

# 'An Albino Terrorist' speaks out

STAR-

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"In many respects I'm not an Afrikaner, at least, I do not think of myself as an Afrikaner and very many Afrikaners would probably agree with me on this point. I can not subscribe to or find a common ground for the generally accepted totality of what an Afrikaner is supposed to be. I cannot subscribe to either the religious or political generalities of Afrikanerdom.

I live in Paris. I'm a French citizen. I had to apply for a visa to return to South Africa. But I think of myself as a world citizen because I've been obliged to become one. That's the way it is without being a matter of choice.

To return to South Africa and to find myself seen as an Afrikaner only, was very strange, but it has a benefit: because of my history and the kind of people I'm in contact with, there are some Afrikaners who will realise that I am in a position to be a form of bridge".



Breyten Breytenbach talks to Garalt MacLiam

Something which one senses very strongly when you come back to this country is that there's a tremendous feeling of inner tenseness, of inner nervousness among people.

If those who run this country try to pretend that we are not living in a police State or a totalitarian State, they only have to listen to people in the streets or at parties or wherever they meet them. You can feel a shying away from hard political issues because there is the sense that Big Brother is watching, you know, or there is the fear that he may eventually be watching and

you don't know what the hell he is going to do if he calls you in.

We whites have developed, the blacks, too, to a lesser extent, a kind of relaxed exterior. We move easily, but I think we look for the loopholes all the time; you know, the braai, the rugby and all the rest of it, in order to work off the tenseness, as it were, or to pretend that it doesn't exist, but in returning to South Africa, I am aware, all the time, that underneath, there's a terrific nervousness.

As a contradiction to that, what I feel is also happening now, and I find an encouragement in it, is the building pressure in the country for the process of liberation, there's no doubt about that, and it's coming from grass roots level.

Talking about the process of liberation, I think it's important to underline that South Africa is contributing not simply the bad things to the world, it's not just the skunk of the world. South Africa, which I tend to think of as a whole, however dichotomous it may be, and then to see its differences in the various communities, cultures or linguistic groups, is contributing and adding to the notion of liberated concepts and consequently is contributing, by the very fact of what is happening here, to the advancement of the individual's right to liberty in all parts of the world.

I also think the cultural component of what's happening during this process of transformation is an extremely important one. What began as black consciousness could now be aptly described as South African consciousness and it includes the potential South African cultural identity. This is another liberation.

Not being aware of the day to



Breyten Breytenbach's love for the country of his birth is an undeniable factor in his life.

day life and strictures in the townships is a confusing factor for whites. I tried to work it out for myself the other day in Grahamstown where you can sit in one part of the town, the white town, and you can actually see down the valley and up the next

hill to where the black town is.

Last Saturday morning I heard that the police and the army were all over the black township again. They had prohibited all public meetings. There was going to be a funeral and it

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couldn't take place, it had to be postponed and they were in, as one old lady put it, with their feet. That means they were without the Casspirs because apparently people had been digging trenches to obstruct the vehicles, so they were patrolling on foot. I was thinking that on the white side, you could actually see this, but the white side wasn't affected at all and I thought: in some ways, we're living in a country of which parts are invisible.

So many of the major issues have been invisible over the years. Now they are slightly, slowly surfacing and I think it creates a sense of unease and uncomfortable awareness that there is something happening in the country that we don't quite know about.

I've often thought about this. You could bring people from abroad and take them into this country and they would spend three weeks here and go away saying: what the hell are you talking about? I didn't see any unrest. I didn't see any shooting, any fighting, anything like that. This must be all communist propaganda.

If the reality of this country has been obliterated, has been made invisible, the media is partly to blame. I was thinking about that the other day. All the front page news about the Queen's birthday. I am, of course, talking here about the media one would have access to as a white South African.

The media here largely reflects the concerns, the mores, the foibles, the dreams, the illusions of the white population, but when you think of it, it certainly ought to be of far greater importance that two, three or four people were actually killed, or that somebody was burned to death, again, or that there's a political trial somewhere. These are hypothetical instances, but they have their reality in life. What about the reality of the vast majority, the blacks? How is that reflected?

It isn't only something which occurs in South Africa. It's true that when boredom sets in, anywhere, when one is gorged with information of horrors and just having had enough, you consequently become dulled to it.

