



# Adrift between shadow and reality

**A**T LAST the firm prospect of a date for an election which will involve all South Africans! This will in part dispel the sense of despair and fear which has gripped so many in recent months. Further, the progress made by technical committees of the multi-party forum is significant, in particular the resolution giving the technical committee a mandate to formulate regulations on the structures, powers and functions of regions.

This has been an issue which has given rise to serious objections from Inkatha and this decision will certainly put to rest some of their fears, thus giving a decisive boost for the negotiation process. It is more than probable that as a direct result of this decision the IFP will not oppose the establishment of a Transitional Executive Council.

In addition, the decision of the forum to accept self-determination as a right will encourage the Conservative Party and the other right-wing parties to stay at the negotiation table. All in all, the readiness and willingness to compromise augurs well for an early date for an election and the appointment of a Transitional Executive Council. This will set the stage for a protracted election campaign culminating in April 1994.

Unfortunately the deliberations of the multi-party forum have far less impact on the general public than many other incidents that are taking place in South Africa.

Firstly, the on-going education crisis with schoolchildren going on the rampage, burning cars, boycotting classes, is a much more vivid image than the concept of party leaders sitting around a table. The strike by teachers, the dithering of educational authorities and cabinet ministers, the disgraceful inability to take decisive action regarding matriculation fees and salary negotiations have a far greater impact on the general confidence of the public.

The chronic state of black education is a breeding ground for bitterness and it should have come as no surprise that the feelings of hopelessness have spilt over on to the streets. It is equally understandable that scholars and teachers alike have come to the conclusion that no one takes notice of their grievances until they adopt radical and visible methods. No one can condone some of the actions and statements of Cosas, but attention must be given to the root causes and not merely the symptoms. Teachers generally, and black education in particular, have had a raw deal.

Apart from the constitutional area, it seems that government is inept and totally incapable of managing the transition. Months ago, all the warning signals were there of an impend-

ing educational crisis. These signals were largely ignored. Once again, we have the familiar scenario: demand is made, it is ignored, the crisis grows, polarisation increases and hey presto, bring in De Klerk and Mandela to clean up the mess. Judging from initial reaction from the teachers and from Cosas, no unilateral decision by even these leaders will suffice.

What is needed is an educational forum to deal seriously and realistically with long-standing grievances involving all the key actors and facilitators.

Secondly, the irresponsible statement by Peter Mokaba, 'kill the boer, kill the farmer' is drawing the inevitable and predictable reaction from farmers in many parts of the country. Their mass meetings, their tough statements, their call for curfews, road-blocks and a virtual call to arms further deepens the climate of distrust and tears apart community relations in rural areas.

Thirdly, the stepping on to central stage of former powerful generals raises the spectre of a unified right-wing bloc which threatens to subvert the negotiation process. Although they have moderated their position somewhat, the intervention by former generals is a cause for considerable concern and exacerbates the general climate of uncertainty which currently prevails.

Fourthly, against these manifestations of conflict there is the backdrop of continuing violence, daily reports of continued attacks on the homes of elderly people in suburban and isolated areas, coupled with the persistent killings in black areas. These all add to the general mood of pessimism.

The real question is, which is shadow and which is reality?

There can be no doubt that enormous progress is being made at the World Trade Centre, but it is a world which the overwhelming majority of South Africans never experience. Their world is the world of continuing unrest, increased unemployment and an awful feeling that the education crisis is only the tip of an iceberg.

Hopefully the appointment of a Transitional Executive Council will help to translate the shadowy negotiation process into the reality of security, education and better community relations. Certainly until such time as the public in South Africa can see a link between the world of formal negotiations and the world of daily life as it impacts upon them, the mood of uncertainty and insecurity will continue.



*Prevailing mood ... uncertainty and insecurity.*

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