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Presidential Address

Joyce Harris

TERRIBLE THINGS are happening in our country. They have been happening for a long time. In analysing what worries me so I have come to the conclusion that it is not so much the events themselves, serious and horrible though they often are, for example the detentions, the deaths in detention, the bannings, the forced removals, the evictions, the labour restrictions. Nor is it even the increasingly violent reactions being provoked. I think what concerns me most is the climate — the texture — of a society which can produce such aberrations, and which can compound them year after year.

Brutality is defined as inhumanity, and inhumanity as the want of human feeling, barbarous cruelty, the want of politeness or courtesy. Sadly the society in which we live conforms to these definitions — to a greater or a lesser degree. Politeness and courtesy are often noticeably absent in the behaviour of the so-called 'Civil' Service, particularly that part of it which has to deal with black people. Barbarous cruelty manifests itself in the many allegations of torture of detainees and by the deaths of some of those who have been held in detention. The want of human feeling is implicit in the total policy of forced removals, or migrant labour, or Group Areas or the Pass Laws.

Brutality

I want to talk about the brutalising effects of brutality — the manner in which a brutal government spreads its poison into the bloodstream of the body politic so that eventually no one is left untouched—not the brutalised, not the brutalisers, not even those who profess to opt out of the whole ugly scene.

It is not difficult to trace the inevitable growth of brutality in our present regime, for it has its roots in the very beginnings of the National Party. It was, and so far largely remains, despite the split, the instrument whereby the Afrikaner folk sought to establish themselves in the community at large, and to safeguard their culture, their language and their identity. The National Party's first priority was

the interests of the Afrikaner people. The maintenance of Afrikaner unity has quite blatantly and unashamedly taken precedence over the interests of the country as a whole.

When the objectives of a government are the achievement of the common good, then the pursuit of power in order to attain these goals may not be altogether reprehensible. But when these objectives are directed towards the welfare of one small section of the community, inevitably at the expense of all other sections, they constitute a very real danger, for then power can be maintained only by a regime which needs to become ever more repressive.

And that has been the history of South Africa under National Party rule. From 90 days — to 180 days — to indefinite detention without trial; from endorsements out of the urban areas, to compulsory migrant labour, to single sex hostels and closer settlements; from Bantustans to Homelands to Self-governing or Independent Black States, to the deprivation of South African citizenship and the fragmentation of the country; from Sophiatown to District Six to Pageview to prosecutions under the Group Areas Act; from passes for men to passes for women, to the on-going horror of Nyanga; from a relatively free Press to an increasingly muzzled one; from untrammelled public protest to restricted venues, to censored posters, to the Riotous Assemblies Act. The list is endless but the direction is always the same; towards more and more restrictions and less and less freedom.

Restrictions imposed in the interests of one group have led inevitably to inter-group hostility, which has expressed itself with increasing violence as those who are restricted fight their fetters while those who restrict feel vulnerable and apply more and more force.

Force is brutal. It has no place for the ordinary human values of caring compassion, or understanding. And as these values are increasingly denigrated and stamped out, brutality rears its ugly head with less and less reaction, or even

awareness from the community in which it operates.

Children are born into, and grow up within a society which has less and less regard for the rights, the freedom and the dignity of the individual; where the vast majority of the people are dehumanised and treated as so many cogs in the industrial and commercial machines; where the media are increasingly unable or unwilling to present the true facts; and where the art of double talk has been developed and refined to such an extent that even those who first introduced it have become so lost in it that they themselves are no longer able to distinguish between truth and wishful thinking.

Perhaps the reality of what this Government has perpetrated and continued to perpetrate is so hideous that even its spokesmen cannot bear to look the facts in the face and must disguise them, not only for the public at large, but even for themselves.

The often unbridgeable gap between words and deeds has led to a sort of national schizophrenia. Take for example Mr Pik Botha's statement after the abortive Seychelles coup, that 'in this country people are innocent until found guilty'. (The Satr, 3/12/81). He said this while hundreds of people were banned or detained without trial, and in the face of legislation like the Urban Areas Act, the Terrorism Act, the Internal Security Act and the Sabotage Act which effectively throw the onus on the accused to prove innocence rather than on the State to prove guilt. He must surely know that habeas corpus no longer operates in South Africa, and yet he found it possible to make the statement he did.

