



Continuing the miracle into South Africa's second decade

The FW de Klerk Foundation

AS DELIVERED

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THE ROLE OF MINORITIES IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

Ten years ago the Constitutional Assembly was locked in discussions on the final constitution. At that time I and the then National Party felt strongly that some provision should be made to accommodate our cultural diversity at the executive level of government. We were worried that if we adopted a simple majoritarian system minorities would in future feel excluded from the processes by which they are governed.

We proposed that, alongside the cabinet, there should be a consultative council on which all parties with more than 5% of the vote would serve. That council would consider all questions of national importance as well as questions that affected the interests of minority communities in a spirit of building consensus. However, it would not have had the power to veto any proposal of the government, but it would, to my mind, have ensured that all our communities would have been fully consulted and involved in the process of government.

The ANC rejected even this relatively modest proposal out of hand. The other significant opposition parties – the DP and the IFP – were also not interested in supporting such a mechanism. I felt so strongly about this principle that it became the most important consideration in my decision to withdraw from the GNU. Why continue with the pretence of power-sharing in the GNU with all its attendant political liabilities if there was no prospect of ongoing meaningful power-sharing processes extending into the future?

Ten years later it is becoming increasingly apparent that my concerns regarding the future of our minorities were all too well founded.

Instead of an approach that accommodates diversity, there is an increasing tendency to require minorities to conform to the ANC goal of 'representivity'. The ANC's idea is that in a perfectly non-racial society all institutions in the public and private sectors should reflect the ethnic composition of society at all levels. Accordingly, the owners, the boards, top management, middle management and employees of all companies and organisations should ideally be 76% black, 12% white, 9% coloured and 3% Indian. The same should hold true for all aspects of government and all state, provincial and municipal institutions – and ultimately for all sports teams as well.

At first glance this would seem to be fair and reasonable. However, on deeper examination it becomes clear that in a multi-community society 'representivity'

means that minorities would be subject to the control of the majority in every area of their lives – in their jobs, in their schools, in their universities and in their sports

In effect, the concept of across the board representivity is irreconcilable with the constitutional principle of cultural diversity. Diversity requires an environment with numerous centres of cultural, social and economic activity - all existing in mutual toleration and respect. It presupposes a degree of community autonomy and acceptance that there are important spheres of life that should be free from majority interference and control. It creates space for community-based education; for Hindu temples; Islamic schools; Chinese restaurants; and Portuguese green-grocers. It means that it's OK for Jewish South Africans to build up businesses that are predominantly Jewish and for English-speaking South Africans to have schools that reflect their values and traditions. The right to freedom of association also means that there is nothing intrinsically wrong if cultural groups tend to associate with their own kind and flock together in particular neighbourhoods – as they do, indeed, all over the world.

All this, of course, is predicated on two key principles: Firstly, that none of these institutions should exclude people on the basis of race or on any of the other grounds that are rightly prohibited by the constitution; and secondly, that in their diversity, all our citizens should give their first and overarching loyalty to South Africa and to the constitution.

The essence of diversity is that individuals, families and associations should be free to decide how they wish to lead their lives. The foundation of our unity is that we should all do so within the framework of the values and goals contained in the constitution.

The reality now is that whites – and I believe members of other minorities as well – feel increasingly disempowered. According to Lenin, politics can be reduced to two words: “who, whom” – who exercises political power and against whom is it exercised. Minorities increasingly feel that they are on the wrong side of the Leninist power equation – particularly as transformation policies begin to impact on virtually every aspect of their lives.

Recently President Mbeki wrote that “the end of the system of white monopoly on political power did not mean the replacement of white domination with black domination, an outcome to which the ANC was and is opposed”. The question is: how will we be able to avoid black domination in a situation in which the black majority in effect now has a *de facto* monopoly of political power? What else is it but domination if the black majority dictates the agenda for the white, Indian and coloured minorities and negatively affects their core interests?

All this is especially problematical because although white South Africans are constantly addressed by government as a group – they are, in fact, not a group. The Afrikaner community is fragmented into dozens of splinter groups and tendencies and English-speaking white South Africans would much rather simply think of themselves as South Africans. There is no ‘White Caucus’ - thank heavens – and no political

party claims to – or even wants to – speak as the representative of white South Africans. The same is true of our coloured and Indian communities as well.

