

SOUTH AFRICA BEGINNING AT THE END OF THE ROAD

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Introduction

South Africa is the only country in the world, and therefore also on the African continent, where white minority domination is still in place. This distinction became a reality when the South African flag was lowered and the Namibian flag raised during the independence celebrations between 20 and 21 March of 1990. The South African government was critically instrumental in bringing about the independence of Namibia and therefore also the end of white minority domination there. By implication, it also signalled the end of white minority domination in its own country and together with the rest of the international community, agreed that the end of the road of this form of political domination was at hand.

However, there is equally broad consensus that the manner in which white domination is to end in South Africa will be unlike any other situation where this came about, eg, colonial withdrawal to 'the motherland' by the white minority or an externally imposed formula for transition by some 'legitimate' international intermediary: Resolution 435 in Namibia or Lancaster House in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. In fact, a view has gradually emerged and become accepted by most of the major parties involved that a situation had to be created where the dominant white minority would negotiate away its position of exclusive control.

There appears to be no precedent for this possibility. Is this feasible? But that is not all. An equally widespread view exists, also on the part of those who govern at present, that not only has white minority domination to be negotiated out of existence, but within the South African context, has to be replaced by a negotiated, non-racial, democratic system of government. Is this realistic? These are the two dominant issues which South Africa has to face up to as it begins to shape its future at the end of the road for white domination.

Some Qualifications

In considering these issues, I am not going to dwell on why, or how, this has come about. This is an entirely necessary, although highly unresolved, area of inquiry. Factors which invariably figure in analyses of this problem are:

External : the changed international environment, eg, the USSR-USA relationship; the political collapse of Marxism-Leninism in Eastern Europe;

external pressure whether *deliberate*, ie punitive or persuasive, or *unintentional*, ie South Africa's vulnerability to a changing international economic climate, eg, the price of gold, the war in Angola, the escalating costs of administering Namibia, etc.

Internal : *deliberate pressures*, ie. the intensification of struggle and mass mobilisation against domination; the abandonment of the constitutional goals of separate development and the acceptance of the notion of an integrated state by the regime; fiscal and monetary constraints forcing choices amongst budgetary options; managing economic policy and resources, or, *unintentional pressures* : population increase; urbanisation; unemployment; pressure for housing, health, education, urban and metropolitan expansion etc.

No doubt an interplay between external and internal factors brought about a compilation of circumstances which strengthened the view that continued white minority domination was a particularly aggravating factor which complicated an already complex situation and had to be brought to an end. Whether its demise inevitably would resolve these 'other issues', i.e. redistribution, growth, democratic government, stability, etc, is a moot point and evidence elsewhere is not compelling, but nevertheless the view prevails that unless and until white domination is also ended in South Africa, these 'other issues' could not be addressed with the seriousness of attention that they deserve.

Whatever the particular compilation of circumstances which came about as a result of the interplay between external and internal factors and which has brought us to the end of white minority domination in South Africa, I wish to draw two preliminary conclusions:

Firstly, the fact that negotiation is seen as the process whereby white domination will come to an end in South Africa also means that there is an acceptance that the process will be *primarily* driven by the *internal dynamics* of the *South African situation*.

Let me state this as concretely as possible. The way in which 'normalisation', 'liberalisation', 'transition' or 'democratisation' comes about in South Africa will primarily depend on the personalities, organisations and resources located *within* the South African society. This may not be as obvious to some as it is to others. For example, the fairly widely-held view that the South African regime will 'only come to its senses when it is on its knees' and that 'external pressure' is somehow 'critical', 'crucial', 'decisive', 'the last straw' to bring about the end of white domination, is committed to a different process of change than is coming about through a process of negotiation by the internal parties to the conflict. Capitulation makes negotiation redundant. At best it may involve a discussion of the terms of surrender. Whatever

else may be said about the current situation in South Africa, this is not what is about to happen.

Which brings me to the second point. The regime is not on the 'point of collapse' and 'victory' is not 'certain' for its opponents. Neither side can impose its will on the other but each is strong enough to frustrate the intention of the other. Put differently, if the regime has its 'back to the wall', it is still strong enough to read the writing on it and to choose between the 'least unpleasant options', and if 'victory is not certain' for its opponents, they are at least significant enough to force the choice.