What is the frequently misinformed and nearly always gullible public to make of this? Very often, and in order to retain their sanity in the face of such blatant contradictions, people listen to the words and close their eyes to the deeds because they simply cannot reconcile them. Thus they choose to believe that justice is done while uncharged and untried people languish in detention and sometimes die, just as they gaze upon black education, homelands, 'voluntary' forced removals, the so-called 'equality' of separateness through the rose-coloured spectacles provided by the Government.

The realities of overcrowding and under-financing of black schools, of poverty-stricken rural areas, of hunger and starvation, of deprivation of citizenship conveniently escape their notice.

And so the inhumanity and brutality of separation and discrimination germinate and grow in dark places. Those who turn a blind eye are just as culpable as the perpetrators of these evils, and in turn they also become brutalised. The whole country seems to be caught in a vicious spiral of violence and suppression and brutality — the end result, I believe, of the policy of apartheid, whatever its disguise.

I would like to try to penetrate the curtain of words and to expose the reality of a policy which

is parochial rather than national in its intentions and how, in my view, this has been responsible for producing the brutal society in which we now live.

I do not believe that the National Party's original intentions were brutal — not at all. But I do believe that brutality was the inevitable result of government by a party motivated purely by self-interest, that the national interest has suffered as a result; and that this has built up enormous resentments which have in turn triggered off increasingly violent fear reactions from the government.

The sad thing is that the National Party's self-interest has never become enlightened and that its laager mentality has waxed rather than waned. I believe it was Dr Bernard Friedman who coined the aphorism, **'The National Party has always had its back to the wall and so it has never been able to read the writing on it'**. Certainly it has become increasingly oppressive as it has sought security, never able to recognise that, in the long run, consultation and negotiation must hold out more hope than confrontation in an admittedly difficult situation.

To start with the Government's homeland policy — however much it might like to deny the implications of the policy with all the accompanying forced removals it has involved, the reality of the rural areas is that they remain poor, non-viable, overcrowded, lacking in infrastructure, dumping grounds for the surplus people — the thousands not needed in the white economy.

For most of them their most productive export is their labour, which feeds the white industrial complex and allows for a dribble of returning income. They are not geographical entities.

They have lost the order and justice of their tribal culture together with the land availability which enabled them to follow their essentially pastoral way of life. They have had a tribal citizenship bestowed upon them, but as soon as their homelands become independent this is at the expense of their South African citizenship and their share in the wealth of the country they have helped to create. And nothing changes.

Ciskei and Venda

In 1981 the Ciskei took independence.

Writing in the Rand Daily Mail, Ben MacLennan had this to say: 'While the Chief Minister of the Ciskei . . . presided over the one-hundred-and-one gun salute . . . there was little celebration in the resettlement camp of Nedvana, which falls within his own electoral constituency. This rambling collection of houses, shacks and tents is barely 10 km as the crow flies from the New Independence Stadium . . . But for the 400 men, women and children who were dumped there two weeks ago, national anthem and flag-raising will do nothing to piece together their shattered lives . . . Chief Sebe, it seems, has adopted and is applying enthusiastically one of white South Africa's most draconian measures — the eviction of 'redundant' people from their homes and their endorsement

out of the towns . . . One of the removals gang said he and his companions expected to be in the Ciskei, moving people, for the next five years'. (RDM, 5/12/81)

Writing in the Sowetan, and comparing Ciskei independence with that of the Transkei, Lance Cherry said, 'In 1976 Transkei was given its "freedom" . . . The freedom was real — Transkei was now free of all the profits its men were working for. It was free of South African citizenship. It also lost world recognition for its people . . . Transkei became a national labour pool with 65 percent of its labour power working in South Africa . . .

