

Leadership

AFTER 40 YEARS IN THE DESERT OF APARTHEID

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The desert of apartheid

After 40 years of wandering in the desert of apartheid, Afrikanerdom and the National Party are today further removed from their supposed White Promised Land than 40 years ago.

Instead of being on the banks of the river Jordan, ready to enter the land of Canaan, Afrikanerdom (and the rest of the South African population) are trapped in the middle of the desert of apartheid.

For quite a long time the protagonists of Afrikaner nationalism pampered the idea that the Afrikaner volk was a select - if not a chosen - people with a God-given destiny. During the first half of this century the Afrikaners experienced relative economic deprivation and a lack of effective political power. This situation contributed to an overheated Afrikaner nationalism. Afrikaner leaders found all kinds of parallels between the exile of the Israelites in Egypt and the humiliation of the Afrikaners.

During the first half of the century, the Afrikaners were susceptible to the idea that they were also a select people with a manifest destiny to restore their national (volk) sovereignty and their national freedom and self-determination. These ideas easily gave rise to the ideology that it would be proper for the Afrikaner nation to use political and other measures (not necessarily parliamentary) to eradicate the real and imagined injustices inflicted upon them. This set the scene for a new symbolic Great Trek from the Egypt-like "captivity" in a country dominated by the English establishment towards a White Promised Land governed and controlled by the Afrikaner volk.

But apart from the struggle against English-speakers for political and economic hegemony, Afrikaner tribalism and nationalism were even more strongly promoted by the fear that they could be over-run by Blacks. During the 1920s and the 1930s poor-White Afrikaners and Blacks competed for scarce jobs in the cities. This played a decisive role in transforming Afrikaner tribalism and nationalism into a forceful political party with a dynamic ideology and a religious justification for what it was about to do en route from "Egypt" to the "promised land".

The changing face of apartheid

Almost immediately after the NP took office in 1948, it started to implement a three-prong programme. Additional discriminatory laws were enacted and also extended towards Coloureds and Indians; the bureaucracy was systematically enlarged and additional para-statal were developed to create lucrative opportunities mainly for Afrikaners; and a variety of welfare (or redistributive) programmes were launched to uplift the mainly Afrikaans poor-Whites.

During the greater part of the fifties these measures were easily justified as temporary measures to solve the (undeserved) poverty of the Afrikaners. When this moral justification became very questionable at the end of the fifties, Dr Verwoerd removed almost all moral discomfort by offering an ideological justification in terms of Grand Apartheid, i.e. the idea of separate freedoms and national self-determination for every ethnic group.

During the term of Mr Vorster, a variety of pragmatic reasons were offered to explain why the Verwoerdian dream of a (pure) White promised land was not attainable and why Blacks should be accepted as permanent residents in "White" South Africa. But in

spite of pragmatic efforts to give apartheid a more humane face, the Verwoerdian ideology was still propagated unashamedly as the moral justification for apartheid although it was acknowledged that grand apartheid was no longer attainable. This was the beginning of the moral hypocrisy that in due time became completely institutionalised.

The Botha government abolished many democratic institutions in the name of reform and replaced them with a multitude of new structures (mainly for co-option) while power became more concentrated and consolidated in the State President's office. These changes bureaucratized apartheid and created bureaucratic wealth for some Whites and some Blacks. At the same time Botha's reform securocratized apartheid and created almost indisputable securocratic power.

As the wandering in the desert of apartheid dragged on during the 40 years, Malan's parliamentarianism (to enact discrimination and redistribution) was supplemented by Verwoerd's ethnic ideology (to supply a moral justification). This was supplemented by Vorster's pragmatism (to keep the clumsy system going). During the last decade Botha's bureaucratic and securocratic structures have been superimposed on all the previous forms of apartheid to keep (and force) the crumbling system into an upright position.

After 40 years of apartheid, the NP - and with it the rest of South Africa - is bogged down in apartheid. The apparent changes since the simple apartheid of Malan and Strijdom, the grand apartheid of Verwoerd, into the pragmatic apartheid of Vorster and into the bureaucratic and especially securocratic apartheid of Botha, have altered little in the basic underlying structure of apartheid, i.e. the structure of White privileges and power vs. Black deprivation and powerlessness.

