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Risking a glass of water

A, trihalomethanes, milligrams and micrograms, nitrates and nitrites ... this newspaper has, since its launch,
been flooding its readers with terms that are
technical and obscure.

The reason: we decided to conduct an independent investigation into the quality of Johannesburg's drinking water after City Hall's health authorities refused to release data they have collected as part of an extensive programme to monitor the city's water for the presence of pollutants.

The council's chief scientific officer initially refused to let us see the data — even though there have been a number of recent press reports expressing concern about pollution in our water.

The official justified this by saying that most members of the public were not capable of interpreting the data and were likely to exaggerate its implications.

This newspaper's investigation discovered traces of mercury poisons — probably the result of our rivers being polluted by industry— in the city's water supply at twice the level considered safe by the World Health Organization

The Daily Mail also found that there are other toxins in the water: trihalomethanes, nitrates and nitrites which cause a disease known as 'blue baby syndrome'.

The city health department hotly disputes he findings of our investigation. But the med-cal officer of health reversed the decision of his officials to block access to the data after our eport was published.

This can only be commended.

The Democratic Party, which controls the overnment of this city, is committed to a policy of open administration and the council's oficials are bound to abide by this principle.

That is the way it is in most other cities of the Vestern world and that is the way it should be n Johannesburg.

And, more importantly, the people of the ity, who pay their water bills, have every ight to demand data and other details about the hemicals and contaminants they might be onsuming.

Professor Hilliard Hurwitz, the city's medial officer of health, says the council has nothing to hide.

That may well be the case. But the only way assure the public that there are no poisons in heir water is to let them see for themselves.

The fact that this information is technical and ften difficult to interpret is no excuse for deriving people of the right to information that may be vital to their health and the health of meir families

This newspaper is determined to make full se of City Hall's promise to open its records n water pollution.

The public will be satisfied they are not taking a risk whenever they take a gulp of water nly after the city's data on water quality has een scrutinised and interpreted.

We aim to do this ... even if it means using ords like methaemoglobinaemia again.



'New' politics: It's still divide and rule

Constitutional
Development Minister
Gerrit Viljoen exposed
the government's
assessment of its sparring
partners: the ANC, the
PAC, the SACP and
Cosatu. By

HE African National Con-

gress is disorganised and

riven with splits. The South

African Communist Party is in

the grip of a single "almighty

leader" whose policies change with

the wind. The Congress of South Af-

rican Trade Unions is jockeying furi-

ously for power within the ANC. And

the Pan Africanist Congress is adopt-

ing a more and more "reasonable atti-

This biting, if contestible, analysis

of the finer balances of power among

South Africa's pre-eminent forces of

resistance is not the work of a familiar

It is, more importantly, the consid-

ered assessment of the government's

most sophisticated spokesman on ne-

gotiations, Constitutional Develop-

Speaking at a special briefing in

Cape Town yesterday, Viljoen opened

a window on to the government's stra-

tegic assessments of the state of their

principal challengers. It was the most

comprehensive account yet of per-

ceived weaknesses President FW de

Klerk's negotiators might seek to ex-

ploit in the crucial coming months. It

also showed that the "new politics"

have done nothing to dull the govern-

ment's fine sense of the potency of

Perhaps the most unexpected ele-

"I noted with interest the PAC's

ment of the Viljoen thesis was his

conciliatory stance toward the PAC..

new economic document," said Vil-

joen. "Although its contents were lat-

er qualified by (PAC general secre-

tary) Benny Alexander, their attitude

toward negotiations and the continued

role of white people in South Africa is

seen to indicate ... that the orientation

towards negotiations on the part of the

PAC and related organisations is im-

"Provided that they commit them-

selves to the (negotiation) process,

the government would welcome their

participation ... I think it's better to

have these people with their heads in

the scrum rather than standing outside

One should be careful, added Vil-

joen in a further metaphorical foray,

"of not creating the impression of.

proving.

the scrum."

"divide and rule" tactics.

ment Minister Gerrit Viljoen.

academic commentator.

tude" toward a negotiated solution.

SHAUN JOHNSON

leaving some political passengers on the platform as the train is leaving. But they cannot expect the train to wait indefinitely".

The doctor's diagnosis of the ANC was less generous. There was no question that the ANC was "dragging its feet", he said, and that the delay in the publication of the joint Working Group's report was at the movement's

The ANC was making heavy weather of the transition from being a "struggle front" to a political party, and often "one ANC administrator doesn't know what another knows or

"They're having problems in retaining internal cohesion ... We note that they have different leadership groups that must learn to work together." He provided through a list these "groups", as perceived by the government: "There's the old Lusaka group; there's the younger Lusaka group; there are the older released leaders; there are the younger UDF/Cosatu leaders, who



Gerrit Viljoen ... The 'ANC's leaders cannot control all of their people

have the only real organisational structures in the country."

Levels of "political education" among the rank and file left much to be desired, he said: "Young members are conditioned by the rhetoric of struggle — they must be reoriented and the ANC is having trouble with this."

Nelson Mandela had admitted that the leadership "could not control all of their people", said Viljoen, and continuing talk of armed struggle merely exacerbated confusion and indiscipline.

"It cannot go on as at present —

also, the continuation of the rhetoric makes it very difficult to deal with rhetoric on the side of the right wing extremists."

Further to this litany of problems for the ANC, argued Viljoen, was the dramatic muscle-flexing occurring within the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

"While the ANC is (ostensibly) the decision maker, Cosatu's power is such that it determines the (political) temperature ... It is clear that Cosatu is seeking to secure maximum influence for itself (in the ANC axis)."

Viljoen reserved his most vituperative criticism for the SACP.

"The best way for the ANC to discredit itself," he said, was by "flaunting its relationship with the SACP when that party's philosophy has failed all over the world.

"Secondly, the SACP is still led by the people who made it one of the most pro-Stalinist of all parties, supporting the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan

"They're still the big guys in the SACP. It has surprised me, the ease with which Mr Slovo indicated after the events of Eastern Europe were clear, that things had been done in the wrong way ... It illustrates clearly that the SACP is not representative of the views of the people, but of an almighty leader, in this case Mr Slo-

Viljoen said he could not assess the SACP's support levels because "it and the ANC form an animal with two heads. To what extent the African leaders in the ANC are communist-related because of the ideology, I don't know — or whether it was just the hand that stretched out to them when they were drowning in the 1950s and early Sixties ..."

The government's criterion for negotiation remained that "all groups commit themselves to the process and must have proven support bases ... in both cases we must look carefully to see if the SACP qualifies."

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

MEMBERS of the Civil Rights
League share the widespread sense
of alarm at what seems an inexplicable reluctance by the government
to strengthen the Harms Commi-

So who

high time that we appreciated the contribution of Mandela to the creation of a new South Africa.—

EL Martin, Summerstrand, Port