'Ciskei obtains 65 percent of its revenue from South Africa . . . The average earning of a Ciskei resident is R212 per annum . . . the hope or chance of Ciskei becoming a viable independent nation is less than one in hell'. (Sowetan 4/12/81)

50 percent of all two- and three-year-olds in the Ciskei are malnourished. Three out of four urban children and eight out of ten rural children are under-sized. (NUSAS Health Fact Sheet No 2)

Professor John Dugard remarked that 'already Major-General Charles Sebe had the dubious distinction of having probably set a record for repressive clampdowns on the trade union movement'. He warned that the 70 000-strong SA Allied Workers' Union would be doomed after Ciskeian independence. In September of 1981, 205 SAAWU members were detained in Grahamstown (Sunday Express, 29/11/81). The Union leaders were currently being held in detention in Johannesburg.

In late 1981 VENDA asserted its independence by detaining members of the Lutheran Church. There was one confirmed death in detention and rumours of more, and of torture inflicted on detainees.

Using the same brutal laws and repressive measures to which they were introduced by the South African Government, three out of the four leaders of so-called independent homelands are terrorising their people and abusing their authority.

Removals and deportations

In the so-called self-governing black states, which still fall officially within the aegis of the South African Government, over-population and land hunger caused by continued removals to inadequate space result in ever-increasing misery. The population of Kwa Ndbele, for example, grew from 50 779 in 1975 to 166 477 in 1980, with 11 resettlement areas (Hansard, 3/81). Massive relocations continue all over the country.

Taking only one aspect of the financial cost of removals, that is compensation, R118 077 540 has been paid to 1 675 white landowners in South Africa, affected by consolidation (Hansard, 8/81). A total of R592 million had been spent on buying land for consolidation by January this year (RDM, 26/2/82)

The Government's priorities for the utilisation of its financial resources are a tangible expression of its determination to press ahead with its ideologi-

cal aims with total disregard for the suffering involved.

I believe that this policy, intended to be in the interests of Afrikaner or maybe even white survival, is inhuman and cruel. It is a form of brutality which must brutalise its perpetrators, while degrading those who suffer so sorely as a result of it.

I believe that a policy which denies a person the right to sell his or her labour on the best market, and which locks a man into a category of employment for his entire working life, that is if he is sufficiently fortunate to be requisitioned for in the first place, to be entirely devoid of any semblance of human feeling.

I believe that to break up black families and to make the lives of black people entirely dependent on little bits of paper — permits and proofs that they are who they say they are and where they say they are — is to reduce them to ciphers and to deny their essential humanness. All are diminished in a society which indulges in such practices.

In case anyone may still think that such things do not happen they might be interested to know that the Administration Board of the Western Cape took R229 351 for fines imposed for influx control during the first six months of 1981 (Hansard 3/81).

There were 38 468 arrests in the Republic for Pass Laws infringements in the first six months of 1981. Of these 15 301 men and 10 035 women were tried and convicted. (Hansard 3/81)

Squatters from Nyanga were deported to the Transkei.

2 017 people were deported during August 1981. (Hansard 7/81)

The Government has gone a step further than the endorsement out of urban areas of people whom it considers to be undesirable or superfluous, and has taken to deporting people who are South African citizens born in South Africa, but who have been deprived of their South African citizenship by the stroke of a pen.

And these deportations took place after many of the people had been subjected to the most outrageous harassment at Nyanga, and eventually guns were trained on them and they were shot at. Their only crime was a desire to live together in family units and to work and earn a livelihood. But they were not permitted the realisation, nor even the recognition of such basic, primary needs. They have simply had to join the long, long list of victims of the apartheid machine. In February 1982 the sand dune on which they lived was flattened, and the hounding goes on, night and day.

It is not possible for those who make such laws and those who are responsible for administering them to remain unchanged and unaffected by them. If they do not reject them sufficiently to cry 'Enough' and to refuse to have anything further to do with them, then they must inevitably be debased by them, together with all those who bear silent witness.

1981 saw the stringent application of the Group Areas Act. The Indian people of Vereeniging were

forcibly moved out of the central business area. They were also ejected from Newtown. 1 456 families were removed from Pageview (17 are still resident there — Hansard 5/81). So-called coloured and Indian people living in the white areas of Johannesburg, because they were unable to find any accommodation at all in their own Group Areas, have been hounded, charged, brought to court, found guilty, fined and evicted. And this has happened despite the Government's acknowledgement of the acute housing shortage.

