

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Unfounded fears

IN HIS article "A simple majority won't work", David Welsh says he hopes to start a debate. I offer the following brief remarks in the spirit of friendly but urgent debate.

For much of his article it looks as if he is on the point of proposing some specific constitutional check on "majoritarianism" but towards the end he says:

"How we achieve institutionalised coalition may not be a function of the constitution: perhaps it will be more fruitful to think in terms of pacts, solemnly agreed by the major players."

It seems to me very unwise to attempt to build into the constitution any interference with the rights of the majority (except those important ones provided by a justiciable bill of rights, proportional representation, and so on). In any case it seems very unlikely that the current majority (almost certainly those supporting the ANC) would accept such a provision.

Once an "ordinary" constitution has been agreed to, however, it will surely become clear that a pact of some kind (though I think it may prove to be a pragmatic working arrangement rather than something "solemnly agreed") will be almost inevitable. I think it will be a working agreement between the majority party, the ANC, and the next biggest actor, the De Klerk group.

What gives me this idea? And how can I be so confident?

It seems to me fairly clear, and I think it will become clear to almost everyone, that the new South Africa will depend upon sensible day-to-day working arrangements between employers and workers, between majority (which will want to pull towards redistribution) and capital (which will want to pull in the opposite direction), between the current haves (who have important power) and the current have-nots in various categories (who will also have important power).

If I am right, David Welsh's fears about appropriate checks and balances may prove unfounded.

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The price of liberty . . .

ICAN'T say it was a pleasure reading of the 'disarray in the DP', but at least your editorial was a fairer reflection of the party's state than others I've had the misfortune of reading.

Some liberal-democrats seem to suffer from the same identity crisis, Nelson Mandela thought he saw in 1953, on the formation of the Liberal Party. Mandela stated: "Liberals are searching for the middle ground where none exists. They condemn and criticize the government for its reactionary policies, but they are afraid to identify themselves with the people . . . the struggle is between oppressors and the oppressed."

Mandela misunderstood the liberal position; as do most South Africans.

For the Liberal South African the major categories are not Left and Right, but Liberal and illiberal.

Leftwing illiberals sometimes believe in civil liberties, but never in economic ones (such as the ANC). Rightwing illiberals sometimes believe in economic liberties, but never in civil ones (such as the NP). For both the notion of political liberties, or tolerance, is foreign. The more

extreme illiberal parties get, the more they resemble one another (such as the PAC and the CP).

The latest strategy declaration of the DP, says that there is 'a middle ground' and commits the party to contesting the first non-racial elections as an independent force. Such action, insightfully predicted in your editorial, is long overdue.

So many liberal newspaper editors think they're doing us a favour by urging the party, as *Reality* does, to 'stick together' at least until a liberal-democratic constitution has been accepted by CODESA. Edmund Burke could have told them that 'the price of liberty is *eternal* vigilance and not just until CODESA is over. Liberal-democrats must take heart. Helen Suzman has set a precedent; Alan Paton has given us a text to live by: "It is not necessary to succeed in order to undertake, and it is not necessary to hope in order to persevere."

Liberals must rise from their armchairs and keep up the good fight. Aluta Continua!

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Make your choice

IAM AMAZED at Alan Sterne's reaction to Ann Colvin's letter. What baffles me, however, is the steadfast insistence on the attitudes of the past. All Ann was pointing out — and this is a fact of life — is that the ANC since 1912 has been advocating non-racial, non-sexist and democratic principles.

This is not true of other organisations. The ANC has always been the people's organisation and will be more so in the future.

The ANC's comradeship with the SACP is hardly an issue as it was brought about by circumstances. Just recently we witnessed the Nationalist Party forming an alliance in order to defeat the forces of evil. Even though we all hailed this for peace's sake, it is important to remember that all the problems we have to deal with are a direct result of the N.P.'s stubborn

rule. The ANC/SACP alliance was necessitated by the fact that they had to resolve the armed struggle.

Alan has quoted a number of examples — DP students prevented from writing their matric, etc. etc. What he does not tell us is why this happened and why he came to conclude without any doubt that the perpetrators were ANC members.

In all fairness we must agree with Ann Colvin, that if these white liberals were really liberal, their liberalism must be translated into action by joining or supporting the ANC. The alternative is for us to conclude that they were merely trying to be better devils during the times when blacks were experiencing the worst oppression ever by human beings in a so-called democratic society.

Come on, Alan. The D.P. will not be there for long. You will have to choose between the N.P. and the ANC.

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Umlazi