To an objective observer of the South African scene after 40 years of NP government, the following ought to be obvious:

- * A White promised land is not, and never was, attainable, although the supporters of the extreme Right are still being misled by their false prophets towards all kinds of mirages.
- * The transition towards a non-racial South Africa is impossible as long as the NP remains in power. The NP will probably remain in office for a considerable time despite its paralysis and its inability either to identify the full dimensions of the mounting crisis or to do something truly effective about it.
- * Consequently, South Africa is doomed to remain an apartheid society for the foreseeable future. It will become more isolated, more divided, more autocratic, much poorer with unhappy and still separated societies

What went wrong?

The worshipping of golden calves in White oases

The NP government failed to reach the imagined promised land of the Afrikaner tribe. Yet it used its parliamentary power to create and expand lucrative (and mainly White) oases in the desert of apartheid.

As Whites are the main beneficiaries of these oases, the question arises who created them. To what extent are they the result of the initiative, entrepreneurship, ingenuity, frugality and the "sweat equity" of the Whites alone? To what extent did Blacks contribute to their making.

If we consider the comprehensive discriminatory measures, the inequality of opportunities and the restrictions placed on the freedom and movement of Blacks, it seems reasonable to say that a large part of these (almost exclusive) White oases are not the

making of the Whites, but the result of apartheid. In spite of recent increases in government spending on Blacks, the Whites still have a very long way to go before their apartheid account will be settled.

For the Afrikaners the rendezvous in these oases have been very advantageous. While their per capita-income was less than half that of their English-speaking compatriots in 1948, it has risen to 75 per cent of the (now much higher) income of the English-speakers.

For the Israelites their wandering in the desert were a long and painful experience to purify them and to make them worthy to enter their Promised Land. Their occasional relapse in the worshipping of golden calves cost them dearly and prolonged their desert journey.

The 40-year-long stay in their oases has not only enriched the Whites but it has also spoiled them and inculcated strong materialistic and bourgeois attitudes in their value system. Many Whites became typical worshippers of golden calves. Originally these calves were mainly fattened in the (English orientated) capitalistic stables of the private sector. Lately many of them can be found in a multitude of (Afrikaner controlled) bureaucratic stables!

In retrospect it is quite fortunate that there never has been a White promised land. As a spoiled people and as recent worshippers of golden calves, the Afrikaners are today far less worthy of entering such a land than they were 40 years ago.

For the same reasons, tragically enough, neither the Afrikaners nor their English-speaking compatriots are today spiritually prepared to make those sacrifices without which structural reform cannot succeed.

Gorbachev showed a profound insight into the nature of reform when he wrote that "everyone will probably have to make sacrifices at the first stage of perestroika, but some will have to give up for good the privileges they do not deserve".

As long as Whites are not prepared to slaughter many of their golden calves, we will remain wandering in the desert of apartheid. And as long as they are not prepared to relinquish some of their misguided beliefs - the so-called holy cows - reform will also not succeed.

But cannot we expect the government to take the initiative in getting rid of these golden calves and holy cows? I fear not, ^A as long as this government remains as committed to the status quo and the bureaucracy, it will not even allow the painful and messy business of calf and cow slaughtering by non-governmental reform processes. It has too high a stake in these holy animals.

In the meantime the fattening of these animals will not bring salvation to anybody. In the longer run it will not even bring earthly salvation. We face the prospect that in the declining economy many of the holy animals may die from a lack of economic fodder.

The racial and tribal obsession of the Afrikaners

To mobilize growing party political support in the decades after 1948, the NP used a double strategy: it launched propaganda campaigns to strengthen the racial and tribal prejudices of the Afrikaners and used its power to compensate its mainly Afrikaner supporters with all kinds of favours. These games were played harder and harder to deliver growing party political support - at least until the seventies.

The propaganda strategy was based on closely integrated programmes. Firstly, the racial fear of the Whites (and