Speaking at a public meeting in Sandton, Dr Koornhof said that the prosecution and eviction of a Johannesburg coloured woman for living in a flat in a white Group Area was 'particularly hurtful', and that cases like this 'make us feel very sorry and we are determined to move away from hurtful discrimination . . . But the law, must be maintained'. (Star 23/10/81). It is apposite to ask who makes the law, and why is no attempt made to change it if it is 'hurtful' and 'sorry'-making?

But there is no sign that the Government intends letting up on its invocation of this brutal and inhuman Act, a cornerstone of its total strategy of separation. 132 white families, 7 589 coloured families and 4 572 Indian families are still to be moved under the Group Areas Act. (Hansard 6/81)

Detentions

Neither is there any sign of easing in the thorny arena of justice — quite the contrary, in fact. Figures for banning and detentions are frequently contradictory and confusing. In January of this year Mrs Helen Suzman was told by the head of the Security Police that 159 people were being detained under various security laws. The figure obtained by her two months prior to this was 131 (Star 5/1/82). The Star's Thermometer of Justice lists 386 persons as having been detained since the beginning of 1981, some of whom had been charged and some released, while the remainder are still in detention (Star 14/1/82). The Detainees' Parents Support Committee claims that more than 5 000 people have been detained since 1963; 400 are known to have been detained since January 1981; and at least 160 people are still in detention (DPSC 28/1/82).

But whatever the exact figures may be there is no doubt that there has been a heavy clamp down since the latter part of 1981, particularly on students and trade unionists, many of whom have now been in detention for several months. Our own member, Esther Levitan, has been detained since the beginning of January 1982, and Keith Coleman, son of our Transvaal Regional Chairman, since October 1981.

Detainees are held in solitary confinement, without access to their legal advisers or their friends, though the courageous work of the Detainees' Parents Support Committee, with Audrey Coleman and her husband Max in the vanguard, has resulted in occasional access to some of the

detainees. However this does not alter the fact that the detainees are within the absolute power of the Security Police and are denied the protection of the courts. Between them, the Government and the Security Police are a law unto themselves.

On February 5, young Neil Aggett died in detention, allegedly found hanged in his cell. He had been detained since November 1981, with no reasons given and no charge preferred against him. According to all who knew him he was a very special young man, gentle, loving, compassionate — characteristics which, in this brutal society, can apparently lead only to trouble. In this tragic instance he paid for them with his life, as others have done before him.

Then there is Thozamila Gqweta, a strong, healthy young man, who appeared in the psychiatric ward of the Johannesburg General Hospital in a state of mental and physical collapse after months in solitary confinement under Section 6. But apparently the horror caring people felt at what can be done to people by the inhumanity of their fellows was not shared by some Parliamentarians, one of whom commented to the amusement of his colleagues that people are not in solitary if they are being interrogated.

Only a sick society can practice indefinite detention in solitary confinement.

Only a sick society can condone it.

Only a sick or a frightened government needs to operate behind an ever-thickening curtain of concealment.

Numbers of those who have appeared in the Courts after having been held in detention have complained of being tortured, though no official investigation of the Security Police by the Security Police has ever confirmed such accusations. However rumours remain rife that detainees are subjected to all kinds of brutal treatment.

Whatever the truth of this may be the Government is showing its utter contempt for the fundamental democratic values of human liberty, freedom and dignity by arbitrarily banning and detaining people. The integrity of each member of society is diminished by indifference to the denial of human rights to others.

Speaking at a seminar on 'Reform in South Africa' Professor Terrence Beard of Rhodes University said, 'The powers of the security police are as great as anywhere else in the world . . . they are nothing less than frightening . . . The secrecy which now surrounded police activities had to a large extent placed the police force beyond scrutiny and thus beyond accountability . . .' (Star 1/12/81). And Mr Geoff Budlender, addressing a meeting called by the Detainees' Parents Support Committee, said that 'The Government removed its opposition by defining its enemies as criminals. Trials are the culmination of a process of removing opposition by defining enemies as criminals who have broken the law. The courts are used as respected validators of the process . . . The whole process of political trials gives the stamp of authority to State actions!'. (RDM 29/1/82)

The Rabie Commission

The Rabie Commission on Security Legislation has added new crimes of 'subversion' and 'incitement' to the already daunting list, and has suggested increased penalties for some offences. In its report released on February 3 1982, it did not shift away from detention without trial; the suggested checks to govern detentions, bannings and restriction orders were totally inadequate; and it placed no limitation on the length of time a Section 6 detainee could be held. The Commission in fact endorsed the Government's apparent contempt for the courts and due legal practices.

Its recommendation of the establishment of a Ministry of Law and Order, approved by the Government, has an ominously un-Western ring to it. It needs to be constantly remembered that law and order do not necessarily have anything to do with justice, in fact they are likely to flourish best in a strictly controlled totalitarian society.

In a free society law and order can best be maintained with the consent of the governed living contentedly under laws they consider to be just. In such a society there should be no need for a Ministry of Law and Order, only one of Justice which is acknowledged to be done.

Mr Tom Manthata, Secretary of the Committee of Ten, saw the report as a declaration of war by whites against blacks. 'It is declared against those who sympathise with the sufferings of the people'. (Sowetan 5/2/82)

Justice

The people have lost all confidence that justice will be done, because in security matters it is not seen to be done. The authorities show the arrogance of non-accountability in their treatment even of the relatives of the detainees. When the laws themselves have little to do with justice and much to do with the retention of power they do not provide protection for ordinary citizens and result in tyranny.

Perhaps one of the most terrifying aspects of being a citizen of this country is that one is totally denied the protection of the law.

Mr Sidney Kentridge said in an address to a parents' protest meeting, 'After nearly 20 years of detention without trial people forget how drastic a departure these laws are from civilised concepts of individual liberty and human rights' . . . (Sunday Express 29/11/82)

He referred to the 'dubious reputation acquired by the Security Police in the sphere of detentions' and said: 'There are many cases which have come before the courts where it has been . . . accepted . . . that members of the Security Police have abused their powers. Nonetheless, I know of no case where any of the police officers concerned has been even publicly reprimanded, let alone punished'.

While brutality and inhumanity are probably most blatant in the spheres of justice and removals, callousness and indifference are evident across the entire spectrum of government. The

labour reforms, based largely on the findings of the Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions, were aimed only at incorporating a 'segregated' class of qualified urban blacks, while keeping the unemployed bottled up in the homelands.

Committees

There have certainly been attempts to improve labour relations, but many of the black trade unions are unhappy about restrictions imposed on them, and the widespread detention of trade union leaders and activists does nothing to inspire workers with confidence.

The Manpower Training Act of 1981 kept training separate for the different race groups, thus reinforcing apartheid.

The report of the De Lange Committee into education proposed dramatic changes under one Ministry of Education, but this pivotal recommendation, which black people have been demanding for so long — viewing it as their only reliable means of achieving equity with whites in education — was immediately rejected by the Government.

The pattern seems to be that the Government appoints Commissions or Committees, extracts from their findings those recommendations which best fit in with its unchanging policy of apartheid, and discards all those other suggestions which, in the main, are the ones which offer hope and encouragement to the dispossessed millions. Discrimination enjoys constant renewal while real and meaningful change is avoided.

The recent scandal over the leakage of matriculation examination papers for black pupils is a case in point with a callous and indifferent ruling from the authorities that thousands of students must re-write their examinations without even a by-your-leave, as though no hardship was entailed.

Politically reform was the name of the game in 1981.

But it has been perfectly obvious that the Government will not accept any recommendations that do not conform to its fundamental policy, and that the only so-called reform which will be countenanced will be cosmetic.

A Markinor public opinion survey showed that while the overwhelming majority of whites believed the Government was handling race relations correctly, a sharply declining number of blacks felt that way. A growing number of whites appeared to be sanguine about their lot in life while a dwindling number of blacks were (Weekend Argus 19/12/81). So the communication gap widens and resentment and ignorance walk hand-in-hand.

