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## EDITORIALS

### 1 "I WON'T BUTT IN" BOTHA

When Mr Hennie Smit, Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, in the debate on the proposed President's Council, made his outrageous statement that it was "unfeasible" to include blacks in the planning of a new constitution because they were "less developed" and had "slower thought processes" and compounded this insensitivity by making an explanatory statement as insulting as the original one had been . . . Mr P.W. Botha did nothing. He neither threw Mr Smit out of his Cabinet, which is what he should have done, nor did he even rebuke him. Instead he said he wouldn't butt in.

When the Lion's rugby tour was on, and South African sport was pretending as hard as it could that discrimination, in its field at least, was really a thing of the past, the Pretoria City Council showed how far progress had gone there by refusing to allow a match to take place on one of its grounds because black players would have been involved. The club with the black players wasn't some upstart team trying to embarrass the City Council. In its all-white days it had been using the ground for 75 years. Mr Botha said nothing.

When the Minister of Indian and Coloured Affairs, Mr Marais Steyn, addressing a white audience in the Jeppe constituency, gave his attention to the question of coloured and Indian people living in the area, and made the statement, quite as offensive as Mr Hennie Smit's, that he did not want friction and unrest because of mixing in white areas and he was particularly anxious about the reaction to it of returning national servicemen . . . Mr Botha said nothing.

Mr Botha, apart from being Prime Minister, is Minister of Defence. The armed forces he controls sometimes boast of the fact that they practise no discrimination. Perhaps they are right in some respects . . . although one sometimes wonders what kind of black person it is who is willing to risk his life not to be discriminated against "on the border", while he fights to ensure for himself the reception Mr Steyn is preparing for him when he gets home.

However, that is another question. The one we pose here is, why did Mr Botha refuse to become involved in any of these highly contentious incidents? What has happened to that knight in shining armour we were being told was our Prime Minister a year ago, the man who was going to challenge the mighty Nationalist Party machine and some of its most cherished shibboleths? Did he ever exist? If he did, he doesn't seem to anymore.

For if Mr Botha was not prepared to repudiate Mr Smit and the Pretoria City Council and Mr Steyn *at once*, which was the only point at which the damage to black feelings might have been contained, one can only conclude that he didn't think it necessary, or that he was too unsure of his position in the Party to risk it.

Either conclusion is depressing. The first would suggest that the Prime Minister is as insensitive to black feelings as the two Ministers we have quoted. The second, which his record in the first half of 1980 supports, is that for him too, as for all his predecessors, the short-term future of the Nationalist Party is more important than the long-term future of us all. □