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APARTHEID: dismantle or transform?

These days we frequently hear the term 'dismantling apartheid'. Some people say it's happening, others say it's not. In a tentative effort to point out some of the stays and the struts of this condemned structure the editor interviewed five people — all chosen for their professional involvement in fields and with groups whose opinions have a bearing on the problem. The five were:

- Prof John Dugard, director of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at Wits University, who is also on the National Executive of Lawyers for Human Rights.
- Mr Joe Seremane, community worker for the SA Council of Churches. Mr Seremane himself spent many years on Robben Island and is now in touch with a wide spectrum of black opinion.
- Prof Eddie Webster, a sociologist at Wits University whose main professional interest is trade union activity and worker relations.
- Mr Faud Cassim, an economist at Wits University who is also on the executive of the Transvaal Indian Congress. Both he and Prof Webster are amongst those academics who are currently grappling with the requirements for a 'post apartheid' society in South Africa.
- Mrs Lydia Kompe who, as a field worker with the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (Trac), works with communities under threat of removal. She also has experience in the trade unions where she worked for many years as branch secretary for the Transport and General Workers Union, a Cosatu affiliate.

The term 'dismantling apartheid' clearly means different things to different people.

To the Government it means dismantling 'outmoded' apartheid. But those who oppose apartheid view its eradication as a fundamental problem requiring complete structural changes.

Prof Dugard explains the Government approach to the problem in this way: 'The Government tends to view the problem legalistically, i.e., from the point of view of laws on the Statute Book which provide for discriminatory treatment'.

Government view in historical perspective

'One can explain this attitude in the perspective of history', he continues. 'In the early 1950's the SA Government was criticised for practising statutory racial discrimination. The attack against the government was directed against those laws which provided for discriminatory practices in the fields of personal relations, public amenities, residence etc.

'Consequently, today when the Government and lawyers talk about dismantling apartheid they tend to

think in terms of the repeal of laws which provide for discriminatory treatment — the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, the Immorality Act, Influx Control laws, the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act and related statutes.

'The Government has already repealed some of these and the main discriminatory legislation remaining is the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act. Should these be repealed the question would then arise as to

whether apartheid had been dismantled. The answer is "no".

The meaning of apartheid

Similar points about the nature of apartheid society made by others interviewed showed why the answer is 'no'; for example, Prof Webster's starting point: 'The way in which one goes about dismantling apartheid depends on what one considers apartheid to be. Apartheid is more than just racial discrimination. It is also part of the whole system of racial capitalism — a system of economic and political inequality in which one group, by virtue of its political and economic advantages, has control over how resources are allocated.'

Mrs Kompe puts it this way: 'Apartheid is the means that one group uses to oppress another — so that they can stay rich and comfortable at other people's expense.' And Mr Cassim says: 'Apartheid is an ideology where race plays a fundamental part — privileges and power are assigned primarily on the basis of race which the state enforces.'

The nature of the change

Given these perceptions of apartheid, 'dismantling' according to those interviewed, becomes an inappropriate term. Prof Webster says: 'I would rather talk about the transformation of South African society.'

Prof Dugard views the term 'dismantling' thus: 'It has a negative effect, as if one can achieve a just political order by removing certain statutes. That is only half the picture. Apartheid will still be with us until there is a new constitution in which all South Africans participate. Apartheid will still be with us until there is a redistribution of wealth which overcomes economic injustice. Apartheid will still be with us until a serious effort is made in many fields — in education, employment and others — to redress past injustices.' Prof Dugard also advocates a system of affirmative action and anti-discrimination laws like the British Race Relations Act.

In contrast Mr Cassim holds the view that: 'The dismantling of apartheid does not logically entail democracy. The notions of apartheid and democracy are different.'

'Theoretically, it is possible to do away with apartheid without extending the franchise, in fact the state could even reduce the franchise. In this context, the term "post-apar-

theid" must be used with care, since it is possible to have a post-apartheid society without democracy.

'More fundamentally, any alternative has to be about challenging the social relations that have been structured by apartheid and capitalism, the division of land, the migrant labour system, and so on.' In Mr Cassim's view, the implementation of the Freedom Charter poses the alternative which will change the social relations, the 'privileges and power' of his earlier definition of apartheid.

So much for the term 'dismantling apartheid' and what it fails to imply. The question then arises as to what the transformation of South African society involves, how the social relations will be 'challenged'. Discussion ranges from immediate to long-term changes, legal changes, attitude changes, and changes which cannot take place without a fundamental change on the part of the Government.

