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EDITORIALS

1. 1991 - Where will it take us?

By the end of 1990 many of the euphoric expectations of the first half of the year had been overtaken by anxieties about the future. Now that euphoria has been regenerated by Mr de Klerk's extraordinarily positive speech at the opening of Parliament, and the meeting, at long last, of Drs Buthelezi and Mandela. Will these two important events provide reassuring answers to the many anxious questions with which we started out the year?

Will political violence be brought under control? 1990 gave little hope that it might. Within the state security apparatus and amongst the ranks of most of its major opponents are plenty of people with blood on their hands. It will need considerably more than public appeals for

non-violence from their leaders to persuade such people to change their ways. They will have to be convinced that their own leaders mean what they say, that their opponents' leaders mean what **they** say, and that both the state and their own organisations will come down on them very hard if they persist with their violence.

Will criminal violence be brought under control? We started 1991 with promises of a massive drive against crime. It won't work unless there are a great many more properly trained policemen about, visibly committed to the impartial policing the State President has promised. Years of enforcing apartheid's laws have completely alienated the police from large sections of the population.

They need the support of those peoples' communities if they are to fight crime effectively. They will not get it until many of them change their ways.

Can the economy be turned around, and new jobs in large numbers become a real possibility, if not this year, at least soon after that? The crumbling of sanctions at least provides a start in the right direction, but the internal instability of the country and concerns about future economic policies are severely inhibiting factors. Investors want to know how deep within the ranks of potential members of a new government the commitment to a mixed economy runs.

Relevant to this question is another. What precisely is the future relationship between the ANC and the South African Communist Party going to be? One asks this, not with any intention of stirring up a witch-hunt, but because the ANC is on a recruiting drive and people need to know. Periodically during recent months the SACP has announced the election of regional and branch office-bearers. Periodically the ANC has done the same. Presumably people elected to office in the SACP are paid-up members of that Party. It seems that a significant number of people elected to office in the ANC also are. This is a curious arrangement, too reminiscent for comfort of the one we had to live with between the Nationalist Party and the Broederbond for all those unhappy years. As for economic policy, any influence the SACP might have on the ANC is bound also to be an unhappy one. Not everyone in its leadership seems to have been persuaded by its universally disastrous record that communism can't work, and one fears that many of the people who wear its tee-shirts and attend its rallies still think the SACP can bring Utopia here. One doesn't have to be an unrepentant capitalist or a free marketeer to hope that our future will be based on more constructive economic thinking than that.

What about the land question? The Land Acts and the Group Areas Act are to be repealed, but much more than that is needed. The Government is to publish a White Paper on its proposed land policy. A first step must be the return to the people who have been dispossessed since 1948 of what apartheid took away from them. After that a considerable measure of redistribution based on sustainable productivity must surely follow?

What will happen about Umkonto weSizwe? Its integration into the SADF is an essential element in the transition process, but how can that even be contemplated while the threat to resume the armed struggle remains? No government in its right senses would willingly incorporate a potential fifth column into its military structures.

What about the rumours of a pact between Inkatha and the PAC? If ever there was a marriage of convenience that would surely be it. They differ on almost every aspect of policy, from the "armed struggle" to economics. Far better than their forming a pact would be to draw them speedily into a genuine national negotiation process. This the commitment by both the ANC and the Nationalist Party to a Multi-Party Conference now makes possible.

Mr de Klerk's speech on February 1st leads inevitably to the end of apartheid, however reluctant some of his opponents may be to concede that. The road ahead also clearly leads to some kind of non-racial future. We must start talking now, without further delay, about what the shape of that future is to be. If that can be done soon, and there seems to be hope of achieving a reasonably acceptable result fairly quickly, many of the fears and frustrations which spur the actions which worry us today, could be diverted into constructive nation-building for the future.

That is what we must hope will start to happen in 1991. □

2. Harms and Kriegler

However the reader of the Harms Commission enquiry into the death squads may have reacted to its findings, or lack of them, there is no denying the anodyne effect of the Commission's report. The CCB existed but there was no proof that its activities were known to, and sanctioned by, higher military or political authority; political responsibility for it was not the concern of the commission and, in any event, the CCB had since disbanded. The only problem that remains is of tighter financial control of military spending. The Vlakplaats death squads did not exist. If Coetzee and his associates had carried out death squad operations there was no proof that they were official. In any event, Coetzee could not be believed. The whole idea that the government used death squads to eliminate its political opponents can easily be dismissed, in the light of the Harms report, as little more than the

fantasies of an over-heated liberal imagination.

This outcome of the official enquiry into death squads produced a profound sense of disquiet among civil rights lawyers and many others concerned with government malpractices. The recent judgement of Mr Justice Kriegler in the law suit between General Lothar Neethling and Die Vrye Weekblad and the Weekly Mail may change all that. While the judgement is apparently to be taken on appeal, Mr Justice Kriegler did make a clear finding on Dirk Coetzee's credibility on the issues before the court and particularly on the issue of the supply of poison to eliminate anti-government activists. We shall have to await the outcome of the appeal on these issues but it does now seem possible that several chinks may yet appear in the official cover-up of CCB and other clandestine security activities. □