Whites - and other minorities to a greater or lesser extent – can however, no longer avoid the reality that they are increasingly being addressed as members of an ethnic group – regardless of what their preferences might be. They have responded to this situation in differing ways:

- A small minority - including the NNP – have sought their future within the ANC.
- Some seek to ingratiate themselves with the powers that be by giving lip-service to transformation and by ensuring the political correctness of all their utterances. These are the people to whom President Mbeki was referring when he recently wrote of those who continued ‘to sing sweet songs about what needed to be done to bring about change’ but who, ‘objectively, were opposed to change’.
- Others – like white members of the DA – continue to oppose the government vocally and sometimes stridently in the media and from their beleaguered position in Parliament. But is the government even listening?
- Many others – overwhelmed by the ANC’s parliamentary dominance - are withdrawing from political arena altogether – as the low voter turn-out in last year’s election indicated.
- A large proportion are withdrawing into their own communities and private lives. They have decided that because there is no future for them in the public arena they will fend for themselves and their families as best they can.
- Too many – with precious skills – have left South Africa – some because there is lucrative demand for their skills in the globalising economy and others because they see no future for themselves and their children in the new South Africa.

How should members of minority communities react to their new situation? I believe that the answer should be to redouble their commitment to the new South Africa and to the constitution on which it is based.

This is not the time for negativism and despondency. As President Mbeki has rightly pointed out, there are many reasons for optimism: the economy is poised for accelerated growth; confidence levels are at all-time high levels, and South Africa is respected throughout our continent and the world. For the great majority of white South Africans life continues to be pleasant.

There are, however, some crucial issues that we need to address and on which we need to reach consensus. The first of these is the whole question of economic and social transformation which will undoubtedly dominate the second decade of the new South Africa. Justice, common sense and political stability demand that

- all South Africans should help to create a fairer and more equal society;
- they should urgently address the problems of those sections of our society who live in abject poverty and who have not benefited from the new South Africa; and that
- national institutions should be increasingly representative of the population as a whole.

However, justice, common sense and political stability also require that transformation should be implemented in a fair and workable manner. Unbalanced transformation has the potential to undermine inter-racial harmony and to impair the country's ability to deliver essential services and promote economic growth.

Hardly a day passes without the announcement of some Black Economic Empowerment deal. Many of these deals are creating real opportunities for black South Africans and are stimulating the development of a whole new generation of black entrepreneurs and managers. Such deals can, and are, making an important contribution to developing a fairer, more prosperous and more representative economy.

However, it is equally important that such deals should be pursued and negotiated in a balanced manner and within the framework of the constitution. In particular:

- they should not undermine or dilute the property rights in the constitution;
- while making full provision for the appointment and promotion of qualified black South Africans, they should not constitute a virtual bar to members of minority communities;
- they should concentrate – in particular – on education, training, mentoring and fast-tracking of black South Africans;
- they should not result in the appointment or promotion of people who simply do not have the skills or experience to carry out the responsibilities assigned to them – whatever their race;
- they should concentrate on giving black workers and managers a stake in the businesses in which they are employed – rather than in enriching a handful of billionaire tycoons.

At the same time, there are a number of reasonable questions that need to be debated and resolved:

- What are the goals of transformation with regard to institutions that have a special cultural identity – such as churches, clubs, newspapers, cultural organisations, schools, universities, old-age homes, ethnic restaurants, etc? Presumably, the Government would not expect that 75% of the reporters on a newspaper like the *Burger* should be non-Afrikaans-speaking black South Africans? What about Afrikaans medium schools and universities? Should English-speaking South Africans be allowed to own and run newspapers, and radio and TV stations?
- What is the bottom line? Charters generally have a ten-year horizon for ownership, employment and other targets – but what are the final goals? If an industry achieves its target of 25% black ownership in the first ten years will it have complied with all of its black ownership obligations – or will it then have to meet another set of ownership targets during the following ten years?
- Is it possible to peg ownership levels in a free market? What happens when a black empowerment partner decides to sell his or her share of a company to white or overseas interests? Should the BEE partner be prevented from selling to whites? Would we have to create separate black and white share and property markets? Or would the company involved simply have to start the process all over again and

find new black partners? We must remember that black ownership of JSE equity rose to 7% in 1998 and then fell to less than 3% in 2002.

