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EDITORIALS

1. After Dakar

The totally negative reaction of the Government to the Dakar visit to the ANC set up by Dr Slabbert must not be allowed to undermine the potential importance of that event. Nor should the outrage of the massive bomb exploded in Johannesburg to coincide with his return.

Caught in the web of its own propaganda the Government was hardly likely to brand the expedition, in public anyway, as anything else than a traitorous grovelling at the feet of the enemy. We hope that privately its mind is a little more open and that, after the initial furore, the discussion of what was said and done during those few weeks is brought on to a rational level. The State President's threats in the parliamentary debate on his budget to see that such a thing doesn't occur again and to stop overseas funding of extra-parliamentary groups, do not promise much hope of this happening. On the other hand his decision no longer to make the renunciation of violence a condition for the early release of political offenders is encouraging.

Mr Botha has said that the whites who went to Dakar were dupes. That for all the reasonableness they showed on this occasion there were hard-line Communists amongst the ANC delegation. That it was notable that no representatives of the military wing of the ANC were there. We suspect that most of the South African contingent were quite aware of this and took it into account. They would probably argue, as we would, that discussions of this nature, which help to destroy the stereotyped view each side has of the other, can only strengthen the hand of reasonable people in the ANC camp.

The question is, will they strengthen the hand of reasonable people in the South African camp? First signs are not all that hopeful, but our future is so obscure that the contacts established in Dakar may yet prove of great value in the years that lie ahead. For one thing is quite certain and that is that the ANC, as a very important element in our political scene, is not going to go away. □