When you see township violence on your television screen, overseas, that is, day after day, and nothing happens, the situation doesn't crack, there's no apparent solution, no catharsis, no catalyst, as it were, you do eventually become dulled to it.

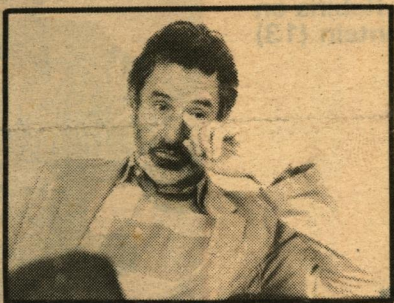
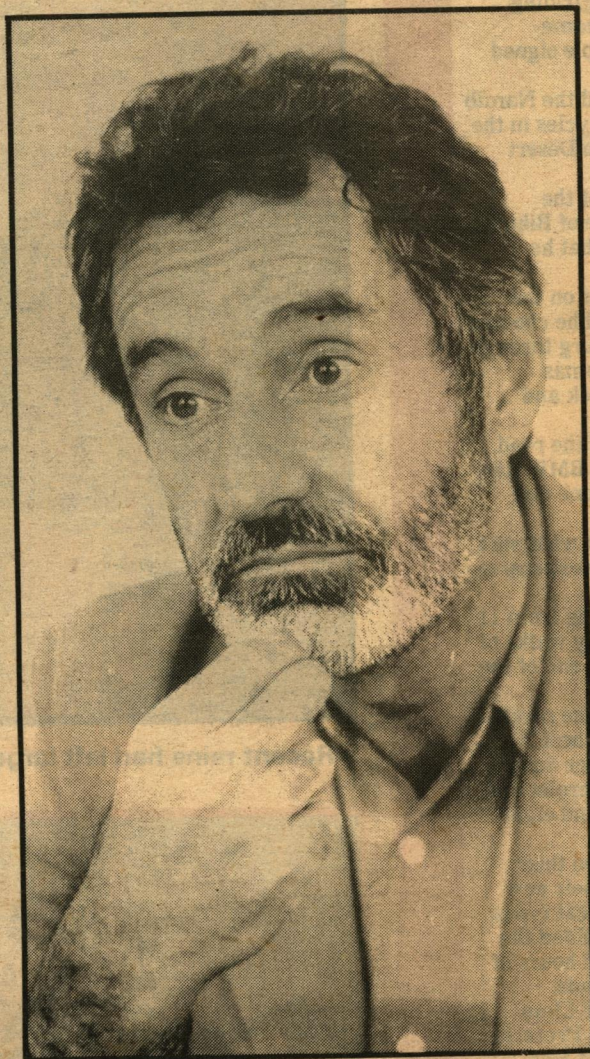
I remember during the Vietnam years when this happened for me. The media tended to glitz it over, as it were. The format of information has become so blurred, particularly in television and more particularly in America. There, I was struck with a sense of shock on how you slide over from advertisements into news broadcasts without being aware of the change. Ultimately it seems all the same reality.

Being exposed to the knowledge of violence without having the means to do anything about it, ultimately has a deadening effect on the person watching it; a demobilising effect.

In the long run, it is this that's so dangerous. I compare it to a prison situation, where you are exposed to what I would call the knowledge of evil; not necessarily what is being done to you, because you shy away from knowing what's happening to you, but you see what is being done to others: the beatings, the violence which is there, the deprivation of food, the humiliation. People letting themselves go; the bestiality of it, in fact. You are forced to be in a situation over which you have no vestige of control, you can not do anything about it, you are forced to be in a situation where you are impotent. So you have to repress something inside yourself; the normal human impulse is to say: F--- that! Stop it! You can't do that to people! It's not human!

This brings me back to the point, which is the South African situation: I'm afraid what we've seen happening in this country, already, is that in the white community there's a kind of deep psychological crisis, a catatonic state in which people are shying away from the knowledge of what is really happening; a continuing effort to find euphemisms, a

# 'Whites will have as much reason to revolt against apartheid'



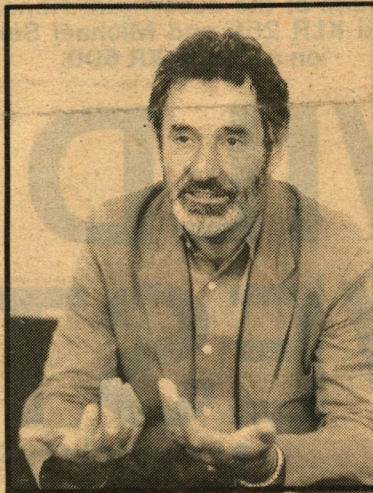
make-believe world, a hoping that things will still come right; or pretending that it must be the communists trying to do this, it must be the outside world, it must be because of East/West conflict or it must be something else.

