

## About real leaders and true understanding

**I**N RECENT weeks all South Africans have been subjected to a barrage of graphic images of murder, mayhem and mass action. Images of hard-faced, gun-toting AWB guardsmen are juxtaposed with those of grim-faced youth proclaiming war on the education system, while national servicemen stand sentinel on all the major roads leading into Cape Town.

Against this background, the big three in South Africa are seen to be providing little of the leadership and vision so desperately required. The one chastises and demands that Britain fulfil its historic duty to South Africa, the other genially opens an international conference and talks of the millions of tourists about to swamp the country. Meanwhile the third struts around Europe declaring himself to be 'the most important and widely respected political figure in South Africa'.

The ordinary South African (whatever he or she may be) can be forgiven for being confused, uncertain and angry about the future of this country as the talking heads at the World Trade Centre appear on television screens, proclaiming another 'imminent breakthrough' in negotiations.

It seems most South Africans weren't advised or warned of the violence and trauma that transition would entail, or the tremendous opportunities it could present.

A couple of years ago I had the opportunity to spend some time with a deputy editor of a major Cape daily newspaper. I asked him whether it was possible for his newspaper to present transition in a positive light. I suggested a page on a daily, or perhaps just a weekly basis, of success stories of transition: integration in schools; integration of South Africans in urban areas; integration in the workplace; the positive response to various NGOs working in the townships. His reply was that although that sounded like a positive idea, it unfortunately didn't sell newspapers.

I came away from that conversation deeply troubled and recalled a trip to our neighbouring countries I had undertaken with a group of South Africans in August 1990. Over a 10-day period we visited Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia, meeting with government leaders, business personalities, trade unionists and members of political organisations. Each of those constituencies had one thing to say repeatedly about our country: 'Your successful transition to a democratic society means that our transitions will be successful.' The images of the violence emanating from South Africa had affected them deeply and wherever we went we were encouraged to do whatever we could to stop the violence.

At this stage, one has to ask the question whether South Africa does in fact have the quality of leadership with vision and commitment to create and inspire a new democratic society?

The assassination of Chris Hani and its violent aftermath has underpinned the deep resentments and racial polarisation brought about by decades of apartheid ideology. It is very

apparent that this same ideology has spawned a generation of bantustan leaders, civil servants, military officers and business opportunists whose vested interests are under severe threat from a new South Africa.

Never before in our history have we needed leadership with commitment to all South Africans as we do now - but where will we find this leadership and vision that we so desperately require? We can find it in our schools, where thousands of teachers have, through the decades, worked tirelessly to create a vision of a better society among their students. We can find this leadership in the non-governmental sector where countless numbers of people decades ago recognised the severe damage caused by apartheid and provided resources and a recourse to justice denied to most people in our country. We can find this leadership in the churches where there are those who have, for many years, preached a spirit of tolerance, understanding and harmony to all South Africans.

However, given the tradition of authoritarianism and personality cults that so dominates here, these voices are seldom heard. We have reached the critical phase in our transition, where a solution will be imposed upon South Africans. Before that happens it is absolutely necessary for those institutions and organisations within civil society to stand up and be counted.

At this critical time, we must hear the voices of those people who understand the deep needs, concerns and fears of most South Africans. We need not hear the guttural vehemence of a Eugene Terre'Blanche or the sloganeering of a so-called youth leader. The 'we demand' syndrome must be transformed into a 'we offer' mode of thinking.

Political solutions that are without a human face must be rejected. Constitutional restructuring and a vote for all must be seen for what they are - merely that. Without a sense of humanity and a culture and spirit of tolerance, empathy and understanding, those solutions will not provide peace, security and prosperity.

Perhaps the time has come for a conference of civil society to negotiate in tandem with the multi-party negotiating forum to provide public comment on the solutions being thrashed out in the debate and discussion at the World Trade Centre. Perhaps then the majority of voices will have some possibility of representation at that venue.

We must now produce creative solutions to the endemic state of near-anarchy and violence. We also need to bury our arrogance and look to other societies which have gone through similar processes, and the dreams and aspirations that emerged from those struggles.

Perhaps our country needs to be permeated with Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech, or the lone voice of an Alan Paton in the 1950s, or the voice of an Albert Luthuli. We cannot just stand around any more and watch the destruction.

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