

5 October 1979

SURVIVAL OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE - OCTOBER 5 AND 6
1820 SETTLERS NATIONAL MONUMENT

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

IT IS MY PRIVILEGE AND PLEASANT TASK TO WELCOME YOU TO THIS SURVIVAL OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE. I DO SO IN A DUAL CAPACITY, NOT ONLY AS VICE-CHANCELLOR OF RHODES UNIVERSITY, WHOSE DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM, THE ONLY SUCH DEPARTMENT AT AN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA, ORGANISED THE CONFERENCE, BUT ALSO AS A COUNCIL MEMBER OF THE FOUNDATION WHOSE TASK IT IS TO HAVE CHARGE OF THE AFFAIRS OF THIS MONUMENT TO OUR 1820 FOREBEARS. IT IS FITTING INDEED THAT SUCH A CONFERENCE SHOULD BE HELD IN THIS VENUE, DEDICATED AS IT IS AS A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THOSE WHO, TO USE THE WORDS OF

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MY DISTINGUISHED FELLOW COUNCIL MEMBER, PROFESSOR GUY BUTLER, BROUGHT WITH THEM "THE HABITS OF FREE MEN" TO THEIR NEW ENVIRONMENT. IN GRAHAMSTOWN, TOO, IN THOSE EARLIER LUSTY DAYS OF THE 19TH CENTURY, THERE OCCURRED SOME NOTABLE BATTLES IN THE DEFENCE OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY, BATTLES WHICH ALAS ARE NEVER WON ONCE IN THEIR ENTIRETY, BUT WHICH REQUIRE TO BE FOUGHT AFRESH FROM TIME TO TIME.

IN WELCOMING YOU ALL, SPEAKERS AND OTHER PARTICIPANTS ALIKE, I SHOULD LIKE TO PAY A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO THOSE WHO HAVE COME A LONG DISTANCE, AND ALSO TO THOSE DISTINGUISHED EDITORS,

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ACADEMICS AND LAWYERS WHO HAVE ACCEPTED THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PROVIDING US WITH THE SET-PIECE ADDRESSES. AS I CHECKED THE LIST OF SPEAKERS AND TOPICS I WAS IMMEDIATELY STRUCK WITH THE AUTHORITY THESE SPEAKERS WILL BE ABLE TO BRING TO BEAR ON THEIR CHOSEN THEMES. IT IS WITH GREAT TREPIDATION THEREFORE THAT I VENTURE ONE OR TWO THOUGHTS BEFORE PERFORMING MY OFFICIAL ROLE OF DECLARING THE CONFERENCE OPEN.

IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THE MAIN QUESTION WE SHALL BE ASKING OURSELVES DURING THESE NEXT TWO DAYS IS NOT "WILL THE PRESS SURVIVE?" BUT RATHER "WHAT KIND OF PRESS WILL SURVIVE?" AFTER ALL, THERE IS A PRESS OF SOME SORT IN VIRTUALLY EVERY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD, NO MATTER WHAT ITS ECONOMIC, POLITICAL OR SOCIAL

SYSTEM. THE ANSWER TO THE FIRST QUESTION IS THEREFORE A SELF-EVIDENT "YES", BUT BEFORE WE CAN COME TO GRIPS WITH THE SECOND WE HAVE TO CONSIDER A FAR MORE DIFFICULT QUESTION "WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE PRESS?" THE ANSWERS ARE MANY, AND NOT ALL WILL AGREE ON THE EMPHASIS TO BE GIVEN TO EACH FACTOR. AMONG POSSIBLE ANSWERS ARE "TO INFORM THE CITIZENRY", "TO MAKE PROFITS FOR THE OWNERS", "TO ADVERTISE THE WARES OF THE FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM", "TO HELP EDUCATE AND UPLIFT THE MASSES", OR PERHAPS LESS PRETENTIOUSLY "TO ENTERTAIN AND TITILLATE ITS READERS". MORE CONTROVERSIALLY SOME OF THE ANSWERS MIGHT BE "TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY", "TO SERVE THE VOLK" OR

"TO PROMOTE THE FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM". THESE LATTER MOTIVES ARE MORE CONTROVERSIAL BECAUSE THEY LEAD TO THE TEMPTATION TO SUPPRESS OR DOWNPLAY EMBARRASSING REPORTS THAT PUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY, THE VOLK OR THE FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM IN A BAD LIGHT.

