

SOCIAL-DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE TO STAND FOR ELECTION

Those South Africans concerned with real issues, will, in the words of the Financial Mail (February 8 1974), "be forgiven for greeting John Vorster's election announcement with a big yawn....It will not make one iota difference to the country's pressing problemsThere is no boldness, no imagination and no constructive initiative".

A group of prominent South Africans, who share this viewpoint, this week announced that they were going to nominate COSMAS DESMOND as a social-democrat candidate in the forthcoming general election. Their general motivations and principles are contained in the following statement:

The present proliferation of political parties is merely a multiplication of mediocrity. Five parties are expected to contest the forthcoming general election, but the policy of each of them lacks any imagination, dynamism or challenge. None of them has a policy which even attempts to get to the roots of the problems and certainly none of the opposition parties offers a real alternative to the present system; they simply propose various modifications to the status quo. They are all based, in varying degrees, on authoritarianism and elitism; it makes little difference whether the criterion for membership of this elite is race or wealth or social status.

Political debate in the so-called democratic societies of the West has long become sterile. Yet in South Africa there is an unquestioning acceptance of Western norms and values. And this despite the evidence of, for example, the Vietnam War, Watergate, the economic chaos in England etc. In those "democracies" all power is concentrated in the hands of a few who, as such events show, may be totally incapable of exercising it responsibly. Such systems may have lead to increased material prosperity, but they have done so at the expense of the quality of life.

We therefore see the need for challenging these accepted norms and proposing a real alternative. If we have to have a label, probably the most accurate would be "Social Democrat". But we do not have a pre-conceived ideology into which all practical policies must fit. "Democracy" here means the effective participation

of all the people in decision-making and in the administration of their affairs. We cannot, therefore, at this stage lay a complete programme to cover all eventualities, since Social Democracy of its very nature demands that this is done in consultation with the people; though there are obvious guidelines, for example, no exploitation whether on racial or economic grounds, equality before the law, a just distribution of wealth etc.

One of the reasons for the sterility of modern political debate is that it lacks any real ethical or moral basis. It is concerned with power not with people. We do not claim that only Christians can introduce moral considerations into the political arena, but we do claim that Christian norms can only be observed in some form of Social Democratic structure, though attaching of a Christian label is not important.

We have not been able to consult with COSMAS DESMOND, but it is clear from his background and past actions, which were based on his Christian commitment, that he is a person who would represent such values as justice, freedom, equality, concern for people, who would be willing to challenge the presently accepted values and who would be prepared to work for a real alternative society.

South Africa shares in the general stagnancy of the West, but political debate is further stifled here because most of the real opposition is gagged by banning orders or imprisonment. By getting COSMAS DESMOND in Parliament we would provide a platform for at least some of those suppressed ideas.

The oppression of Blacks in this country is an obvious fact and some of the opposition parties are concerned about relieving this on a material level. We are concerned about the quality of life for both Blacks and Whites. Blacks are now giving voice to their own oppression but too many Whites are not even aware that they too are oppressed and unfree. A person who is experiencing a more extreme form of this, but being banned and house-arrested seems to us to be the best person to give voice to this.

THE CANDIDATE:

Cosmas Desmond (38) is a South African citizen. A former Franciscan

... he first came to public attention ...

a staff member of the Christian Institute he published "The Discarded People", an in-depth study and searing indictment of the government's resettlement programmes for rural Africans. His book has been suppressed in South Africa and has also been published in Britain and in Holland.

In 1971 Mr Desmond was banned and house-arrested under the Suppression of Communism Act.

Mr Desmond left the priesthood in 1972, but remained an active Catholic. He is now married and lives in Parkhurst, Johannesburg.

SOME UNIQUE FEATURES OF HIS CANDIDATURE:

No banned person has ever stood for election to Parliament in South Africa. We have taken legal advice and it appears there is nothing in law to prevent Mr Desmond from being nominated for election, although obviously his campaign will be subject to very severe and abnormal limitations. For example he will not be able to address any public meetings, nor to publish a manifesto or any other election document nor may he be quoted in the press, nor may he consult with his supporters, not even one at a time. At the very least his campaign should serve to highlight the whole iniquitous system of arbitrary bannings.

THE CHOICE OF A CONSTITUENCY:

Since he is confined by his banning order to the Johannesburg magisterial district, the constituency to be contested will have to fall within that area. The final choice has not yet been made, but a number of constituencies are being considered. The final choice will not be influenced by a United Party/Progressive Party contest, since none of the parties has a policy which even attempts to get to the roots of the South African problems, but merely propose various modifications to the status quo.

Thought is also being given to the possibility of a running mate for Mr Desmond to contest the Provincial Council election. Such a candidate would be able to perform some of the electioneering functions denied to Mr Desmond, such as addressing public meetings, and this would hopefully strengthen Mr Desmond's campaign. Various names are being considered in this connection.

THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRAT PLATFORM:

The general motivations and principles have been outlined in our statement.

It is easy enough to indicate those things to which we are opposed. For example:

- * White monopolisation of political and economic power
- * Discrimination in unequal expenditure on education
- * Unequal economic opportunities
- * Trend towards totalitarianism: banning, jailing, flogging, informers, excessive expenditure on defence, etc etc
- * Refusal to recognise African trade unions
- * Enforced migratory labour, influx control and resettlement schemes
- * The down-grading and exploitation of women in our society
- * Pollution and congestion - the inevitable results of present attitudes to economic growth
- * Censorship and thought control
- * **Lopsided** emphasis in medical research and facilities

It is never so easy to state positive beliefs, but the following are some of the cardinal features of our evolving concept of social democracy:

- * It is democratic: i.e. all people must have the right to participate in decisions that affect their destinies
- * It is socialist: i.e. the redistribution of power, land and resources amongst all the peoples of the land.

Some specifics:

- * Decentralisation and devolution of political powers
- * Socialisation of the nation's resources and means of production
- * Free and compulsory education determined by the people themselves
- * Restoration of the Rule of Law and the entrenchment of the personal freedoms and rights of the individual
- * Promotion of trade unionism for all workers
- * National health and welfare scheme
- * Abolition of censorship and other forms of manipulation and control
- * Effective and creative relationships with the outside world, in particular with the rest of Africa

- * Recognition of religious autonomy and the non-interference of religious beliefs
- * Cheap, efficient and adequate transport for the bulk of the population

FINANCE:

This election campaign can serve as a rallying point for those who share our basic concerns and principles. An immense amount of money is wasted in South Africa over election campaigns, money which should be used more creatively and productively. In effect, money is wasted on irrelevant white politicking whilst there is malnutrition and poverty for the majority.

We shall conduct our campaign as cheaply and as unostentatiously as possible and will use voluntary help. At the same time we do have some financial requirements and would welcome donations and offers of help. These can be sent to the Social-Democrat Committee, PO Box 31134, Braamfontein, Transvaal, 2017.

Issued by the Ad Hoc Social Democrat Committee

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