The immediate legal changes

Referring to the immediate future, Mr Seremane and Mrs Kompe list the immediate repeal of all discriminatory laws as a priority. Mr Seremane says: 'It is necessary to go through all existing legislation to strip out all the elements of apartheid. For instance, it is no good scrapping the Mixed Marriages Act when the Group Areas Act remains. People can marry but they are not free to live where they choose. A couple must live in the area of the black spouse.'

Mrs Kompe stresses the breadth of the required legal change and its totality: 'It's too late for piecemeal attempts at reform. People have seen that these piecemeal reforms are not genuine.' As Mr Seremane describes it: 'It appears that the Government is standing there dishing out sweets but they turn out to be stones.'

Mrs Kompe uses the abolition of influx control as an example. 'I don't have a house of my own although I've been waiting for many years. If the white person who is providing me with a back room in the white suburb was to leave and I was kicked out I'd have nowhere to go. If I then put up a shack in someone's backyard I can be forcefully removed to anywhere a magistrate chooses to send me and that may mean losing my job in the city. (The Government

from *The Cordoned Heart*



A mine worker in his concrete bed. 'Apartheid will still be with us until a serious effort is made to redress past economic injustices such as the migrant labour system'. Ben MacLennan

failure to meet black housing needs is dealt with on page 6).

The legal changes to which Mrs Kompe and Mr Seremane refer include all those laws that create homelands and 'independent' neighbouring states. To scrap apartheid will also mean repealing certain security laws. Mrs Kompe asserts: 'Laws must be scrapped which make it a crime to belong to certain political organisations, and which turn our leaders into criminals for their political convictions.'

Mr Seremane includes the release of political prisoners and the return of South Africans in exile on the list of immediate changes. 'But', he says 'political leaders such as Mr Nelson Mandela will ask "On what basis am I released?" The release of political prisoners will automatically mean that there's going to be free and equal participation.'

So which of these pillars on this list of immediate changes must fall first? Mr Seremane replies: 'It's hard to draw a priority list. If there's a drought in the country, where will you let the rain fall first to please everybody?'

Cooperation to formulate new structures

Mr Seremane describes what he thinks should happen after racial laws and political repression have been removed. 'We will need the complete participation of everybody to jointly work out a new constitution.'

But that's not all. 'There will have to be education programmes to change people's attitudes and prepare them to play certain roles.'

Mr Seremane predicts that though tradition and prejudice die hard in the long term future, with complete freedom of association a change of alliances will occur. 'There may be people who will join the Nationalists', he predicts, 'others may join the Progressive Federal Party. Political affiliation is not a question of colour for many, it's a question of what people do. Dr van Zyl Slabbert won the respect of many when he took the step he did. Dr Beyers Naude was a Broederbender but that is irrelevant. He is much loved and respected today. Behaviour and attitudes determine how people react. The spirit is a formidable force.'

Redressing the imbalances

Should people's hopes for 'immediate' changes be met, there's still the question of the transformation necessary to challenge privilege with its attendant power. It's a process which can begin in certain institutions without waiting for changes in Government. Prof Webster explains: 'Transformation needs to take place in those institutions that maintain and reproduce inequality.' For instance in universities, with which Prof Webster is familiar: 'Instead of a new gymnasium, say, a university can spend its funds on support programmes to upgrade the standard of education in the community outside, or change its research programmes to focus on issues that would assist the underprivileged more specifically.'

Prof Webster like Mr Cassim, also feels that the Freedom Charter states social needs, which if met, would lead to that transformed condition of a 'post-apartheid society.' For example, 'the people shall share in the country's wealth' and 'there shall be work and security' and 'there will be houses, security and comfort, free education and medical care' are some of its expressed con-

ditions.

'As far as the economy is concerned,' Prof Webster continues, 'these demands represent a major challenge to industry. The problem will be how to reconcile the apparently conflicting objective of increasing productivity on the one hand with meeting those goals of the Freedom Charter on the other. Industry will require a dramatic increase in productivity for houses, schools, clinics, medical equipment etc.'

'These are needs we can begin to try and meet but to be effective we would need to introduce industrial democracy to give people a stake in what they produce. Working people have to feel that the wealth they are producing is being shared equally.'

'The sociological evidence of worker participation is almost unanimous in demonstrating that productivity is increased by greater participation. How precisely one creates greater participation is something that will have to be resolved through negotiation between management and labour. There are a range of models we could choose from such as West Germany's system of co-determination, to Yugoslavia's worker councils, to the highly successful system of worker control in Allende's Chile.'

