

Helpful outside pressure on the negotiating parties will not continue indefinitely, warns JACK SPENCE, Director of Studies at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London.

GET THINGS RIGHT IN THE INTERIM PHASE OF REFORM!

IN A caustic leader *The Times* berated Douglas Hurd, the British Foreign Secretary for leading a *troika* of EC ministers to South Africa. Ostensibly, the paper's scorn seemed justified: after all, by his own admission, Mr Hurd's visit was "not to knock heads together".

What then — one might legitimately ask — was it for? Fact finding — that excuse for a junket that's so beloved of politicians? Hardly, given that the 'facts' of the three month old stalemate in negotiations were well known. In any case, what are ambassadors for if not to brief their political masters on events in distant places?

Yet, to put the kindest interpretation on what *The Times* called a "pointless mission", Douglas Hurd was doing no more than could be expected of a foreign minister dealing with a state where British interests remain important: that is, engaging in diplomatic double-speak, disguising his real intent to knock some sense into parties which appeared unable to compromise and return to the conference table.

That objective, following a De Klerk-Mandela summit has now been achieved. (Nonetheless, Chief Buthelezi's deliberate active self-exclusion from negotiations is alarming. President de Klerk may well be counting on Inkatha support in the long run, but if it is not forthcoming and elections, for example, are boycotted, the potential for yet more violent confrontation cannot be excluded. Come back Douglas Hurd — all is forgiven!)

The precise degree to which EC pressure was instrumental in getting agreement between the NP government and the ANC is difficult to judge, but no doubt it was one factor among many which led the two leaders to the summit. Indeed, whatever the strictures of *The Times*, the fact is that external involvement in domestic South African politics is now a fact of life. Both the NP government and the ANC have accepted (and in the case of the latter welcomed) the presence of UN monitors/observers

while Mr Pik Botha, the Foreign Minister, is on record requesting a senior UN "person" to "act as a catalyst" to help get negotiations under way and, more important, keep them going until agreement is reached.

The dye was cast with the visit of Mr Cyrus Vance, the UN Secretary-General's special envoy earlier this year and we may confidently expect an international presence (UN-EC-Commonwealth) to monitor the first non-racial election whenever that is held.

THIS FLURRY of international commitment is surely to be welcomed. The fact that it occurs indicates that South Africa is still on the international agenda, that the external world retains a profound interest in a decent political outcome of the protracted negotiations that began over two years ago. Indeed, the external observer cannot but conclude that the local actors need all the help they can get to maintain the momentum of constitutional resolution.

This is not to say that the UN will play that "imperial" role in South Africa to which Douglas Hurd alluded in a recent press interview: the deliberate intervention in a conflict-torn society e.g. Somalia, regardless of local susceptibilities, and, in particular, insistence on the time-honoured principle of state sovereignty. We are a long way from such radical departures from the traditional norms that have governed and ordered international society in the past, and that proposition holds for South Africa as much as it does for Yugoslavia.

Clearly, there is a limit to what the outside world can do to help the negotiation process along.

It can, no doubt, "facilitate" by applying discreet pressure on local actors; it can and will stress the consequences of delay in reaching a new apartheid-free political and economic order. Its spokesmen and emissaries can and will legitimately point out that time is running out, that at most South Africa has two years to achieve a durable

political structure and one capable of attracting both private investment (a scarce good, hotly competed for elsewhere in the world) and aid from international funding agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF.

Failure to reach this goal means that an economy even more depressed than now will be unable to satisfy even modest expectations of jobs, food and housing on the part of a population set to expand from 38.1 million in 1990 to 47.5 million by the year 2000. Nelson Mandela — following his interview with Derek Keys, the Finance Minister — can be in no doubt about the time constraints and this remains a crucial imperative pushing the two leaders towards agreement.

FURTHERMORE, the world's interest in South Africa might well in these circumstances turn to indifference — especially as the 'Time of Troubles' characteristic of global politics looks set to persist indefinitely. There will be correspondingly less commitment to do much more — in South Africa's case — than engage in band aid diplomacy e.g., look after the interests of external passport holders and salvage whatever remains of their interests in a broken-backed economy and a political system barely able to cope with unprecedented social pressures.

So what's new, South African readers might well retort to this gloomy litany?

We all — insiders and outsiders alike — subscribe to the conventional wisdom that the major actors will remain committed to a negotiated outcome because no other alternative is available.

The NP government remains powerful, but it cannot effectively govern without acknowledging the countervailing presence of the ANC and its capacity to resort to 'mass action' (as it had to in June) in desperation at government's refusal to make concessions.