It is, again, a shying away from real knowledge because people have been deprived of the means of dealing with a crisis of political conscience. I think there is no group in this country who is as profoundly depoliticised as the white population. We think we were involved in politics, but we weren't. We think that we had a choice, in the years of apartheid, whether we would become involved or not, but we never had that choice, the decisions were being made for us.

Some of us hated those decisions. We knew we hated them and so we found outlets; we found cultural outlets, social outlets. We became more and more refined in other ways. I think this knowing and at the same time not wanting to know has left very very deep scars.

When this happens to human beings, ultimately they are conditioned for self-destruction. You are being conditioned for self-destruction so you become a fatalist. You lose the normal, everyday, simple, human means of logically examining and dealing with this type of situation.

Because you can not do so, you are obliged not to do so and it is this that leaves those very deep



psychological scars, I mentioned.

I think there is a kind of schizophrenia presently rampant in the white community, which is one of the reasons that I decided to come to South Africa now. I think there is now the possibility of saying something at the moment which can still, perhaps, count. I think there is, not necessarily a willingness to listen, but a great sense of unease among many whites. Among many of the Afrikaners, particularly, there is a sense of aimlessness.

Apartheid, they now know is crumbling forever. That whole bedrock that whole carapace that has been thought out for us is disappearing and one now has to start thinking for one's self.

There has been a careful cultivation of apoliticism, taking politics away from the whites, that's really what has happened in this country, and they no longer know where to turn. So, within the state of general malaise, I think the time is ripe to bring across a certain number of uncomfortable reflections: nothing new, nothing at all that hasn't been said before, but saying it at this moment, saying it to them in Afrikaans, in their own



language, having them sit still to hear what must be said, is the proper thing. They are not yet prepared to take it in English, or hear it spoken to them by Tutu, but the words must be spoken.

So, if there's something I can do from within and for their own good, I feel that coming at this moment and talking to them and even accepting the risks of doing it within the precincts of their own temple, the State Theatre, it will have been worth it.

My coming has provoked debate and criticism, but it may be of some little help in achieving what I am trying to achieve here, what needs to be achieved, what has to happen. Certainly I couldn't do so just by speaking to the so-called coloured people or the blacks.

I think all of us have to find out what we can do about our society within our limitations. For instance, and this is something I keep on saying to people abroad, to people of various professions: doctors, lawyers, trade unionists, journalists and others. I say: make contact with those people doing the same work as you in South Africa and see how you can exchange information. After all, one shares far more with people doing the same work. This has validity across all barriers; be they so-called racial barriers or ethnic barriers or, for that matter, national frontiers. The inter-changing of ideas can have much greater

impact than simply talking with people of the same linguistic or cultural backgrounds who are doing different jobs.

I think it should not be underestimated what can be done by an individual, if it is done correctly and honestly and clearly and with a kind of ethic awareness. It doesn't matter if it is not within itself an aggressive action of protest, or whatever the case may be.

I move from a very simple premise, in fact three premises. There's no possible way in which what's presently happening in the country can continue. I mean, by that, a minority ruling a majority. It has nothing to do with historical determinism, or anything like that.

I think it is intrinsically such an uneven and unnatural situation and condition that attempts will continue to be made by the majority to put things right. You have a choice. Things can be put right or you can live in a state of increasing unrest, disillusionment and decay until the country eventually goes to a Lebanonisation; even to something similar to the Cambodian situation.

My second premise is that a coming to power of the majority is, in the long run, inevitable. The whites in this country, I'm talking about the bulk of them now, are here to stay; obviously there's going to be a hive off, we've already seen that, but the majority will stay.

The whites here, as far I'm concerned, are Africans, there's no doubt about that. They may be particularly hard to digest, hard to fit in with the rest of the continent, however you want to put it, but they are Africans. The whole of Africa accepts this.

