside as if it was the family pet. The issue under discussion was not Marxism but Man's inhumanity to Man. Come to think of it, what is wrong with Marxism?

Blacks haven't done too well under the present social order. We are drastically in need of a new social order and Marxism might well be the answer. I personally feel if the Church could co-exist with fascism I don't see how it can't with Marxism.

Another regrettable part of the conference was that, the delegates did not get the opportunity, of hearing first-hand reports from the people from the different areas of stress, as was originally planned, which thing might have pricked other people's consciences and given the conference the seriousness it deserved.

Mr Lebethe is a staff member of the Anglican Church's Justice and Reconciliation Division, which also deals with education.

/RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED