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A FEW REMARKS ON THE OCCASION OF A MEETING WITH MR SIMON BARBER
NEWSPAPER CORRESPONDENT FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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Mr. Barber, you are an experienced journalist and one detects in your writing a very particular perspective as you write about the news in the context of the news behind the news. There is a very urgent need for analytical journalism in South Africa and there is a need for journalists to begin looking at the events and the processes which create the news that is behind the news. I would offer the opinion that what analytical journalism there is in South Africa is probably something like 18 months behind in perceiving what is happening in the country. All too frequently there is an analytical lack of awareness of the implications of what is happening today which will only hit the news headlines next year or later. Journalists did not predict the Dakar meeting because they have been unaware of the extent to which there is already a gravitation in Black politics towards discussions and dialogue

which could lead to a more united Black South African political voice.

It has always been a fact that an ordinary Black labourer or an ordinary Black peasant, an ordinary Black clerk or an ordinary Black domestic worker, does not feel divided from Black labourers, peasants, clerks and domestic workers because they belong to different political organisations. At grass root level there is what one can perhaps call the unity of the chain gang. There is a over-riding perception that they share more than they do not share. There is an over-riding perception that they are the victims of apartheid who belong to each other.

This is why wherever you get a real membership-based Black political organisation the demand is for Black unity within the framework of a multi-strategy approach. It is the ordinary Black who bears the brunt of the failures of Black political organisations. It is the ordinary Black who pays the price of misconceived tactics and strategies. The Black reaction to township violence is far more complex than it would appear to be from journalists' insights. Blacks experience violence at first hand. It is in Black townships that it erupts most frequently. It

erupts amongst them and Blacks know intimately and painfully that violence flares, escalates, hits a ceiling of reality and then dies to flare up yet again. Blacks know that township violence can only escalate that far. They know that there must be at least some degree of normality in the flow of people and goods in and out of townships. It is their hunger, their desperation and their life and death vested interests which ultimately act to produce that hideous equilibrium of violence and counter-violence in our townships.

Revolutionary forces can scream as much as they like about the need to escalate violence and to establish a people's war but when the time comes that escalating violence destroys the basis of life in townships, then it is the people who react to curb it. It is no earthly wuse analysing those curbs which come from the people themselves as orchestrated vigilante curbs which serve the forces of apartheid. The police and army do benefit from Black backlashes against violence. Criminal elements do enter the scene and utilise both violence and backlashes to it for their own purposes. But it remains true that there is a very real people's backlash. People become aware that they are being used as cannon fodder in exercises in which logistically the forces of violence cannot win.

When one goes beyond the levels of organisational propaganda one perceives at this time in South Africa that the ANC and UDF, for example, are having to re-think their tactics and strategies. Leaders in these organisations are fully aware of the fact that violence has not escalated and spread the way they had hoped it would two to three years ago. June 16 and its events this year are not what they hoped for, nor is it in fact what they predicted to

themselves. There was a euphoria two to three years ago that the South African Government is on the run and that apartheid would be smashed in the foreseeable future. There is now some dismay that

things have not worked out as they hoped that they would work out.

It is now time for stock-taking, for reassessment. There are of course some who are reassessing and saying that there is nothing left to do but to go back to square one and do the same things all over again but to do them more intensely. There are others who are saying that all that would be would be to make the same outcome more dramatic.

When I talk about these things I use a word like 'gravitation.' I believe that tendencies, emphases, seemingly unimportant shifts, slightly altered stances, are all adding up to paint a picture which analytical journalism has not yet really perceived. Black

violent opposition to the violence that is necessary to maintain

apartheid can in fact not be made that much more effective. There are very restrictive logistic problems in the movement of people and arms. There is the very real factor that the escalation of

violence must be supported from without and that the best that can be done has already been done to support violence from without. If there could have been more violence there would have been more violence. It is not a case of the forces of Black violence having only mobilised some of their batteries. They could not have done more than they have done and they will not be able to do more than they have done at least for the foreseeable future. During the last few years the process of rapid urbanisation has proceeded. There are now more people in urban and peri urban areas desperately needing food and the essentials of life. The ceiling of counter-

violence has in fact lowered somewhat. There are curbs against the further escalation of violence. ;

As opposed to these curbs it truly can be said that the violence of which the State is capable has hardly even been displayed thus far. The devastation which State violence could create is awesome to

contemplate. Black revolutionary organisations and those who strive with them from within the country to make South Africa ungovernable are as aware of these facts as I am. They need of necessity now to reconsider their options. They are attacking

apartheid where it is the strongest and they are making what amounts to suicidal sallies against the full power of the State where it is most brutal. They know that there is not a single railway route which is not operational; they know that every bridge in the country stands intact; they know that the vastness of the country's electricity and water supply systems are intact. They know that violence has closed down no factory. Blacks know this. There may be great anger among Black South Africans but it is anger cautioned by the very widespread perception among Blacks that the violent onslaught against apartheid has not produced the goods.