WHATEVER OUR INDIVIDUAL ANSWERS ARE TO THE QUESTION "WHAT IS THE QUINTESSENTIAL FUNCTION OF THE PRESS?", IT IS IMPORTANT THAT EACH ONE OF US ANALYSES THEM CAREFULLY, FOR IN THESE PERILOUS TIMES THE KIND OF PRESS WE WANT IS NOT GOING TO SURVIVE IF IT IS CARRYING EXCESS BAGGAGE. MANY OF YOU WILL HAVE READ THE ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST SUCCESSFUL TRANSATLANTIC BALLOON CROSSING. IN THE LATTER STAGES OF THAT EPIC JOURNEY,

EVERYTHING THAT WAS NOT VITAL TO THE SURVIVAL OF THE PASSENGERS AND TO THEIR RECORDING OF THE FEAT HAD TO BE JETTISONED OVERBOARD. THOSE WHO ARE NOT PREPARED FOR THAT KIND OF SACRIFICE IN TIMES OF EMERGENCY ARE UNLIKELY TO SURVIVE. MANY OF CORTES' SOLDIERS, FOR EXAMPLE, DROWNED IN THE SHALLOW LAKE SURROUNDING MEXICO CITY AS THEY RETREATED BEFORE MONTEZUMA'S HORDES, ON ACCOUNT OF THE GOLD PLUNDER THEY COULD NOT BRING THEMSELVES TO ABANDON. THERE IS A POIGNANT SHORT STORY OF, I THINK, DE MAUPASSANT IN WHICH A BORDELLO PROPRIETOR SURVIVES UNSCATHED THE BURNING OF HIS PREMISES ONLY TO PLUNGE BACK INTO THE INFERNO

AND RE-EMERGE TO EXPIRE IN THE STREET STILL CLUTCHING THE CHARRED REMAINS OF A HUGE WAD OF 1000 FRANC NOTES.

WITH THE ESSENTIAL FUNCTION OF THE PRESS AND THE MEANS TO ACHIEVE IT DEFINED, THE NEXT TWO IMPORTANT STEPS ARE TO IDENTIFY NATURAL DANGERS AND NATURAL ALLIES. TO MOST OF US THESE TASKS PRESENT NO GREAT INHERENT DIFFICULTIES. IN LESS COMPLICATED DAYS KINGS AND RULERS WERE WONT TO ASK, AS HENRY DID OF BECKET "WHO WILL FREE ME FROM THIS TURBULENT PRIEST?" AND DID NOT LACK FOR VOLUNTEERS. WITH THE DECLINE OF RELIGION THE QUESTION IS NOWADAYS MORE LIKELY TO TAKE THE FORM "WHO WILL FREE ME FROM THIS TURBULENT EDITOR?" THE FRIENDS OF THE PRESS TOO, ARE EASY TO IDENTIFY. THEY ARE THOSE WITH "THE

HABITS OF FREE MEN" WHO VALUE FREEDOMS OF SPEECH AND ASSEMBLY, THOSE TO WHOM THERE ARE FEW OR NO SACRED COWS AND THOSE WHO WISH TO SEE NO RESTRAINTS ON THE MARKETPLACE OF OPINION AND DISCUSSION, EXCEPT IN TIMES OF CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER TO THE SURVIVAL OF THEIR SOCIETY.

THE WISE MAN, (AND THE SAME APPLIES TO THE WISE INSTITUTION) WILL THEREFORE STRIP HIMSELF OF ALL IMPEDIMENTS TO THIS CARDINAL TASK OF SURVIVAL. INTERNALLY HE WILL ENDEAVOUR TO TURN IN A FIRST-CLASS PERFORMANCE OR DELIVER A FIRST-CLASS PRODUCT, FOR OF ONE THING WE CAN BE CERTAIN : THE SECOND-CLASS

OR THE MEDIOCRE CAN ONLY REMAIN VIABLE IN THE MOST FAVOURABLE OF ENVIRONMENTS. EXTERNALLY, HE WILL NOT GRATUITOUSLY PROVOKE A NATURAL ENEMY OR ALIENATE A NATURAL FRIEND. THIS DOES NOT IMPLY THAT HE WILL TRIM HIS SAILS TO EVERY GUST OF EXPEDIENCY, FOR WHEN PRINCIPLE IS AT STAKE HE WILL NOT FEAR TO MAKE HIS STAND, BUT IT DOES IMPLY THAT HE WILL NOT THROUGH LACK OF HEED OR CARE COMPOUND HIS ALREADY DANGEROUS CIRCUMSTANCES.

IN THE PRESENT COMPANY IT WOULD BE PRESUMPTUOUS INDEED OF ME TO VENTURE ANY CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS AS TO HOW THE PRESS MIGHT FACE UP TO ITS CURRENT CHALLENGES. IN THE FIRST PLACE OTHERS SPECIALLY SELECTED FOR THEIR COMPETENCE AND EXPERIENCE HAVE BEEN INVITED HERE TO DO SO. IN THE SECOND PLACE I AM NOT ABLE TO REMAIN WITH YOU FOR THE DISCUSSION PERIODS IN ORDER TO

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ASCERTAIN HOW SUCH SUGGESTIONS MIGHT FARE. I THEREFORE TURN TO MY OFFICIAL TASK. IT IS NOW MY PLEASANT DUTY TO WISH YOU EVERY SUCCESS IN THE COURSE OF YOUR DELIBERATIONS AND DISCUSSION, AND FORMALLY TO DECLARE THIS SURVIVAL OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE WELL AND TRULY OPENED.

D S HENDERSON

5/10/79