I've met and had long discussion with President Diouf, who is now the chairman of the OAU, the President of Senegal. I can assure you that in African quarters those who are most resolutely against apartheid, against this regime, never for one moment question the permanence of the South African whites on the continent of Africa. In other words, a solution has to be found that is going to include or accommodate, to some extent, the whites also.

My third premise is that apartheid, to give it its generic name, which hides so many other things, has affected the whites as badly as it has affected the blacks.

Very often for blacks it has meant death; having to go to prison for not having a pass in order; not being allowed to live in certain areas; having an inferior education; and it has meant malnutrition and even starvation.

For the whites it has meant the death of the soul: the maiming of the moral awareness of the human being. I think once we whites realise that, we will have as much cause to revolt against apartheid as the blacks have.

It is not a case of saying *mea culpa, mea culpa*, we're just a lot of murderous bastards who have kept you guys out for too long, now let us bow our heads in shame and pray that the black man will be cleverer than we have been. That, of course, is bull---!

We must find ways, as white Africans, knowing that we are going to be here permanently, of standing up and rejecting those who rule us.

How can this be done? I have no doubt that there are means by which whites, in an organised way, within their professions, within their cultural groupings, within political groupings, can become effectively involved in the transformation process, but to do this they will have to realise that the necessary change is not going to be brought about by the government.



**T**he day life begins at 40 and for me it did. The day I had my 40th birthday, I was in London, and I had a call from the Tricycle Theatre and they wanted me to do my show. That changed my life completely. It's extraordinary being back to the same title, "Adapt or Dye", although it is Beyond the Rubicon. When I started it in 1981, it came out of a tremendous frustration and a feeling of total helplessness that forced me to do it. I was originally going to go into politics and stand against P. W. Botha in the election. Now it's the show that's become my bread and butter.

Maybe it's because I turned 40 and the country fell to pieces and all one's values and all the standards went up the creek and what was important last year is ludicrous now. I'm back to where I was in 1981. I'm back to that same incredible frustration. I'm not doing the show to fill a theatre. I'm doing it for my own therapy: 14 hours of white South Africa a day is really too much. I need to get on that stage to do my gym.

The evolution of the sketches is amazing. When I first did PW (pronounced PV throughout), it was in Afrikaans and the character's trade mark was: "South Africa is... South Africa is... South Africa is..." Now it's in English and he says: "South Africa won't... South Africa won't" and so on.

I've retained PW and Koornhof and the coloured soldier because each of those is relevant. They don't change.

The coloured soldier used to say in the

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old show, at the end of his speech: "I think of my old granny sitting by candlelight and crying for her lost life. I can't help but hate, just a little." Now he ends by saying: "I can't help but also hate, each time a little more."

And, of course, there's Evita Bezuidenhout. Having to force her back into the chorus was hell. She wouldn't do it. Madame is Joan Collins of Boerewors Broadway. She won't do it. The only way I could contain her is to take her hair off on stage.

When I go on tour shortly, I'm giving her a whole new attitude. She'll be set in the future. She'll become the white equivalent of what Winnie Mandela is now. And, of course, Oom Hasie is on trial for treason. This time we'll have PW in Polismoor. Mandela is the President. Tambo is Minister of Law and Order.

That's where I've got to take the material now. You can't really call it sci-



Pieter-Dirk Uys talks to Garalt MacLiam

# He's on his STAR now

26 April 1986



ence fiction, because there is no science fiction here. It's all happening now. It's taking it into a different era like a positive of a negative of a positive, if you know what I mean.

Everything is more simplified. I'm totally on my own. When I go from one venue to another, I drive my own car. I set my own stage. I don't even have a stage manager, just somebody to do the lights and that's it. I think I've shed a

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helluva lot of baggage in the past six months and learnt some extraordinary lessons.

What's got to be remembered when I'm on stage is that I'm not talking politics. It's theatre. If I do Allan Boesak or Bishop Tutu, I'm entertaining. I'm in a theatre not in a church. I don't do it the way they do it in real life.

In 1981, "Adapt or Dye" was a first. People hadn't done that sort of thing before. There was a lot of cottonwool, a lot of icing sugar. There had to be. It's taken me five years to get to the point where

I'm able to stand on the stage with a beer belly hanging out and say: "I'm a white South African and I'm proud of apartheid, so — you all". Even a year ago, I wouldn't have dared to say that sort of thing. I have tremendously hard things to say about my own involvement in being a white South African and being an Afrikaner. But the place for me to say it, to editorialise, is not on stage. Strangely enough, in England the material is seen as being very cruel.