As opposed to this curb on the escalation of revolutionary violence and the awesome heights to which State violence could be raised, there is growing democratic vulnerability to the ruling National Party. All reality points out that there can be no economic recovery until there is the kind of really meaningful political reform which will swing Black South Africans behind what is being done in the reform process. The present tricameral parliament of South Africa must unquestionably continue to fail and the State President is powerless to remedy the failure while he proceeds with unilateral Whites-only initiatives. Black South Africans in their millions amount to a massive vetoing block as far as constitutional reform is concerned. They are in the position to veto wrong moves because only the moves that they participate in have any hope of

achieving anything at all. The State President needs to achieve something. The country's business community needs him to achieve

something because they need achievement for their own future security.

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Constitutionally it is the State President himself who sits in the hot chair of Black constitutional reform. His role is pivotal for the success of the reform programme if it is going to be a reform programme which is legitimised through Acts of Parliament. That is the only kind of reform programme available to the State President. He really is hoist with his own petard. The White South African electorate unquestionably see the State President's pivotal role. They are mounting pressures on him now to act and to act in such a way that he succeeds. He is forced by the total logic of economics and politics to seek Black approval for what he is doing. It must be approval demonstrated not in clever manipulations of propaganda. It must be demonstrated in the organs of Black local and regional government. It must be demonstrated in the State President's ability to life the national state of emergency. The normalisation of South Africa will be the test of the State President's success. There is no escaping the judgement of continuing deterioration in the economy and the continuing necessity of the Government to rule through states of emergency.

The State President is terribly vulnerable on the democratic front; He has been returned to Parliament with greater Party political

control than he had before the election. It is political control, however, which is not an end in itself and will have to be used to make Parliament relevant to the process of real reform. He was

served with very clear notice in the election campaign that he will have to do just this. The breakaway movement was not insignificant because it only captured one parliamentary seat. There is a dissatisfaction in the National Party itself about the way the State President is orchestrating its own internal democracy.

To a large extent he has already shed those who will step to the right.

The demands for action that action succeeds now are going to grow. These questioning and demanding elements in the National Party itself are strongly reinforced by academics and churchmen. However incomplete their wisdom is and however incomplete their vision is, there is at least the wisdom to know that things cannot go on as they are. They do not quite know where to but they know it must be away from apartheid. This questioning and the support it is getting from academics and churchmen is powerfully reinforced by big business. Big business demands that the State President now moves away from pretensions in the politics of negotiation and move

towards the real thing. It is Black democratic opposition to apartheid which has the key to the negotiating doors. The doors

that we have opened are doors through which the State President will just have to walk. The first step to that door must be the release of Dr. Nelson Mandela, Mr. Zeph Mothopeng and other political prisoners. The second step must be the de-regulation of Black politics which amounts to it being unshackled. It is: only powerful Black democratic forces which can translate the right decisions arrived at in meaningful negotiations into the kind of on-the-ground realities which will halt the escalation of violence and herald economic recovery.

I am quite sure that these few thoughts I have expressed are rooted in the realities that surround us. I am also quite sure that Black organisations which really are membership-based and have viable organisational machinery which is effective in regulating internal democracy are going to be very advantageously placed in the unfolding of the political scene as it will emerge during the next couple of years. Inkatha has in fact increased its membership by something like 200 000 during the last two years. Its membership now exceeds 1.5 million. I have not dissipated Inkatha's strength on street corners. I have not involved Inkatha's members in failing tactics and strategies. It is the strength of Inkatha which is attacked from some Black political quarters. Those attacks have in fact tempered the steel of Inkatha's resolve to continuing pursuing its aims and objectives through the tactics and strategies of its choice. When the cookie crumbles we will be there with many advantages.