True, 'mass action' (strikes, etc.) had short term utility in demonstrating to ANC rank and file that the organisation



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had bargaining power outside the confines of the conference room. Yet the use of the so-called 'Leipzig option' in the Ciskei demonstrates all too clearly that elements in the ANC leadership have failed to recognise the profound difference between an East German state with virtually no popular support and denied the prop of Soviet intervention and a South African government still capable — in the last analysis — of ruling even without a truly *popular* mandate.

Yet in one profound sense *The Times* leader writer is right: only the local actors "can find an agreed route down which to go to a new constitution and . . . they must find a way of delivering the support of their followers in going down that route."

Both are formidable tasks: the late intrusion of "federalism" into the constitutional debate by the state president suggests that the oft quoted view that broad agreement exists on general principles needs drastic qualification. Whether the new South Africa should be federal or unitary is far more than a mere 'nuts and bolts' issue; it is a fundamental constitutional principle with crucial implications for power distribution, the protection and enhancement of civil liberties and the role of an independent judiciary. We need only recall the way in which General Smuts 'dished' the federalists at the national convention in 1908 and the consequences that followed for the development of the South African state.

NO DOUBT this topic will engender fierce debate when talks resume and compromise will not be easy. ANC reservations are understandable: capturing the state at the centre seems to offer the prospect of using its exclusive power to do what has to be done to promote the dignity and welfare of a citizenry long deprived of these precious goods. Yet the Latin American experience suggests that the recovery of several states in that region occurred in part because their publics (the very poor included) were

finally forced to acknowledge the myth of the omniscient state. Virtually all other ideological prescriptions had been tried and found wanting. One can only hope that the new South Africa will avoid a similarly painful learning process.

Thus there is much to be said for setting limits to the capacity of the state and mechanisms such as privatisation, deregulation and, above all, a devolution of power should not be casually dismissed.

Moreover, South Africa is trying to reform within the confines of existing state boundaries in contrast to what has happened in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia where suppressed ethnic tensions burst the state asunder. Thus, devolution as a means of forestalling such catastrophic division has, therefore, much to recommend it.

The events of the last few months have also demonstrated the importance of getting and sustaining grass roots support for constitutional compromise. Indeed, the Boipatong and Ciskei tragedies have made the task even harder for the "moderate" leadership of the ANC, given what appears to be widespread distrust of the De Klerk government and its intentions on the part of many rank and file members.

Particularly resented is the failure of the NP government to take effective means against dissident members of the security forces.

The difficulty for De Klerk is that the security force/violence issue is a structural one with its roots deeply embedded in the psychology and sociology of the apartheid state. Overnight root and branch reform is, therefore, an unrealistic expectation; certainly more is required than just moving police generals around. The task is immense and one that will have to be high on the agenda for a transitional government and probably its post-apartheid successor. But how to convince the rank and file of the truth of this proposition when so many are affected by the daily round of political 'violence' that corrodes their lives?

AND HERE the contrast between the smooth running of the State President's office and the cumbersome decision making process of the ANC is instructive. The former is stuffed with clever civil servants and policy advisers, all secure in the mandate provided by the government's white constituency in the March referendum. On the other hand, the ANC leadership has to filter decisions

via a twenty-member National Working Committee (NWC) and an eighty-eight strong National Executive Committee (NEC). These bodies no doubt reflect the diverse constituency the ANC represents; Mandela may indeed be more accountable than his counterpart, but it does mean that he has a far harder task in trying to devise a strategy broadly acceptable to the membership of his organisation.

These random reflections were prompted by a recent visit to South Africa and the news that a summit involving De Klerk and Mandela had agreed to restart the negotiation process. The major item on the agenda will be the structure, composition and role of a transitional administration. Its major advantage will be that the key actors will be locked into government and, therefore, have to share the responsibility for policy making particularly on such issues as the control and reduction of political violence in the direction of economic policy.

These are, of course, potentially divisive and all the parties will have to compromise if effective government is not to be paralysed and the threat of 'walk-outs' avoided.

The transitional authority will also be responsible for supervising elections to a constituent assembly — an historic moment for South Africa as the black population votes en masse for the first time.

THE ELECTORAL process has already begun as politicians and psephologists alike do frantic sums to calculate voting outcomes while De Klerk and his colleagues look to the "uncommitted" black voter for support in their efforts to ensure that a "power sharing" rather than a majoritarian post-apartheid regime will emerge following elections based on a new constitution. Whether the white minority in South Africa can buck the trend of elections elsewhere in Africa — e.g. Namibia and Zimbabwe — in which the dominant liberation movements emerged with clear majorities is another matter entirely.

These developments ensure that for some time to come South Africa will continue to engage the attention of the outside world. Thereafter, South Africa — for good or ill — will have the status of "just another country" and that is why it is so important to get things right in the interim phase, to give the new South Africa the best chance of survival in what will be a difficult and dangerous world. ●