Moving towards more democratic practices in the economic sphere is a

transformation which can begin today. Mrs Kompe's comments on the subject of access to information on which to make decisions bear this out: 'Because everything is put into a tight pot, only individuals can see in. That's why we have to push. The first time a factory worker knows that her factory is in trouble is when the flow of material to the machine she is operating starts to dry up. But it's something management knew months before. Management's attitude is, "I run the business, you do the work, you can't be party to the decisions. You don't have to know what we produce".'

Prof Webster's opinions are based on his research and surveys conducted in the trade unions. He draws a paragraph from a paper entitled '*The independent black trade union movement in South Africa — a challenge to management*'. The paper brings together the findings of a survey conducted amongst leaders of trade unions movements such as Cosatu, Cusa and Azactu. On the question of the economy the survey revealed: 'All those interviewed believed that the free enterprise system had failed to deliver adequately to black workers. They all favour some form of socialism. However, they appear to reject Soviet-style communism. What emerges is the idea of a system in which large companies

Women on strike. To increase productivity we need to introduce industrial democracy to give people a stake in what they produce. Paul Weinberg



and industries, such as the mines and transport, are nationalised but in which small businesses would be allowed to operate. One could categorise this as some kind of social democracy or democratic socialism consistent with the economic demands of the Freedom Charter.'

Prof Webster's survey shows that black workers feel the free enterprise system has failed them. They favour 'some kind' of socialism as an alternative. Mr Cassim reaches the same conclusion about the maladies of the market mechanism but his assertion is based on his research into

economic data about the effects of state economic policy, especially in the last six years. At the same time, he is more cautious about attaching a label to the remedy. He concludes:

'The problem of meeting social demands is not simply whether economic growth will eradicate the inequalities caused by apartheid but more pertinently whether the economy, given the present political and economic constraints, can sustain any growth at all.

'The non-interventionist *laissez-faire* policies of the State in recent years have left the economically dis-

advantaged worse off with fewer jobs and dwindled packets, on the one hand; on the other, repression becomes the only expanding activity.

The solution to achieving the requirements of a "post-apartheid" society will not lie in technocratic manipulations of economic variables such as interest rates and government spending. It will have to involve a qualitative change in the way the political and economic system is organised to determine what is produced and how its income-yield is distributed.'

What the advice office files reveal

Every year thousands of residents from the townships around the white urban areas come into Black Sash advice offices in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown seeking help. Their requests reveal the grim side of township life in South Africa. In this summary, GLENDA WEBSTER combines reports for 1985 of the chairmen from each of these regions presented to National Conference.

During 1985 the Black Sash's seven advice offices opened some 11 000 new files for those people they felt they could help. Many thousands more were interviewed, and many letters and telephone calls were received but files were not opened for them. They were merely given information, for instance, about citizenship and local authorities. Or they were referred to other agencies, such as trade unions, where these already existed to provide help with unfair dismissals, incorrect pay packets, family and consumer problems, Motor Vehicle Assurance etc.

Hundreds more could not be helped at all. Their problems stem from the shortage of jobs and houses, giving rise to unemployment, non-payment of rentals, evictions and a spiral of destitution. Sometimes they do not qualify for the unemployment or pension be-

nefits they seek. And in other ways, there are those who could not be helped because the law does not allow them to do or have what they are seeking.

In a broad analysis the new cases (ie not counting some 6 000 ongoing previous cases) can be divided into four main areas and a category called 'other':

Problems with employment

The loss of jobs, pay disputes and work-related problems gives rise to the need for assistance with Unemployment Insurance claims (UIF), Workmens Compensation claims and so on. This is the biggest category of cases in all advice offices except Johannesburg and Cape Town, where many other agencies exist. In Pietermaritzburg some 73% of cases fell into this category, in Grahamstown 62%, Durban 55%, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth who un-

like the rest, also dealt with unrest-related cases, had percentages around 50.

All the advice office reports refer to the increase in UIF claims and the problems of destitution. This extract from the Pretoria report sums up the findings of others:

'The deteriorating economic conditions in our country manifested themselves. We saw more people who had lost their jobs through retrenchment than ever before. Many people had been dismissed on flimsy pretexts as an easy alternative to retrenchment.

'The consequences of the loss of employment were revealed in the following ways:

a) *Refund of pension contributions.* Most retrenched workers wish to obtain a refund of all their pension contributions. The average wait for such is well over seven months. The various pensions funds are struggli-