

1983

THE NEW CONSTITUTION CAN BE ^{strong} A UNIFYING FORCE

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The new constitutional dispensation can prove to be of historic importance. I would like to evaluate its possible effect within the necessary historical perspective.

The PFP is not prepared to support the proposals. They regard it as irrelevant because the Blacks are excluded. The CP rejects it as dangerous and as the thin edge that will bring Blacks into Parliament.

These parties thus stress the Black problem - albeit for completely opposite reasons - and focus the attention to such an extent on the Blacks that the groups actually involved in the constitutional reform - namely the Coloureds and Asians - are lost from sight.

This kind of propaganda to blur the strategic importance of especially the Coloureds in the South African political and constitutional history, is unjustified and unfortunate.

It is extremely unrealistic to think that we can tackle the problem of Black participation in the decision-making process without, firstly, accommodating Coloured representation in a satisfactory way and without, secondly, building a strong middle-ground consensus (not necessarily within the same party) between Afrikaans and English speakers regarding the process and method of gradual and incremental constitutional reform.

The main aim of the constitutional proposals and the referendum is to attain these conditions. Only then can the possibilities of effective Black participation in a confederal structure be thoroughly investigated and implemented.

By stressing the importance of the Coloureds as a clearly identified and duly classified group within the heterogenous South African population spectrum, I openly admit that it is necessary to have a group-approach to our constitutional problems. Those who reject the classified groups as the essential building blocks of a new dispensation

will, to my mind, have logically no other choice than to end up with a one-man one-vote system.

Because of the complexities of constitutional reform it is unrealistic to think that all groups can be accommodated simultaneously (as the PFP is demanding) and similarly (as the CP is fearing). I am convinced that these demands and fears will not materialize.

On every occasion in our constitutional history when forms of parliamentary representation of especially the Coloureds were abolished, the argument was that Coloured representation in a Westminster orientated Parliament (i.e. a Parliament in which the winner takes all) might in due course have a destabilizing and even destructive effect on the body politic.

The argument at each occasion was that, given the unfortunate tension between the English and Afrikaans speakers, Coloureds could not be allowed to obtain a parliamentary position which would enable them to determine which one of the two White language groups would govern the country.

The tension between the Afrikaans and the English speakers - and the long and bitter political struggle between them, was without doubt the reason why the Coloured vote on the common role was abolished in the 1950s. The Coloureds can be regarded as the unfortunate victims of the struggle for hegemony between the two groups. This is the reason for the historic importance of Coloured representation in Parliament and why - from a strategic and moral point of view - it must receive prime priority in constitutional reform.

One can deplore the long and exhaustive struggle that has taken place - and to a certain extent is still taking place - between the two language groups. But it is a historical fact that cannot be denied. I am of the opinion that this unfortunate struggle has absorbed so much time and energy that the Whites have only spent a fraction of the time and energy necessary to find reasonable solutions for our racial problems. We cannot afford to continue with this situation.

In the 1950s the English Establishment was still the bearer of the liberal and imperialistic ideology of Victorian Britain. Being relatively affluent, educated, urbanized and internationally orientated,

they projected a strong superiority complex. They controlled the economy but regarded themselves morally the best equipped to govern the country and regarded the Coloureds as their natural allies to attain political hegemony. After being part of the government for 29 out of the first 38 years after Union, they found it extremely difficult to adopt to the role of opposition - even to this day.

During the 1950s the Afrikaner Establishment was the bearer of a young and narrow nationalistic ideology with all the typical but unfortunate characteristics of an immature, uncertain and ex-colonial national movement. It was very much inward-looking and anti-internationally orientated. It drew its inspiration and its dynamic character from the Afrikaner's experience as underdogs and blamed the poverty and the inferior conditions of the Afrikaners on British imperialism and exploitation. Although it succeeded in capturing the political control in 1948, it believed that it ought to play a more prominent role in the economy and that Afrikaners deserved a larger part of the national income. ^{It} They also demanded and erected protective measures against actual and reputed Black and Coloured threats.

In the 1950s the Coloured vote on the common role was the central bone of contention in the struggle between the two White Establishments. The struggle reached its zenith when this vote was abolished.

My major argument is that whereas the Coloured vote on the common role was the deviding factor in the 1950s, the accommodation of the Coloureds in a separate House in Parliament can prove to be a strong - and perhaps the - unifying force to establish a strong middle-ground consensus between realistically orientated Afrikaans and English speakers on behalf of on-going incremental reform. This could prove to be indispensable for successful future constitutional development.

I believe that roughly 60 per cent of Afrikaans and English speakers will vote positively in the referendum. This consensus between the language groups on constitutional issues could prove to be the foundation on which Black constitutional reform could be based even if (as in all probability will be the case) this 60 per cent of the electorate will not become united in the same political party.


+ We have reason to believe that
nor the PFP on the far left,
nor the CP and HNP or the
far right represent any longer
the real English and Afrikaner
South Africanism of the 1980's re-
spectively

To understand the historic significance of this potential middle-ground consensus regarding constitutional matters, one has to look at the extreme ideological positions of the parties who reject the constitutional proposals.

In its ideological position at the far left, the PFP fossilizes the liberal and Victorian ideologies and projects not only the lack of realism but also the affluence, the economic power and the superiority complex that was typical of the English Establishment in the 1950s.

In their positions at the far right, the CP and the HNP fossilize the narrow and inwardlooking ideology of an immature nationalistic obsession and project not only the escapism but also the inferiority complex, the ethnic fear, and the underdog mentality that was typical of the Afrikaner Establishment in the 1950s.

Whereas the two White Establishments - each with its strong ideological obsessions and aspirations - occupied the central scene in the head-on clash of the 1950s, the situation could become much more relaxed if a realistic middle-ground consensus could emerge from the referendum.

There are already strong signs that the core of the small parties on the far left and the far right have become anachronistic remnants of a bygone era.  They stand ideologically so far apart that the ideological territory between them is large enough to be occupied by more than one realistic and reform-orientated party.

Although a very hard and upward road lies ahead, the possibilities that may be created by the new dispensation are very promising. The ideological obsessions that have dominated White politics for many years could become of secondary importance, a new middle-ground consensus between realistic and reform-orientated Afrikaans and English speakers could be established spontaneously, and the Coloureds and Indians could receive a relatively effective form of parliamentary representation.

If this could be accomplished, then, for the first time in South African¹³ history, favourable conditions will have been created for tackling the very difficult problem of Black participation in the decision-making process.