Against this background one has to understand the positions of F W De Klerk and Nelson Mandela.

The one symbolises the history of white domination, and how it has come to the end of the road; the other the history of the struggle against it and what has to replace it. Both agree that its end and its alternative have to be negotiated and its alternative has to be a non-racial, democratic system of government. It would be foolish to assume that they both have exactly the same outcome in mind, but in order to take the question seriously as to whether the whole process is feasible, one has to at least start from the assumption that both are seriously committed to it and that they accept each other's integrity (this has been publicly stated by both a number of times). This does not mean that as the process unfolds, either one, or both, may not fall foul of hidden agendas or powerplays from interest groups or individuals within their respective ranks, or from outside of them. But this is precisely what the problem of feasibility is all about. It would be pointless to consider the problem of feasibility if one does not at least assume that both De Klerk and Mandela are serious. For the purpose of the subsequent argument, they will represent the Regime and the ANC in the process of negotiation.

The State and Transition

Before inquiry proceeds any further, it needs to be said that both the Regime and the ANC agree that the kind of process of negotiation that is at issue involves compromise; in other words, it is not about capitulation or surrender, or co-option or pseudo white domination. This has been made clear by the principals on both sides, even if they cannot be quite sure about the lingering confusion within their ranks on the matter. One of the most important compromises already conceded, if not explicitly then certainly by implication, concerns the role and fortunes of the South African state in the process of transition. It must be common purpose that the *state is not going to collapse or disintegrate, but that its instrumentality, legitimacy and functions will have to be adjusted in the process of transition, and also as a result of negotiation and co-operative management by at least the Regime and the ANC.*

This is a fundamental compromise and its significance can be clearly understood against some of the prevailing assumptions about the State held by various interest groups within South Africa. One familiar assumption is that the State is simply an extension of the interests of a particular group (Capital, *Die Volk*) in South Africa, and therefore its destruction a pre-condition before any alternative can be constructed to represent 'the real interests' of 'the workers/working class' or 'the majority', etc. For a long time this was the prevailing view of the State within Nationalist Party ranks as well as within the ANC and that is why 'revolution or seizure of power' on the one hand or 'radical partition' on the other was 'the only way' to resolve the 'irreconcilability of interests' between the State and its opponents. Anything, therefore, but negotiating and compromise. This is still the view of the State held by 'partitionists' or 'white homelander' such as the Conservative Party, AWB, HNP, etc, and perhaps some dormant subgroups within the NP; and, on the other hand, by 'militants', 'extremists' or conventional Marxist subgroups within the ranks of the ANC and the PAC. These tendencies on the polar opposites of the political spectrum will remain a constant source of volatility in the process of negotiation or further compromises, and cries of 'sell-outs' or 'suicide' will reflect the uneasiness as the process unfolds.

Another familiar assumption about the State is that it will simply become irrelevant as the process of transition increases 'individual liberty and freedom'. This is the familiar 'if only' approach to the role of the State as represented in its purest form by radical 'Free Marketeers' and some liberal spokesmen. 'If only' the government or somebody or 'thing' in a position to do so would remove all restrictions on individual liberty, society would find a stable, and above all, a 'fair' equilibrium because of each person pursuing his/her interest to the maximum of his/her ability. The significance of this view lies in the fact that it is held by some strategically located groups, particularly in the white community (but certainly not exclusively), and they are bound to get restive as the process of negotiation appears to move 'the other way', e.g., consider the debate on nationalisation. The rate at which capital and skills leave the country is also an indication of how, or to what extent, this view of the State is being undermined. But the Regime and the ANC would be short-sighted to summarily dismiss some of the valid fears held by those in this camp as they negotiate a new instrumentality and legitimacy for the South African State in the process of transition. At the heart of this debate lies the problems of a command vs growth economy and the tension between liberty and equality.

