

Factors influencing change in South Africa

The following are extracts from papers delivered recently by DR OSCAR DHLOMO, Secretary-General of Inkatha, KwaZulu Government Minister of Education and Culture and Chairman, KwaZulu/Natal Indaba. Dr Dhlomo also led KwaZulu's delegation on the joint SA Government/KwaZulu committee to identify obstacles to negotiations in South Africa.

The national and international climate regarding South Africa has changed drastically. Less than a decade ago I was told by distinguished churchmen, to whom I was speaking in Europe, that any South African liberation movement — such as Inkatha — that believed peaceful negotiation and not armed revolution was a viable strategy, was a welfare society parading as a liberation movement.

On many occasions abroad I was given lengthy lectures on how liberation movements in South Africa that used to share my apparent faith in negotiation politics were now promoting the so-called armed struggle as the sole and authentic means of struggle for a just society.

Now, not only is there a convergence of viewpoints on the possibility of peaceful change, but there is even consensus that this

“Any serious observer of the South African political scene will readily agree that the emphasis of the debate about political change has somewhat shifted during the past five to ten years. In the past the South African debate revolved around the possibility of political change. The inevitable conclusion was always that change was not possible.

“Today the debate is about the nature and extent of the change we desire, as well as the mechanisms for bringing it about. Even on these issues an amazing convergence of viewpoints has become apparent. There is now general agreement that the change we desire would have to transform South Africa into a united non-racial democracy affording political participation to all citizens regardless of race, colour or creed. There is even consensus that this political transformation of South Africa will have to come about peacefully through negotiations involving representatives of all the people of South Africa.

“Consequently those who travel regularly to South Africa will agree with me that “negotiation” has become the new buzz word in our country. Everybody now talks about negotiations. Even the Conservative Party claims that it is prepared to negotiate the boundaries of its ‘boerestaat’.”

*Address to the United States Council for International Business,
Harvard Club, October 1989*

will come about as a result of negotiations involving representatives of all the people of South Africa.

Consequently those political groups that have devoted all their energies to pursuing the revolutionary option are now scurrying around attempting to put together their so-called negotiating positions. On the other hand, those political groups that have all along devoted their energies to pursuing negotiation politics have learnt to perfect their negotiation skills and are looking forward to making a positive contribution at the negotiating table.

Inkatha leads within the ranks of those that nailed their colours to the mast on negotiation politics from the very beginning. Inkatha did not need American, Russian, British, or OAU pressure to tell us the obvious — that negotiation and not revolution is the gateway to a new democratic South Africa.

Many factors have conspired to bring about this socio-political climate which makes political change in South Africa both desirable and inevitable. The following are some, obviously not all, of the factors that have influenced political change in South Africa.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON THE NAMIBIAN QUESTION

The historic negotiations on Namibian independence involving South Africa, Cuba, Angola and the United States of America — with the Soviet Union lending significant diplomatic support in the background — opened up numerous opportunities for resolving regional conflicts in



Dr Oscar Dhlomo

Southern Africa through negotiations.

Two super powers (America and the Soviet Union) decided to temporarily sink their ideological differences and work for the promotion of common policy objectives in Southern Africa. Similarly, South Africa, Angola and Cuba decided to lay down arms and promote a negotiated settlement in Namibia in terms of United National Resolution 435.

It is my submission that this

historic event significantly influenced political thinking inside South Africa and revived the fading hope that a negotiated political solution would also be possible here.

The argument in black political circles was: if South African rulers could successfully negotiate with foreign Marxist regimes, then it was possible for them also to negotiate with black fellow countrymen, the majority of whom were not Marxists. Even today

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South African politics continues to bask in the success of negotiations for Namibian independence.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR NEGOTIATED PEACEFUL CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Another recent positive development is the support that the international community is now giving to a negotiated settlement and are subtly advising these liberation movements to pursue negotiation instead of revolution.

Inside South Africa this strategic shift has had many positive effects amongst black political groups that supported the so-called armed struggle: it rescued black politics from the belief in an impending armed revolution spearheaded by foreign armies marching to Pretoria to seize political power. It also rescued black politics from what I prefer to call a "political dependence syndrome", and revived the belief that the struggle for liberation is in fact a South African struggle which will be fought, won or lost in South Africa. Black politics has genuinely been put back to work as liberation movements that have hitherto placed implicit trust in the armed struggle are now scurrying around and attempting to put together their negotiating positions in anticipation of negotiations that are in the offing.

THE OUTCOME OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GENERAL ELECTION

Different views have been expressed on the outcome of the recent South African general election. There is, however, general consensus amongst political commentators that the fact that the National Party lost seats to both the left and right wings of the political spectrum is indeed a positive political development. The phenomenal growth of the Democratic Party is also seen as a

positive political development even though this party still failed to become the official opposition. It is possible that the general election results might have taught National Party strategists that it is dangerous for a political party to attempt to be all things to all voters.

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There is now a pressing need for the National Party to re-define its political position in relation to two opposing political camps in white politics which are represented by the Conservative Party on the right and the Democratic Party on the left. I expect that this re-definition will most probably be in the direction of the Democratic Party and not the Conservative Party. This expectation is possibly backed by President de Klerk's own comments on the election results when he said that over 70 percent of white voters in South Africa had supported political change in one form or the other. In so saying President de Klerk was of course alluding to the fact that the National and Democratic Party voters constituted one pro-reform bloc while the Conservative Party voters constituted another anti-reform bloc.

Finally, the recent election also underlined the urgent need for a new negotiated constitution to replace the thoroughly discredited tricameral parliamentary system. Although one leg of the tricameral parliament in the form of the white House Of Assembly remains reasonably viable, the other two legs, namely, the Coloured House Of Representatives and the Indian House Of Delegates have been thoroughly discredited as a result of boycotts, lack of real political power and allegations of corruption among members. This is not to say of course that there

have been no allegations of corruption in the House Of Assembly. The difference perhaps lies in the fact that culprits in the House Of Assembly have been weeded out by Commissions Of Inquiry while in the House Of Delegates they have remained members of Parliament.

THE QUIET BLACK REVOLUTION

Not much has been written or said about what I prefer to call here the "quiet black revolution" taking place in South Africa today. Commentators such as John Kane-Berman of the South African Institute Of Race Relations and Andrew Clark, an American living in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, have written extensively about this quiet black revolution. This is a revolution conceived and spearheaded by blacks themselves and it harnesses black assertive skills in a variety of socio-economic spheres:

When the Conservative Party — controlled City Council of Boksburg applied apartheid laws which debarred blacks from using public facilities in that town, the town was hit by unprecedented consumer boycotts which threatened to bring economic activity to a virtual standstill. These consumer boycotts dampened the enthusiasm of the Conservative Party to introduce more apartheid in other towns under its control, and enabled the National Party to win the Boksburg seat fairly comfortably during the last general election.

The efficacy of consumer boycotts as strategies to dismantle apartheid has of course been enhanced by the increase in the

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