

WE CANNOT ABOLISH APARTHEID ... BUT WE CAN (AND WE M U S T)  
START TO DISMANTLE IT

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Apartheid has become one of the worst words of our time. In the world of to-day it has become a symbol of something which is totally unacceptable, and seemingly also indefensible.

We are living in a world that has shrunked to a "global village". It is a world dominated by the mass media. In this world symbols and images are of decisive importance.

As a symbol apartheid has attained a meaning that is clearly no longer reconcilable with the values and attitudes operational in the Western world at the end of the 20th century. Apartheid symbolises something that goes against the grain of the current trend of history.

Apartheid as it exists in South Africa has many negative and deplorable dimensions. But we must realise that the image projected by the symbolised meaning it has attained in to-day's world, is far more negative and indeed something abhorrent in the eyes of many. We can fight this wrong image, but in the end we cannot do much about it.

Attempts to call Apartheid by other names have failed. Attempts to reform apartheid to give it a more humane face are very meaningful and commendable. But at the end of the day it is still apartheid ... and that is for moral and other reasons not acceptable any more.

As long as we are still committed to apartheid as such, our chances to offer successful resistance against the well-orchestrated anti-South African campaign are very slim. Until we get to the point where we become committed towards the total dismantling of Apartheid, our options are rather limited.



- (i) We may plead for appreciation of our unique situation from the world and our friends. Our conditions are indeed unique and not comparable to any country in the world.
- (ii) We can try to explain to the world that one or another kind of Apartheid system is for the time being the only way to organise the social, economic and political life in a civilised and orderly way in a country where a quarter of the population are First World people and three-quarters are Third World people. Given the small size of the modern sector and its small tax capacity we cannot afford to fully democratise our political and economic life at this stage.
- (iii) We can blame the rest of the world for its hypocrisy and its double standards. We can try to highlight the discrimination and the structural injustice in every other country of the world. The existence of these discriminatory practices are, however, one thing. The legal sanction which the apartheid system bestows on similar practices is quite another. That, in a nutshell, explains the strong opposition of the rest of the world.
- (iv) We can accuse the rich countries that they are practicing a form of "territorial apartheid" behind the protective "boundaries" of the nation-state idea. We can argue that the world system discriminate in an inhumane way against the peoples of the poor countries. Although the nation-state idea may in due course come under the same kind of pressure as apartheid, it is not yet the case.

All these arguments are very relevant in putting the case of South Africa. But they provide little scope for counteracting the very negative symbolic meaning projected by apartheid. Against the extreme negative symbolic meaning it has attained, these arguments just do not wash.

But if apartheid has become such an impediment, why do we not abolish it without further ado? It is unfortunately not possible. Anyone who thinks that apartheid can be abolished overnight, underestimates the devastating consequences of such an attempt in a way which is politically naive and economically foolish.



Apartheid is not only a policy. It is also part and parcel of the South African pattern of life - socially, economically and politically. This pattern was structured in the 19th century. Since then it was systematically enlarged, legalised and adapted. It has become the very foundation of the building or structure of South Africa. Consequently it cannot be demolished in a short period of time without serious disruptive effects.

As a social structure apartheid can be compared with the Old Order in France before the French Revolution. During the Revolution an attempt was made to abolish the Old Order in one night. What the reformers of that night expected to be the arrival of an Utopia turned out to be only the beginning of a long upward and still incomplete process of social democratisation. But the night of 4/5 August 1789 witnessed the commitment towards greater social equality and mobility and towards the acknowledgement of human rights.

As an economic structure apartheid can be compared with High Capitalism in the 19th century. Interesting parallels exist between the privileged and protected position of the whites in South Africa and the bourgeoisie in the 19th century. Since the beginning of this century all the governments of the West have committed themselves towards greater economic equality and justice. No country tried to attain this end overnight. Although we witness the gradual growth of the Welfare State in Capitalist countries, real economic equality and justice have not yet materialised .... but there is progress.

What we urgently need is a comparable commitment towards the total dismantling of Apartheid. What we need is a Declaration of Intent from the government that will state in unequivocal terms that its ultimate aims are to dismantle apartheid peacefully, to get rid of all forms of discrimination, to work towards full human and civil rights for everybody and to create structures of equal and relevant political participation for everyone.

As part of such a declaration the government can also state that the process towards such goals cannot be a simple, linear and a short-term one. It cannot proceed at a pace that will cause disruption and endanger civilised standards. It will have to move through several phases before the ultimate goal can be reached. Rome was not built in one day.



Such a declaration of intent clearly will have disadvantages, but will hopefully have greater advantages and will create great opportunities.

It may have the unfortunate result of increased radicalism on the left and on the right. In the case of the former, it will in all probability quicken the spiral of rising expectations, create unreasonable demands and consequently create a greater degree of instability. In the case of the latter, it may cause disruptive resistance politics. The government must be realistic enough to realise that no solution to the South African situation can possibly satisfy all parties. We must look for the most acceptable common denominator. In order to achieve this by negotiations, the maintenance of law and order is a non-negotiable prerequisite.

Unfortunately, there will also be attempts to discredit such a declaration as a trick to play for time and to bluff the world. It will be stigmatised as a symbolic gesture and as an alternative for real reform. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that the government should prove the credibility of its commitment to real reform to critics both here and abroad. To this end the abolition or drastic revision of as many discriminatory laws as possible is an urgent prerequisite. Such a step would not only prove the credibility of the nationalist government, but also of the Coloured and Indian partners in the new tricameral parliament.

But on the other hand the potential internal and external advantages of such a declaration must not be underestimated. It <sup>may</sup> prove to be of enormous symbolic value. It can be a moral liberation for many South Africans who experience apartheid as a bondage. It can create new hope and enthusiasm for the future. It can command great foreign support for South Africa.

As the embodiment of a common longterm goal, such a declaration can prove to be the symbol that will unite all moderate people. This can give a new meaning to our common destiny. A common commitment to operate as a magnetic centre, is in urgent need in a country experiencing centrifugal forces.

If such a declaration can be made, it may also be the beginning of the end of our ideological quibbles. Then we can start to debate its practical implementation, the strategies needed and the timespan necessary to accomplish our goals.



The rate of reform towards the dismantling of apartheid will be determined in a decisive way by four crucial factors:

- (i) the growth rate of our economy (and especially its tax-paying capacity) - it tends to be too small;
- (ii) the growth rate of the black population - it tends to be far too high;
- (iii) the willingness of the whites to make the necessary sacrifices - it is far too small;
- (iv) the amount spent on black education.- it is still at too low a level.

None of these factors can be easily manipulated for policy purposes. Consequently, the road towards the total dismantling of apartheid is going to be a long and difficult one. The sooner we start, the better.