Reading your review of "Adapt or Dye" was an extraordinary experience for me. I felt such a lot. I felt it was a thesis. It was a cry from the heart, your heart, absolutely, and it was wonderful because that's what

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my show's about. It must bring out that reaction from the people I was very moved by it.

It told of something we all feel: an incredible helplessness, concern for what is happening. The feeling of wanting to run out on Table Mountain with a spray can and paint the words: "Kill Apartheid NOW". That's what I also feel and it's what I sense in the audience when they laugh. It's not a case of we're having a nice time during the

show. Nobody is having a nice time. The laughter is like: Yes! yes! yes! Let us for God's sake do something.

I was born and brought up in the Dutch Reformed Church, although my beliefs don't necessarily fit into any envelope, but the fact that the DRC has been the basis of our so-called civilisation and which says: love your neighbour but apartheid is the rock on which we've built Afrikanerdom, is a crime which in turn is totally unforgivable. It's a total mockery of everything we should believe in. It mocks change, it mocks reform, and it's all based on lies, anyway.

The last year has changed my whole attitude about theatre. Now it is not about the differences between black theatre and white theatre, English theatre and Afrikaans theatre. That's all gone. There is no Afrikaans theatre for me. There is no Afrikaans culture for me. Apartheid has killed Afrikaans culture, it's not the possibility of black majority rule that has killed it. We've killed it ourselves. It's gone; g-o-n-e, gone, and that's it. We must put up a little flower on the grave every now and then.

Afrikaans has become synonymous with tyranny. The irony of it, God doesn't sleep, hey? But it's up to us to revive it. It's a wonderful language, not a language to say: up you, kaffir! I think we should make the Afrikaner's culture strong enough to stand on its own feet, but not by using the gun and sjambok and killing children.

I loved Afrikaners, I loved my own na-

*"If we need laws to make culture survive then there is no culture to protect. I think it should be strong enough to survive on its own feet."*

tion for so long, they were such lovely people. And now the less I think about them, myself and the language, the better. I don't even find I can write in Afrikaans anymore. I find that I simply write obscenities in Afrikaans, but not about love or caring or healing.

We have created the bed or the grave for our language and our culture and it is up to us to change and make it flower and survive. If we need laws to make culture survive then there is no culture to protect. I think it should be strong enough to survive on its own feet.

When I was in London I saw myself on telly. I saw Bishop Tutu on telly, I saw PW on telly, I saw a number of other South Africans on the box: we all came across as losers, all of us whining. I thought: what's happened to winning? The difference between winning and losing is a tiny, tiny piece. Then suddenly you see winners. Marion Crawford of Orchards who went to

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## PERSONALITY

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jail because she refused to pay the pass fine. Wendy Orr, who was treated as a pariah when she stood up for human rights, the students from Stellenbosch, Winnie Mandela. Winnie Mandela is playing Joan of Arc. These are the people who are becoming our winners. Go for it! I say. I want to be a winner. We've got to sort it out. People must talk about what's on their mind and express their misgivings about injustice. People must stop saying, Ja Baas, all the time. We must say no. We must say no firmly. As we are, we deserve what we get because we voted these people into power. We took no interest in their backgrounds, we didn't do our homework for nearly 40 years.

Talking about Bishop Tutu: I felt from seeing him on television in Britain that I had got to know him. The man has got a tremendous compassion, a tremendous sense of humour and a boundless anger and also he's a performer, he plays to the gallery and a hatchet job has been done on him. He's been turned into the anti-Christ. It's rubbish!

When people march to Pollsmoor for Mandela why the hell is it only a black group of people? Why is it not a South African group? We are perpetuating the situation: a black revolution and a white laager. We must get up there and stop being afraid. Why are we afraid? It's because we're losing. We must stop losing now. The blacks are not afraid because they're winning.

We're not alone in a crazy world. A friend of mine from London was in Beirut recently during one of the big blow-ups when the fighting was in full swing, and buildings were being disintegrated, and the sun was shining over the smoke, giving it a marvellous depth of marvellous colour in what was once the most beautiful city in

# It's my last Uys

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the Middle East. And there was the terrible noise of war, this was at about 6.30 pm, and suddenly it stopped. No more shooting. And all he heard was the general buzz of the "Dynasty" sound track. They'd stopped the war to tune in to "Dynasty". They'd stopped the bloody thing to go and look at Alexis Carrington. It's extraordinary!