Yet another view of the State is that it is a neutral arbiter between the contending political forces and a dispassionate/disinterested servant of whoever happens to be the government of the day. This is, of course, an ideologi-

cal legacy of British civil administration in South Africa and its resilience is proven by the fact that it is to this day proclaimed by most of the senior white civil servants, despite forty years of National Party domination in government. No matter that fact can easily destroy this legend of the State, its significance may very well lie therein, that as the process of negotiation proceeds, a surprising degree of flexibility may be found amongst civil servants to administer new policies and accept new masters. Provided the process of transition does not tamper too drastically with pensions and conditions of employment, civil servants may prove to be the least recalcitrant to changing definitions of the instrumentality and legitimacy of the State (vide Zimbabwe and Namibia in this regard).

The view of the State that seems to be emerging between the Regime and the ANC is that the South African State is a 'house of many mansions', ie, locked into its structure are the interests of workers, servants, industrialists, warlords, chiefs, securocrats, youth, the aged, law and order and justice, the homeless and the unemployed. The end of white domination and the creation of democracy can be achieved by continuing with some of these interests but certainly not all of them. How and which of these interests are to be abandoned is also what negotiation is going to be all about. To the extent that acceptable compromises on these issues increase, then at least the Regime and the ANC (and no doubt others) will increasingly share responsibility for managing the transition of the South African State away from white domination and hopefully towards a democratic alternative. I am not for one moment suggesting that this emerging view of the South African State is shared with hegemonic enthusiasm by everyone supporting the Regime or the ANC, but evidence of this view is readily available from De Klerk and some of his senior members of the cabinet as well as from Mandela, Slovo, Mbeki and Sachs in the ANC ranks. Put differently, if no evidence for this emerging view of the State is available from either side, it would be almost impossible to make sense of what negotiating away white domination and a democratic alternative could mean.

In the same view, if, for whatever reason, either De Klerk or Mandela, or both should be replaced by another leader who reverts to the old orthodox view of the State represented by their groups in the past, negotiation as understood here would be impossible. This is not simply restating a truism which flows from my definition of the process, but in making this point I am also referring to circumstances within the South African situation which complicate, or even negate, the feasibility of the process itself. To the extent that this emerging view of the State becomes conventional wisdom, it makes increasing 'sense' to explore the feasibility of negotiation.

Let me illustrate this point with an example which may not remain hypo-

thetical for too long. Part of the bargaining ability of opponents to the Regime, and therefore also the ANC, is related to a fundamental paradox underpinning the administration of the South African State: a State structure which services white minority domination increasingly has to depend on the black majority to administer it. Already blacks comfortably outnumber whites in the service of the South African State. It would make sense for the ANC in shaping up for negotiation to capture as many areas of State structure as possible, eg, homeland structures, black education, organised state labour, local and regional structures of government, etc. Signs of this are already in evidence. Such areas can then be denied as part of the power base of the Regime to continue white domination or to enforce unacceptable compromises. But equally, the Regime will sharpen its control over its remaining areas of State domination, eg, defence, police, intelligence, telecommunications, fiscal and monetary policy, to ensure that bargaining away white domination leads to a more 'democratic' alternative than simply another form of racial domination.

Thus, the new emerging view of the State does not mean a comfortable or even cosy agreement between the regime and the ANC on how to manage transition to each other's benefit. It is primarily a competition for bargaining resources in shaping up for the process of negotiation itself. At the same time, it is in the interests of both to deracialise the nature of the competition and subsequent negotiation as much as possible by focusing general attention on the values of non-racialism and democracy.

The feasibility of transition

O'Donnell and Schmitner (1986) in their provocative and stimulating analysis of transition away from authoritarian rule to uncertain democratic outcomes in Latin America and Southern Europe, draw a distinction in the process of transition which has relevance for the South African situation as well. They argue persuasively that it is important not to confuse the phase of 'liberalisation' with that of 'democratisation'.

Liberalisation for them is a process of redefining and extending rights and a 'characteristic of this early stage in transition is its precarious dependence upon governmental power which remains arbitrary and capricious'. However, they maintain that 'if those practices are not too immediately and obviously threatening to the regime, they tend to accumulate, become institutionalised, and thereby raise the effective and perceived costs of their eventual annulment' (1976:7).

