

WE NEED STRUCTURAL REFORM, NOT COSMETIC REFORM

SAMPIE TERREBLANCHE

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When PRES FW De Klerk deliver his speech at the opening of parliament on 1 February, he will have a golden opportunity to show his ^{mettle} ~~metal~~ as Great Reformer. This is an opportunity he dare not but take full advantage of.

[Since the NP became a so-called reform party at the beginning of the seventies it has constantly been inclined to do too little too late. Consequently its reform measures were not only cosmetic, but also of a nature that brought the term "reform" in disrepute.

De Klerk's historic speech on 2 Feb 1990 signalled the intention of the NP to make a clean break with its tradition of cosmetic reform. But has it succeeded in accomplishing this?

To emphasize the fact that the much needed reform is not only about the abolishment of apartheid, but ought to be mainly about the

constructing of a New South African society, many people prefer the term "structural reform". In his first public address after his release ~~on the 11th of February last year~~, mr Mandela made a strong plea for a "fundamental restructuring of our political and economic systems".

[It is for several reasons indeed more appropriate to make a plea for structural reform. Firstly, a structural approach focus attention on the fact that POWER - be it political, economic, bureaucratic or media power - is still very much concentrated in the hands of the white population comprising only 13 per cent of the citizens. If the reform measures are (or remain) of such a nature that it did not succeed to bring about an adequate ^{and} (hopefully orderly) empowerment for the people other than white, it will still be cosmetic reform instead of the highly needed structural reform. It will then not be possible to build a more just society, to stabilize the internal situation and to normalize our international relationships.

[Secondly, a commitment towards structural reform ~~is more appropriate because such a commitment~~ will necessitate a structural analysis of the true nature and causes of the South African problem. This ~~kind of analysis~~ will uncover the fact that the very unequal and unjust distribution of power between the different population groups, have made (and are still making) important contributions to the poverty, the deprivation and the relative backwardness of people other than white.

Thirdly, a clear understanding of the structural (i.e. power) dimensions of the South African problem and the need for structural reform, will convince people that the necessary (structural) reform can only be brought about over a relative long period of time. Those people who talk about a New South Africa that will be "created" in 1994, are not only deceiving themselves, but are apparently also unaware of how profoundly the apartheid-based society will have to change before it will become a truly new and democratic society.

[The De Klerk government's commitment towards the abolishment of apartheid and towards negotiations is very praiseworthy. Unfortunately, Pres De Klerk has up till now neither acknowledged the structural (i.e. power) dimensions of the South African problem, nor committed himself overtly towards an adequate empowerment of people other than white. On the contrary, he often create the impression that he is striving towards a negotiated settlement that will guarantee the continued control of (political, economic, bureaucratic and media) power by ^{mainly} the white population group.

[In his address to the nation on television on Desember 18, 1990, pres De Klerk reprimanded the ANC for what he call "their outdated rhetoric and policies". He blamed the ANC that they are "trying to pre-empt the necessary negotiations and constitutional process" by continuing "to demand a constituent assembly and an interim government".

In the same speech pres De Klerk was adamant that the ANC should not "talk of the transfer of power" because he regard such talk as confrontational. He claimed that the ANC (should) "know that the purpose of the proposed negotiations are to determine how, in the interest of all South Africans, power should be shared and domination avoided" (my italics).

[These very controversial remarks of pres De Klerk left lots to be explained. I want to make four points.

[Firstly, if it is confrontational of the ANC to talk about the transfer of power, then it should also be regarded as confrontational of the NP government not to be in principle prepared to transfer power to a properly elected ^{majority} party or coalition in a future constitution.

The government has up till now failed to commit itself to do just that. [With almost all power still neatly controlled by and effectively entrenched in white hands, the talks around the negotiation table can hardly be talks about anything but the (orderly and systematic) transfer of at least a considerable part of political power to those that have been disempowered and disenfranchised.

[Power is certainly not something that can be created out of thin air. Power is like wealth a limited quantity. The NP cannot supply the disempowered majority with adequate power and still expect to remain effectively in control .

[Secondly, if it is indeed the purpose of negotiations to determine "how power should be shared and domination avoided", what then is the difference between the De Klerk/Viljoen and the Botha/Heunis approaches? During the 1987-election Heunis coined the slogan of "power sharing without domination". Do we have reason to believe (and to fear) that De Klerk's constitutional model is fundamentally the same as the PW Botha model and that the main difference between them is the more effective marketing strategy of De Klerk? I truly hope that this is not the case.

[Thirdly, if the purpose of negotiations is indeed to determine a formula for power sharing that will avoid domination, what are the chances to "discover" ~~or to "create"~~ such a miraculous formula during the negotiation process and in a reasonable period of time? For such a formula ~~to become a reality in South Africa~~ we will need a constitution where no group and no political party must ever attain a position of domination over any group or party and vica versa. The chances to reach such a miraculous formula in 10 years - or even a century - is zero!

[The NP has been monopolizing political power for more than 40 years. After all these years they should know that the name of the political game IS power. (Or does the NP know it too well?) Consequently they should know that any attempt to neutralize the ability ^{of} ~~to~~ all parties and all groups to attain domination, is nothing but an attempt to sterilize the whole political process. What is the use of that?

Fourthly, in setting as precondition for negotiations the task to determine how "power should be shared and domination avoided", Pres De Klerk not only pre-empted negotiations in a serious manner, but is also trying to straight-jacket the democratic process in a future South Africa. Any attempt to pre-determine the outcome of a democratic election, is a self-defeating exercise from a democratic point of view. [It belongs to the very essence of democracy that any party or coalition that is governing the country must be in the position of losing its controlling position and must then have no choice but to make way for another party or coalition that can win a vote of confidence in Parliament. Any attempt to create a democratic system without winners and losers - and without partners that dominate and others that are dominated - is per se undemocratic. A system of power sharing without domination is neither a system of politics nor a system of democracy. It represent a ridiculous attempt to evade both.

[If Pres De Klerk want to maintain his year old reputation as Great Reformer, he should acknowledge the structural(i.e. Power) dimensions of the South African problem. He should also commit himself to profound structural reform and openly grant the point that reform without an effective and adequate transfer of power to the disempowered majority is not real reform but cosmetic and will be too little too late. [The time to face the real issue - i.e. a more just and democratic distribution of power - is long overdue. Pres De Klerk must take the "power" bull by the horns, even if it is not a pleasant task.
