

# What it means to be a leader now



It has been said before – South Africa is a very strange society. Against the background of deep social and racial cleavages, against the spectre of ever-increasing unemployment with its attendant misery and instability, our political leaders continue to play fast and loose with the hopes and aspirations of all South Africans.

Chief Minister Mangosutho Buthelezi and 20 000 of his IFP supporters march through Johannesburg carrying dangerous weapons. This in defiance of the recommendations of the National Peace Accord and the Goldstone Commission. The weapons, according to eye witnesses, included wooden and metal sticks, axes, spears and baseball bats. Mr Felgate, senior spokesperson for the IFP, insists that "Zulus will continue to carry their traditional weapons despite the outlawing of these". Baseball bats!? Is this how far American imperialism has reached!? Perhaps having failed to make any impression on the international soccer scene, South Africa will do a lot better in baseball! If it wasn't so serious, it would be farcical. The carrying of dangerous weapons against the background of continuing violence is at least as reckless and provocative as the ANC's determination to march on Ulundi.

One of the basic reasons why the ANC continues to threaten to march on Ulundi and Mmabatho is the lack of political freedom which exists in many homelands and so-called independent states. The call for Mr Mandela to cancel these marches because of the prevailing climate in no way excuses the bankrupt policies of the government in this regard.

It is the government and the government alone which must accept full responsibility for the balkanisation of South Africa and the consequent lack of political freedom and denial of democracy. It is the government and the government alone which has the capacity to bring pressure to bear upon those leaders who deny basic fundamental rights to all of their people. It is a nonsense for the government to suggest that these homelands enjoy sovereignty. Without the government paying the bill, at the expense of the South African taxpayer, they would not be able to last for 24 hours. It is completely within their power to bring pressure to bear on these states.

The latest charade in the dilution of democracy is the recent short session of parliament. It is clear that the National Party, with the State President in the vanguard, used this session in the first place to placate the party faithful. In the second place, the government attempted to ram through unpopular legislation at all costs.

The question of indemnity is highly controversial and despite many warnings and pleas from a variety of sources, Mr De Klerk went ahead and tried to force through the Further Indemnity Bill. In trying to steamroller parliament and force the bill through the President's Council, the State President has made the concept of democracy meaningless and has dragged the present unrepresentative parliament to a new low and into further disrepute.

At this critical time of its history, South Africa doesn't need a lame duck parliament which is manipulated by the ruling party.

South Africa doesn't need marches, armed or otherwise. We need men and women of vision who, because of the seriousness of our times, will set aside party political ambitions and self-interest, and work together for the common good.

Having said that, what does it really amount to? It is one thing to be critical of the current leadership. But it is another to suggest alternative democratic action. If the key leaders were to take seriously a commitment to building the nation and resolving conflict and setting South Africa on a road to democracy, peace and prosperity, certain gestures have to be made.

To start the process, Mr De Klerk could immediately announce that after due consideration and for the sake of genuine reconciliation, he is delaying the Further Indemnity Bill until it can be considered by an interim government. It will mean that Mr Mandela will state publicly that for the sake of reconciliation the ANC will not march on Ulundi and Mmabatho. It will mean that Chief Buthelezi will no longer defy the law relating to the bearing of dangerous weapons in public and declare that the IFP will respect the judgement of the National Peace Accord and the Goldstone Commission regarding this matter. It would also mean that these three leaders will agree to meet around a table in order to thrash out their differences and to set a timetable for multilateral negotiations leading towards an interim government.

**T**HIS is in no way to minimise the serious differences in policy and attitudes between the three parties they represent. But the place to resolve these differences is not through point-scoring and public acrimony, but at the negotiation table. They must begin to lead by example. If the situation is such, and the differences are vast, then it may make good sense to have a mediator or facilitator who could bring about the meeting and enable the three leaders to discuss sensibly and seriously the issues which have divided them for so long. They should not be allowed to end the discussions until, through compromise and consensus, they find a way forward to further negotiations.

In the United States of America, there are clear signs that ordinary Americans are contemptuous and weary of traditional politics and self-serving politicians. The time is long overdue for ordinary South Africans who are just trying to get on with their lives, getting their children to school, of feeding and clothing their families, of making ends meet, to demand of their leaders the integrity, the vision and the common sense which would replace the petty politics and the furthering of their own political ends. If ordinary South Africans, who are fearful of their future and the future of their children, and are fed up with the on/off negotiations, can be galvanised into putting pressure on all political parties, this would indeed be democracy in action.

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