The authors repeatedly warn against facile generalisations in comparing the process in authoritarian countries but what is clear in this initial phase of transition is:

i) the risks are greater for the regime than for its opponents and hence the 'capricious' nature of its liberalisation. They talk about the 'tolerance-repression calculus' where if, in the opinion of the regime, the costs of tolerance begin to outweigh the costs of repression, then a clampdown may be implemented. This does not necessarily mean that the process is reversed but it certainly is arrested.

ii) Depending on the reaction of opponents to the new space created by the regime, a certain threshold is crossed where the costs of repression become too great and transition moves more securely into the next phase.

Democratisation they see as 'the process whereby the rules and procedures of citizenship are either applied to political institutions previously governed by other principles (eg, coercive control, social tradition, expert judgement or administrative practice), or expanded to include persons not previously enjoying such rights and obligations (eg non-taxpayers, illiterates, women, youth, ethnic minorities, foreign residents) or extended to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen participation (eg, state agencies, military establishments, partisan organisations, interest associations, productive enterprises, educational institutions', etc.

Democratisation, for the authors, is not simply the extension of the franchise, holding an election and transferring power (although events in some East European countries appear to reflect this). It is the progressive involvement of sectors of society, previously excluded, in decision-making and participation in new spheres of civil and political administration. In this process, initially, 'pacting' plays a decisive role which they describe as 'a negotiated compromise under which actors agree to forego or under-utilise their capacity to harm each other by extending guarantees not to threaten each other's corporate autonomies or vital interests' (1986:8).

The whole process of transition they see as the interval between one political regime and another during which the rules of the political game are not clearly defined, but a clear indication that it has started is when 'authoritarian incumbents, for whatever reason, begin to modify their own rules in the direction of providing more secure guarantees for the rights of individuals and groups' (1986:6).

I have dwelt at some length on the insights of o'Donnell and Schmitter to make the point that although there may be no historical precedents for how white domination is negotiated out of existence and a non-racial, democratic system negotiated into its place, there is more new research available on how minority authoritarian regimes go into transition towards uncertain democratic outcomes, and with recent and current developments in Eastern

Europe and the USSR, these insights will no doubt be added to. At least this could assist us to avoid the more obvious dangers and pitfalls of transition in our own case.

The liabilities of liberalisation

South Africa went into serious transition when Mr F W de Klerk addressed the opening of Parliament on 2 February 1990. He then announced the unbanning of banned organisations, the release of political prisoners and the need to negotiate a new democratic system of government. He conceded that in order to achieve this, the political climate had to be 'normalised' and invited the ANC leadership to discuss this issue with him. In doing all this, De Klerk took some obvious and serious risks, not the least of which was and is the haemorrhaging of support away to the rightwing. This has to a certain extent been offset by an improved international image and acceptance, but the critical factor which will make the risk 'worthwhile' is going to be the response of the major extra-parliamentary opponents of the regime to the new space created and in particular the response of the ANC. If this new space is going to be occupied by opposition groups to simply pursue conventional revolutionary mobilisation politics, the tolerance/repression calculus could come into effect and force De Klerk to clamp down on threatening instability.

However, if the new space is going to be used by the ANC to consolidate the gains for liberalisation beyond the threshold where repression is an option, they have to change their style of politics and take a few 'risks' as well. These risks are all tied up in the adjustment from being a liberation movement in exile to becoming a constituency political organisation in the domestic political arena. For example:

How are returning exiles, particularly the militant wing, going to be integrated into normal political life?

How is exile and domestic leadership going to be reconciled into one line of authority and also in terms of ideological emphases, strategic and tactical preferences?

Can radical outbidding be contained when the movement enters into preliminary 'talks about talks'?

These questions cannot be addressed in the calm atmosphere of academic reflection, but against an increasingly turbulent political environment in the urban and rural areas of South Africa in which other political competitors and even criminal elements compete for the new space that has been created. At this initial stage, despite claims to the contrary, the process of transition, if not reversible, can certainly be arrested by a clampdown if either the regime or its major opponents calculate that the costs of "normalisation" are too

great for maintaining their respective support bases intact. However, given the changing international, regional and domestic environment, the costs of forcing a clampdown through confrontationist strategies on the part of opponents of the regime would be greater for them than for the regime. Depending on the outcome of the first round of talks between the Executive of the ANC and the De Klerk government, the transition in South Africa is beginning to approach that critical threshold where neither side can afford to appear 'unreasonable' by 'capriciously' arresting the process.

