

ANC seems disastrously incapable of learning from others' mistakes

AS THE ANC aspires to the government, it is appropriate that we evaluate the possible consequences carefully, to decide on whether such a development should be supported or opposed.

Many will agree that the country's main problem is the poverty of a large proportion of the population. This in turn results in desperation, violence and crime, and if this problem is not vigorously attacked, there will be no peace and very little economic development. Nor are we alone in having this problem. It is indeed the problem of most of Africa, and there is little hope of improvement.

Consequently, to blame poverty in South Africa purely on apartheid is to foster the delusion that the removal of apartheid (with possibly some redistribution of wealth) will solve the problem.

The *sine qua non*, in fact, of overcoming poverty is that the rate of economic growth must exceed the rate of population growth. If this condition is not met there is no ideology that can save us from a very dismal future — a future in which unemployment, unrest and violence will increase rather than decrease. A burgeoning population and the absence of sufficient wealth will mean that adequate pollution controls are not affordable. Even those who prefer the simpler life will find their options very limited as our precious natural heritage is destroyed.

We should, therefore, reject any political movement which fails adequately to address this fundamental problem.

Because this principle was appreciated by the rulers of Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea, those countries put a very high value on economic development, even to the point of making full political freedom subordinate to it. However much this order of priority was criticised, the consequent prosperity of the masses has provided the kind of environment which will safeguard the democratic future of the people (ignoring for the moment the possible negative effects of Hong Kong's reverting to China in 1997).

What also comes as a surprise to many is how exceptionally clean they find Singapore and Hong Kong, despite the very high population density.

by

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These countries have shown how poverty can be overcome, with better prospects for the entire population than are available elsewhere in the region. But has the ANC shown that it is aware of this necessary condition for overcoming poverty and all its disastrous consequences? There is no doubt that ANC members generally are opposed to continued poverty and violence but, as experience elsewhere in Africa has shown, good intentions are not enough.

Let us consider the implications of what their leaders are saying. According to what Mr Reggie September has told me, the ANC has never considered the relative effects of economic and population growth on poverty. It was also reported that when Professor Albie Sachs flew from Johannesburg to Cape Town he was so impressed by the size of the country that he saw no need for population limitation.

As for the prospects for economic growth, we know that the ANC as a matter of policy first wants full political freedom before it will call off sanctions. It ignores the fact that the priority given to economic growth in the Pacific rim has ensured strong support for democracy (in contrast, in fact, with much of Africa where Nkrumah's dictum of 'seek ye first the political kingdom' applied). Having embarked on a process which ensures that the next general election will be non-racial, we have moreover no time to lose in getting our economy right. The ANC's attitude is, therefore, far from helpful.

Obviously the ANC will not persist with sanctions if it should become the government, and it will presumably try to attract foreign investment to foster

economic growth. But will it succeed?

It must be borne in mind that there is nothing brave about money. It likes to feel safe, and it certainly won't go where there is danger unless there is hope for an excellent return.

But we are already finding ourselves in competition with Eastern Europe, which is desperately seeking funds to help overcome the effects of many decades of communism. Their ability to attract funds will, moreover, depend on how convincingly they accept the principles through which the prosperous countries of the world became rich, and not in their willingness to reform socialism. In view of the fact that Joe Slovo says that the failure of communism in eastern Europe must be blamed on the practitioners rather than on the principle itself, it is clear that at the top level of the ANC the idea prevails that communism can be reformed and successfully applied in South Africa. On being asked about this possibility in Cape Town recently, the Polish Counsellor-Minister stationed in Pretoria noted that it is an illusion to which some members of Solidarity had clung, but that anybody still sticking to it is simply telling lies.

With all the violence in South Africa at the present time, investment prospects are not good, and we certainly do not want any additional deterrents. But the ANC's ideological baggage of its past history hardly makes it suitable for public office.

Whatever way we look at the ANC, it seems disastrously incapable of learning from the mistakes of others. It still regards its affiliation with the SACP as more important than any other, thereby ensuring that there is no prospect of attracting foreign investment if it should become the government.

And bearing in mind its failure to address the question of population growth, it must be totally rejected by all thinking South Africans as not having an appreciation of the needs of any significant group of class of South Africans.

If this judgement is too harsh, it is up to the ANC to tell us whose interest it has at heart and how it proposes to meet their aspirations without relinquishing the communist affiliation. ●