There were more than 50 acts of sabotage and violence from January to October 1981, a 200 per cent increase on the same period during the previous year. (Weekend Argus 19/12/81)

Priorities

When TV 2 made its long-promised appearance during 1981, Percy Qoboza had this to say. 'To think that the whole exercise cost this country nearly R110 million in the face of hunger, starva-

tion and disease in the countryside. One begins to see how this nation's priorities are developed. To spend that amount of money while ignoring the needs of the communities, can only mean one thing — namely that television, like radio, is seen by the Government, not in terms of its entertainment value, but of the effective propaganda medium it can become'. (RDM 5/1/81)

An editorial in the Sowetan pointed out that 'We all love this country and no sane person would like to see a violent disruption to his life-style. But there are basic issues, very serious issues, which are eating at the very souls of blacks. We do not have to go into the pass system, influx control, into bad pay and the dismal housing situation. We don't even need to speak about the scandal of squatters in a country that is inviting and encouraging thousands of white immigrants. We need not speak about unemployment and lost job opportunities. We hardly have to breathe about the forced homeland issue and the politics of base inequality. These things have been said often enough.

'We believe it is utterly hypocritical and even unpatriotic for those in the lap of privilege to wish to convince themselves that the majority in this country has nothing to complain about. Whites have to wake up to reality. They are sitting on a time bomb'. (Sowetan 4/11/81)

The Press

This brings me to the basic necessity of having an informed public and to the Steyn Commission into the Mass Media and its restrictive recommendations. In proposing a Government-controlled register for journalists it appears to regard them as would-be anarchists intent on misrepresenting the news to the detriment of society as a whole and the Government in particular. In reality the majority of them are dedicated, hard-working, often underpaid, concerned citizens doing their best to sort the wheat from the chaff, caught up as they are in the Government's interminable and tortuous word games.

It seems to me that the Government, and with it the Steyn Commission, are seeking to apportion blame for the publication of material they find undesirable in terms of their own interests, on the Press and its unfortunate journalists, to divert public attention from the fact that it is their own actions which are reprehensible, not the reporting of them.

If the Steyn recommendations become law then the final nail will have been hammered into the lid of the coffin of a free Press, but even more frightening is the knowledge that the public will not even be aware that it is dead. How many of us remember, every time we open a newspaper, that we are no longer getting any news about the Army, or military operations, or prisons, or the police unless passed for publication by the relevant authorities?

If more restrictive laws are introduced we will know even less than we do now, and the Government will be free to carry on with whatever it is

that it wishes to hide, untrammelled even by the limited degree of accountability to which it is presently held by the vigilance of a few.

In discussing the events of 1981 I find that I have made no real mention of the General Election, called by the Prime Minister for no apparent reason. There were gains to the right and the left of him, but it remained essentially a non-event, except that it cost the taxpayers R2 609 000. (Hansard 6/81)

The opposition groupings, however, have problems. Because the establishment is so undesirable in basic human terms the opposition is thrown into confusion. Those who opt for total non-participation do so largely because they are experiencing a total reaction to brutality. But the logical end-result of non-participation is confrontation, which is inevitably brutal.

On the other hand those inclined to opt for participation in the hope that this will lead to evolution by negotiation, are at the same time fearful of being insidiously sucked into the vortex of a brutal establishment, with which they would prefer not to have to associate themselves. Thus the dilemma constantly compounds itself.

I remember with horror the first time I heard or read the words 'liberalism' and 'humanism' — words which for me have always evoked the best elements of the human spirit — allied with the word 'sickly'. I remember my sense of outrage at the phrase 'Sickly liberal humanism'. I simply could not believe it was meant seriously. But that phrase was no accident, for it exactly portrayed Government attitudes to such admirable human concepts as freedom, dignity, civil rights, justice, compassion. And it still does. That phrase, sickly liberal humanism, was the direction-finder, the compass by which the Government has steered its policy and the entire country in pursuit of the security of the Afrikaner nation. In so doing it has blunted the sensitivities of everyone and reduced their level of humanity.

I resent what has been done to the values I hold dear.

I resent the difficulty we all experience in trying to retain our standards in an environment where words have lost their meaning, where the laws themselves denigrate decency, and where moral and ethical concepts have been turned upside down.

I resent the debasement of the society in which I live and the manner in which all its people have been dehumanised.

I know that my colleagues and friends in the Black Sash share my resentment and that we will continue to resist, as best we can and as we have always done, the brutalising effects of living within a brutal environment.

I know that we will do our utmost to retain our integrity and our consistency. I know that we will face the future courageously, armed with our belief in the rightness of our cause to seek and promote justice and human rights and liberties for all.

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