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## **EDITORIALS**

### 1

# THE NATIONAL CONVENTION IDEA

The idea of calling a new, fully-representative, all-race National Convention to negotiate an agreed basis for South Africa's political future has been a good many people's policy for quite a long time. It was Liberal Party policy over twenty years ago. It was Progressive Party policy and is now PRP policy. It is the policy of most Black people working within the apartheid system, as well as of many outside it. It is not, however, Mr Vorster's policy.

At his report-back meeting to his Nigel constituents recently Mr Vorster said that the purpose of a new National Convention could only be to scrap the present constitution and to bring in a new one aimed at one-man-one-vote. On the first point he is quite right. The purpose of a new National Constitution would be to substitute a new constitution for the present one. Whether it would be based on one-man-one-vote we don't know, although we hope that

it would be—for, in our view, one-man-one-vote, tied to a Bill of Rights and an independent judiciary, perhaps within a federal framework, provides much the best hope for our future stability and happiness. After all, isn't the vote what democracy is supposed to be about? And if we are not to have one-man-one-vote democracy, with all its hazards, you can be sure we will have something much worse.

However, the fact that we would advocate one-man-one-vote at a National Convention, and Mr Vorster would not, makes no difference to our conviction that it is urgently necessary to call such a convention. Its task would be to produce a constitution which would probably satisfy nobody completely but would offer a prospect of reasonable security to all. Sooner or later, we are convinced, such a convention will take place, even if it goes by some other name. It is inconceivable that a secure and acceptable future for all South Africans will ever come out of Mr Vorster's policies, not only because

those policies have been worked out by White people alone, but because they are rejected in principle even by the Black people who are prepared to work within their institutions—to say nothing of those who are not. This last group includes the majority of our urban Black and Coloured people. The past six months of urban unrest has shown that this rejection is more emphatic amongst young people than it is amongst old. Who can seriously imagine that, as the years go by, this rejection will subside, or disappear? And if it does not, as we are sure it will not, is Black civil unrest to become part of South Africa's everyday life? How long, if it persists in its present policies, will Mr Vorster's government be able to contain this daily threat on the home front, while external diplomatic and economic and military threats grow—as they undoubtedly will and as long as widespread internal rejection of those policies continues?

These questions are being asked by more and more people, not least a variety of Nationalist academics, businessmen and newspaper editors. But the government's reaction to the questions, and to the events which inspired them, has been almost completely depressing. It has rejected out of hand any suggestion that the time has come for a new start to be made in South Africa. It has done worse. Through Mr Vorster and other Cabinet Ministers it has given support to the arch-conservative, Dr Treurnicht, in what seems to be a deliberate move on his part to reverse some of the few relaxations of apartheid which the last few years have seen.

If we may ask again a question which we have asked before, does this mean that the Government will refuse to negotiate with its opponents, until, like Mr Smith, it has no alternative? Does it mean that it has learnt nothing from Rhodesia and Namibia? Does it mean that the Nationalists

will refuse to start sharing power until they have no choice? We hope not, because by that time such bitterness will have been created in our country that the prospects for racial harmony may have disappeared.

In this deteriorating situation it seems to us that, little though Mr Vorster may like it, one of the constructive things which people who want a non-racial society can do is to hold up continuously before the South African public, Black and White, the idea that the only peaceful way out of our impasse is through a new Convention. At that Convention must be everyone who has an effective following within the community, whether, at this moment, they happen to be gaoled, detained, banned or free, and whether they be Black or White. At it must be the people who have the power to effect change and those who have ideas about what that change should be. This means that, amongst others, the Nationalists must be there, and they must be there in the frame of mind to negotiate with people they at present regard as a threat.

There is absolutely no sign that the Nationalists have yet reached the stage where they would be prepared to consider such a Convention. That is no reason not to keep pressing the idea, in the hope, however faint, that, even in the South African situation, man is not so immune to reason that he cannot be persuaded that it is better to talk to his opponents from a position of comparative strength in a situation of peace, than to meet them across the armistice table after a long and bitter conflict.

From such a Convention, and the hard bargaining which will go with it, could be born a society which promised something to all South Africans, and to which all could give their love and loyalty. How else will we ever achieve that? □

## 2 DEATH IN DETENTION

In March 1976 Mr Joseph Mdluli died in the hands of the Security Police the day after they had detained him. Seven months later four security policemen were charged with culpable homicide arising out of his death. They were acquitted because according to the evidence, they were not present when he died:

That Mr Mdluli sustained the severe injuries which led to his death while being held by the Security Police is not in question. They say that he tried to escape and that there was a struggle. They say he fell over a chair. The Judge was obviously not happy with all the evidence that was placed before him. He remarked, "I need hardly say that the problem of how Mdluli met his death is one that should be solved." But will it be?

The inquest on Mr Mapetlo Mohapi, who was said to have committed suicide while being held by the Security Police at Kei Road in August, 1976, had still not been held by December. By that time the two doctors who attended his post mortem as representatives of his family had themselves been in detention for several months.

On November 11th, 1976, an inquest court in Cape Town began an inquiry into the death of Mr Luke Mazwembe, who was found hanged in his cell at Caledon Square police station only hours after being detained. The attorney representing Mr Mazwembe's family remarked to the court, "It appears Mr Mazwembe was very conveniently left with a piece of twine and a razor blade." Out of these and strips of blanket he is said to have manufactured the noose with which he hanged himself. At the time of writing the inquest inquiry has still to be concluded, having been postponed after one day to a date to be announced.

There have been several other deaths of people held without trial by the Security Police within recent months. One could almost say that the event is becoming common place. It certainly no longer provokes the uproar which it did some years ago, or even when Mdluli died. The official announcement of death is usually accompanied by the statement that it was due to natural causes, or suicide.

We suppose it is possible for people to die of natural causes in detention, but why should they want to commit suicide?