- When does affirmative action become racial discrimination? President Mbeki recently pointed out that 182 000 white households now fall in the lowest income group which earns less than R 9 600 per annum while 440 000 black households are now in the highest income group earning more than R153 000 per annum. On what moral and constitutional basis will members of the advantaged black households now be able to claim precedence over members of disadvantaged white households when it comes to affirmative action appointments?

Another area in which we need to engage the government in debate relates to the crucial question of skills.

On 16 February 2005 Minister of Sport Makhenkesi Stofile told Parliament that the government had “called on sport administrators to sacrifice a little bit in terms of wanting to win, because even when we field these lily white teams we lose.” Minister Stofile’s statement encapsulates very nicely the dilemma at the heart of South Africa’s transformation policy. Where do we find the right balance between wanting to win and wanting to promote representivity?

In my opinion, the Government has too often sacrificed the need to win on the altar of representivity. In its perhaps understandable haste to create a representative public service it has lost, or dispensed with, the services of 120 000 white civil servants since 1994 – many of them highly skilled and experienced. The simple reality is that no organisation, institution or company can succeed without properly trained and experienced people – whatever their race. The shortage of skills and experience is, I believe, the main cause of the serious problems that the country is experiencing with regard to delivery in the provision of health, education and municipal services.

There are more than 350 000 skilled jobs lying vacant in our economy. This skills shortage in turn is a major obstacle to the achievement of our national goals – including the goal of transformation. We need a national strategy

- to retain our pool of skills and experience;
- to identify and utilise the skills and experience that is at present lying dormant in our society; and above all
- to develop skills and experience particularly in our black population through the provision of excellent education and mentoring programmes.

But what are we doing? Throughout the country in the private and public sectors people with real skills and experience are being told that they have no prospects; that there is little possibility for promotion and advancement. What will their reaction be? Can we really expect them to continue to work enthusiastically for employers that fail to recognise their effort and merit?

Unfortunately, many people who find themselves in this position – particularly if they are young and mobile – leave the country. Between 1997 and 2002 some 230 000 South Africans emigrated to the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Some left because of higher incomes offered elsewhere in the

global economy. Others left because of crime – but too many left because they felt that they and their children had no future in South Africa. Very few of these people left willingly or happily. Most, wherever they are, retain an unbreakable attachment to the country of their birth. How many hundreds of thousands have left since 2002 and how many more will go during the next ten years if we fail to address their reasonable concerns regarding their future and the future of their children in South Africa?

We are confronted with a clear choice: either we can rush forward with our headlong pursuit of representivity at any cost and run the risk of losing more. Or we can field our best teams in every arena of our national endeavour while we launch, at the same time, a massive and intensive campaign to train and assist black and other formerly disadvantaged South Africans to take their rightful place in the economy. There will be room for everyone in a fast growing economy. The key to genuine and sustainable transformation will be to ensure that we all work together to make South Africa a winning country.

To sum up:

- we need to return to the values and ideals contained in our constitution: and
- we need to reach consensus on the key issues of transformation, cultural diversity and skills.

I am convinced that if we can do so we will be able to achieve the vision of the just, equal and prosperous society that is spelled out in the constitution.

I strongly agree with the conciliatory remarks made by President Mbeki in the debate on his state of the nation speech. He said that all of us would have to internalise the reality that our very collective future depends on the ability of all our people to grasp an important reality – the fact that the success of black South Africa is conditional on the success of white South Africa, and that the success of white South Africa is conditional on the success of black South Africa. “If indeed we all came to understand this, together we would have to answer the question as to what white South Africa should do to ensure that black South Africa succeeds, and what black South Africa should do to ensure that white South Africa succeeds!”

I couldn't agree more and look forward to addressing this question with my fellow South Africans in lively debate. My only regret is the absence of a structured forum in which such a discussion can take place. Should the Government not take the lead in creating a forum where civil society and the politicians can thrash out a consensus on the way forward? I think so!