As I see our place in the scheme of things, the National Party is now to the Left and has taken over the role of the PFP. There is no more white, Left wing. There's only white and Left in party politics and I try and point to these things and to the pain we all suffer in my show.

I feel, being a writer and a satirist, even though I hate that word, that I must try and get both sides of an issue. To show that every thorn has a rose once a year. The difference between being anti-apartheid and anti-South African is A and Z. We have been brainwashed by this government into believing that apartheid and South Africa go together. I met countless people in London and nobody was anti-South African. Anti-apartheid, yes, and anti-the present town council that calls itself a government.

But as long as you and I and everybody live under these laws, protected by these

laws, and even though we bitch, we are all put under the same umbrella; from Eugene Terre-Blanche and Jaap Marais and Ari Paulus to Helen Suzman, we are all under the same thing.

I was at a party with many of the most famous names in showbusiness a while ago. I looked around me at all these pale, talented people, lovely people, nervous people, frightened people; half of whom are aware that by just reading the news on the SABC, they are collaborating with government propaganda.

I suddenly thought: they are maybe the most famous faces in the country, but actually in the long run the most irrelevant people in the country because who gives a damn about what we do any more?

The day I'm declared redundant, as a so called satirist, is the day that I will be very happy. At the moment, I think we are living under a very clever dictatorship, 40 years of government does not make

*"At the moment, I think we are living under a very clever dictatorship, 40 years of government does not make them stupider."*

them stupider, and whatever we are told is irrelevant because all the decisions are made behind our backs. The result is that we have three generations of kids who are looking at each other across the barrel of a gun, because education has not trained whites to accept change or trained blacks

to look forward to it.

The black theatre that we are presently nurturing is all based on the horror that we have created in the past. It is becoming a culture based on a nightmare. In addition to that we do nothing about theatre for youth, nor for creating any new audience for the present. The arts councils have gone into the real estate business: putting up huge buildings and taking over the renovation of houses. We're not in the business of theatre.

I'm so jealous of the artists overseas; so jealous I could cry. These people have a life to fill in their work. Where can I look to in my life? There are no standards here, we're all running around like bloody fools. I've got two new plays, but I don't want to go to the arts councils. I don't want to work for the Government, I don't trust them. I don't want to go to the SABC, P. W. Botha's propaganda department.

I look forward to the freedom of having a choice of information. I want to read the New York Times, I want to read Nelson Mandela's autobiography, I want to have opinions that can change every two days; not to have this cross (of apartheid) that is now becoming like a tightrope that is going around one's throat.

I'm sorry. It's out. It's utter nonsense now. I'm taking my konsert to the Nico Malan and I'm going to play while Parliament is in session. I want my script writers to improve my material. Then I will tour overseas.

What worries me in my job is that I look over my shoulder and there's nobody there. I want to see some 21-year-old satirist who's so damn good I want to kill him. There's got to be somebody cutting their teeth and challenging me, giving me the shock of my life. It's very sad.



SUNDAY TRIBUNE - 20/4/86

### **Praise for that editorial**

I MUST congratulate you on the spirit of your editorial, Trust is the key to success.

The South African political scene is becoming more complex, making group and party affiliations difficult and at times dangerous.

This appears to be particularly so in black politics, the intricacies of which I do not claim to understand.

One fact has been patently obvious to me, however: millions of underprivileged people are suffering under the yoke of apartheid. For more than 30 years I have been faced daily with the ghastly consequences of deprivation for the life and health of the people of South Africa.

It is a source of great dismay and pain to witness the dissipation of energy and resources by the opponents of apartheid in an internecine feud. Apartheid will continue to exercise its toll while the country burns and its sons and daughters have to starve — physically and intellectually.

Is it too naive to expect the opponents of apartheid to find sufficient common ground from which to come to grips with this basic evil?

One prerequisite will have to be met for this dream to become a reality: trust. However, before I can trust my fellow man I want him to state categorically and unequivocally that his prime objective coincides with mine and that he will not stab me in the back — neither physically nor metaphorically.

Walter Loening

Professor: Maternal and Child Health

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