

# How long until Cinderella parties come to the ball?



**A**T long last it appears that the leaders of the two major parties in the negotiation process, the National Party and the ANC, have accepted the absolute necessity for a resolution of the current political stalemate.

South Africa is a deeply divided society and the decision to form a government of national unity for a period of at least five years is the only sensible choice. It will give South Africa the much-needed stability and consensus which will be essential in dealing with the socio-economic challenges in the second half of the '90s. It is more than probable that if the MPLA and Unita could have reached a similar agreement prior to Angola's election, that country would not now be locked in violent conflict. The art of negotiation is not to gain as much as possible for one's party, but to reach compromises which will be to the greater good of all.

Our political leaders, who have come in for very strong criticism for their lack of statesmanship, deserve praise for reaching this important milestone (it is ironic that a great deal is owed to the once-despised and feared Joe Slovo for his seminal paper some months ago calling for a government of national unity to last for at least five years!). It is of course important to persuade as many of the other parties as possible who will be attending the next round of multi-party talks to agree with this basic concept.



*Angola, September 1992.....government of national unity in SA a sensible choice.*

**T**O exclude the Conservative Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party would be disastrous. However, despite the progress that has been made, we cannot be too sanguine about the prospect of all the parties agreeing to a government of national unity. South Africans have been disappointed too often to assume that all will proceed smoothly.

If a major actor, say the CP or the IFP, refuses to endorse the idea of a government of national unity, what will happen? Separately, they have the capacity to severely disrupt the process. Together, they could increase the climate of violence and instability.

In particular, Buthelezi's flirtation with secession has grave implications. Fortunately De Klerk and Mandela are not unaware of this. Therefore it can be expected that some concessions will have to be made in terms of self-determination on the one hand and regionalism on the other. To achieve this will take the wis-

dom of Solomon! (The move by some MPs from the NP and the DP as well as Solidarity could have a moderating influence on the IFP. On the other hand, it may encourage the IFP leadership to take an even tougher negotiating stance.)

But what if the CP and/or the IFP remain intransigent? Can they be allowed to delay the process indefinitely? And if not, what is the cut-off point when the major parties representing the majority of South Africans will decide to proceed to an interim government without one or both of these parties? Because the costs would be very high, this can only be seen as a last resort. But the one commodity that South Africa does not have is unlimited time. The socio-economic pressures demand a speeding up rather than a slowing down of the process. It is this fact which has driven the ANC and the National Party to set

aside some of their demands in order to reach consensus. The pressure is on all other parties to make similar concessions in order that the process can be carried forward. Political bickering can only worsen an already serious economic climate.

The CP and the IFP, therefore, should be under no illusions that they can delay the process indefinitely. Unreasonable demands and interminable delays will not receive the support of the international community, nor the major political parties. More importantly, unnecessary delays will receive the censure and condemnation of the majority of South

Africans who have grown weary and impatient with the machinations of some political leaders.

To proceed without the CP and/or the IFP is not desirable and could be very dangerous. But to delay the process indefinitely could be an even higher price to pay. Sooner rather than later the tough decisions will have to be made. Hopefully the multi-party negotiations will give all parties an opportunity to support a rapid move towards elections for an interim government, which will be truly representative.

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