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PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF SOUTH AFRICA

14th February, 1990

The Right Revd. David Russell,  
Bishopsbourne,  
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Dear David,

Thank you for your letter and cutting from the Daily Dispatch.

I do hope that we have not begun to talk past each other - always a danger when relying on impressions gained from correspondence and press reports.

As far as the Dispatch report is concerned it is not, in parts, a very accurate reflection of what I said. At no stage did I seek to justify Mr. Knott's actions as implied "because people in town were quite within their rights to fire a worker ...." What I said was that evictions also take place daily in town, and that these are often equally unacceptable. At no stage did I use the term "smacks of hypocrisy" (although this is indeed often the case). Neither did I question the wisdom of "increased media coverage". I questioned rather the wisdom of uninformed media coverage.

The reporter did not, in my view, make sufficient effort to determine whether there was another side to the story and to verify facts. The crucial allegation that the workers had been told that they could stay was not checked. This allegation was not true and reflected directly on Mr. Knott's integrity.

If Mr. Knott proved unco-operative in giving information, the reporter should have questioned Mr. Adler, the seller. After all, the real responsibility, in my view lay with Mr. Adler. It was he who in a most irresponsible and inhumane way washed his hands of his staff, knowing full well that Mr. Knott was not going to employ them. He should not have sold until he had satisfied himself that the staff had been properly catered for.

What I did, on being asked for my comments, was first to investigate the allegations and then to declare that in my view, the full story had not been told. I stated that the portrayal of Mr. Knott as a heartless landlord who summarily evicted the people in contravention of an earlier undertaking that they could stay was, as far as I could determine, not a fair reflection of the situation, and that therefore I was not going to join in the

I went further to say that this kind of public castigation which was not based on true facts did nothing to solve the plight of the people and only served to polarize the community. I still hold that view.

With regard to my Party's policy on evictions, I must assume that you are implying that all evictions are wicked, and that we should not stop at condemning only 'summary' evictions. This involves us immediately in a semantic debate on the definition of the word 'eviction'. I would like clarity on this, and would value your opinion. Let us take the following hypothetical case:

1. A housewife in town hires a live-in servant. She moves into her flat, and very soon her lover moves in with her. Does the housewife have a right to object to this? (The privilege of having the right to determine who will live in or on your property.)
2. The couple are sociable and have rowdy late night parties with much coming and going and loud music which causes a nuisance. The housewife asks them to desist but they ignore her. The woman proves to be slovenly and workshy. The housewife decides that she no longer wants her services. Does she have a right to tell her that she must go? Is this an eviction? (Let us say the worker is a model servant but the housewife runs out of money and can no longer afford her. Is this an eviction?).
3. Whatever the reason the housewife wishes the worker to go, the worker defies her. She says she has nowhere to go. In the meantime two small children have made their appearance; they belong to an indigent sister. The housewife calls the welfare people, but they are told by the worker that this is her only home, she has nowhere else to go with her man and her extended family. An aged mother now also moves in. What does the housewife now do? How does she cause them to leave without being guilty of causing an eviction?

My attitude, and that of my Party, is yes, of course, there are times and circumstances when people must be caused to move. It is simplistic to refer to all such situations as evictions and condemn them all out of hand. But there are norms which determine how such evictions must take place, and this we accept.

With regard to specifics. We are convinced that at the heart of the problem of farm and domestic workers, is the fact that they do not operate under proper contracts which spell out their terms of employment. Both worker and employer must bind

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The Right Revd. David Russell

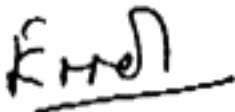
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themselves to certain reciprocal obligations as is the practice in employment codes the world over. This code of contract should include reference to retirement and security of tenure in retirement. (Under such a code the old woman you speak of would have had the protection she obviously deserved.)

I have spent much time and effort in working for reforms in this field, and would be happy to work with you or anyone else in trying to establish these reforms, but this is something that I believe we should discuss when we meet.

With very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



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ALBANY