

February 1992

XIMOKO PROGRESSIVE PARTY

Working Group 2

Subject: The Balance Between Central, Regional and Local Government

1. POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The stated position of the Ximoko Progressive Party is that:

- there will be representative government at the First-, Second- and Third-tier levels with clearly-defined and separate powers and functions;
- jurisdictions of Second- and Third-tier governments, both geographic and functional, must be such as to promote economic growth and development; and
- there will be maximum devolution of power to lower tiers of government in order to bring government closer to the people with the necessary checks and balances to preclude the centralisation of power. These checks and balances to be clearly circumscribed in the Constitution.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Expanding the basis of effective democracy.

2.1.1 The Ximoko Progressive Party is mindful of the observation attributed to Thomas Jefferson over a century and a half ago ".....it is not by the consolidation or concentration of powers, but by their distribution that good government is effected." It is the conviction of the XPP that the more sites of power that exist, the greater the potential checks and balances and the greater the potential for having as many citizens as possible living under the laws and regulations of their own choice. This would require a great deal more than merely the decentralisation of administrations which would at regional level merely execute the will of a centralised authority. Rather, it would require the establishment of truly representative and democratic government at the Second- and Third-tiers with defined and entrenched functions and corresponding autonomy, protected either through a federal constitution or entrenched within the constitution of a unitary state.

2.1.2. It is the firm belief of the XPP that by bringing government close to the people through the devolution of power, a mechanism will in effect

be put into place which will ensure a departure from the inertia which has for so long characterised the government of this country. Smaller local and regional governments are generally more flexible or responsive to change than are central governments which are detached and whose preoccupations tend to be more on the plane of grand ideology.

2.1.3. It is the conviction of the XPP that strong and autonomous local and regional governments provide the most compelling instrument for achieving a free society in South Africa.

2.2 Some Objections to Regional and Local Autonomy Frequently Encountered.

2.2.1. The distribution of wealth and income between "rich" and "poor" regions

The argument is frequently encountered that the greater the level of autonomy enjoyed by regions or states within a nation state, the greater the probability of locking poverty into poor states and wealth into rich states. This argument is generally advanced by those who propagate the redistribution of wealth as the primary instrument for social change. It can and has been persuasively argued that natural resources and wealth are not necessarily linked, as evident from case studies throughout the world. Far more important determinants of wealth are skills and knowledge, and most particularly benign economic and institutional arrangements which encourage and foster the best use of those skills. The concept of "rich" and "poor" regions therefore needs to be revisited and carefully considered. However, it would be naive not to accept that in the short- and medium- term transfers of resources from "rich" to "poor" regions would be necessary in pursuit of national objectives. We are convinced that mechanisms could be designed for such reallocation. Empirical research in the Third World would seem to indicate that normative considerations generally tend to be more important constraints on the

success of decentralisation or regionalisation than are material considerations.

2.2.2. Normative considerations

The perception that strong regionalism implies disunity and a return to some form of tribalism is erroneous and frequently the most important normative constraint on effective regionalism. The perception that nation-building can only be achieved through the centralisation of power has in many African countries in fact led to a gross

misuse of that power by central authorities and the development of a yawning gap between governmental- and popular perceptions of what the real needs and priorities of the society are. The ideological argument against strong regional government is more often that not an argument in favour of a centrally-planned economy which has been to the detriment of effective democracy and the economic development of millions in Africa.

3. THE BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN CENTRAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 A Federal or a Unitary State

Central to the debate on the balance of power between the First- and Second-tier levels of government is the question of federalism versus unitarism. The XPP is well aware of the inherent complexity of federal governmental forms but recognises the great advantages which they offer in protecting the autonomy of regions. However, it is also recognised that such systems are inherently rigid and that some flexibility may be desirable in order to allow the country to develop over time toward an optimal dispensation of functions between the various levels of government. The XPP recognises that the option of unitary regionalism, provided there is sufficient entrenched protection in the Constitution, can provide many of the advantages of federalism but without its disadvantages.

3.2 The Devolution of Powers to Regional and Local Governments

3.2.1 The XPP will provide more detailed proposals

when the debate has advanced to that stage. However, it is proposed that the principle of the devolution of power to the lowest tier of government capable of exercising that power efficiently and effectively within the overall requirement of cost-effectiveness of democratic government be accepted.

3.2.2 The XFP is in favour of the adoption of the general principle of limitation of the autonomy and functions of higher authority and of the devolution ^{of} all residual powers to lower tiers.