The dilemmas of democratisation

There is no reason why aspects of liberalisation and democratisation cannot run concurrently except that the initial phases of liberalisation do have a certain chronological priority in order to make democratisation practical, eg, unbanning organisations, releasing political prisoners, etc.

The dilemmas of democratisation focus on progressively involving groups or sectors into various aspects of civil society that have previously been excluded from them or survived under extremely repressive circumstances. There is a tendency to see the political dimension as the primary area of democratisation and particularly the issue of who controls executive authority. As I have already indicated, this is only one, though important, aspect of democratisation. At least the following dilemmas of democratisation will have to be addressed:

Democratising the state. I have already dealt with this as an important area of implicit if not explicit area of compromise between the Regime and its opponents. To the extent that the concept of sharing power has any empirical reference, it could be operationalised in terms of the relative degree of control the Regime and its opponents have over managing the state in the process of transition.

Democratising the budget. This refers to the allocation of resources to the various items covered by the budget. It is not only a question of increasing or decreasing funds for a particular function, but to the extent that we move from domination to democracy, it must inevitably mean new policies and resources for defence, law and order, justice, health, labour, industry, agriculture, etc. These new policies will presumably be the consequence of debate, argument and compromises between the Regime and its opponents in a variety of forms, commissions and committees.

Democratising the economy. The structural inequality which is reflected in discriminatory budgetary and political policies finds similar expression in the structure of the economy. It is this 'structural' inequality which prompts the disenfranchised and the deprived to seize on strategies for radical redistribution, ie, nationalisation. Although there is increasing consensus that nation-

alisation is a highly ineffective and even counter-productive strategy to deal with the problem, the problem remains. It serves little purpose for economic stability and political manageability if labour becomes increasingly democratic and capital undemocratic. The problem of not only democratising changes (equality of opportunity) but making it possible for more and more from the majority to become part of the corporate economy is going to be crucial for the transition from domination to democracy. Democracy without an economy to underpin and service the aspirations of those who participate in it simply becomes a temporary staging post to a new tyranny. This area of democratisation does not only involve the regime and its opponents but particularly the private sector. If they do not actively drive the political economy towards greater democracy, they cannot escape the responsibility for the failure of our transition.

Democratising the constitution. This is an obvious area where attention on democratisation focuses. I suspect that as the process of liberalisation and democratisation proceeds, this will turn out to present the least of the problems of democratisation. It is not, and never has been, difficult to write an attractive constitution for even the most conflict-ridden society. In this sense, South Africa is one of the most over-constitutionalised countries in the world. The simple point is that if a constitution does not reflect an already existing consensus on the nature of political society, then no constitution can fabricate this. This consensus will have to arise out of the other areas of bargaining and compromise so that a democratic culture can become the value infrastructure to sustain a new democratic constitution.

A very important dilemma of democratisation in the South African context is the *absence of an external arbiter* to oversee the process of transition. All the major actors are participants and referees to the manner of their own involvement in liberalisation and democratisation. This could become a major stumbling block. It seems unrealistic, perhaps even undesirable, to search for a mutually acceptable external arbiter. Perhaps a solution could be the appointment of a 'council of wise people' reflecting the interests of the different parties but nevertheless developing a collective responsibility to keep the process on track without being subjected to constituency pressures to the same extent as those they represent.

Conclusion

Can these liabilities and dilemmas be met successfully? I believe yes. The changing international, regional and domestic climate urges a positive approach. Although we face formidable socio-economic problems, particularly in our metropolitan areas, our industrial and commercial bases are sound enough to respond to a conducive climate. The most important factor may

yet turn out to be the will of the major participants to make a success of it. There is enough bitterness, hatred and vengeance in our past to sap this will to its limits. But the very fact that one can still write plausibly about the transition from domination to democracy shows the will is still resilient.

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References

o'Donnell, G & Schmitter, P.C. (1986) - *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, Baltimore & London : The Johns Hopkins University Press