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What is the name of the game -

A DE KLERK APPROACH OR A KLERKIAN IDEOLOGY?

Sampie Terreblanche

It has been ten months since Pres De Klerk has made his historic speech on 2 February. It is time to re-evaluate its true meaning.

In his speech Pres De Klerk launched what we can call the De Klerk approach to the South African problem. Both his predecessors, Vorster and P W Botha, put their own stamp on the South African politics to such an extent that we can also talk about a Vorster and a Botha approach. The important difference between De Klerk and his two predecessors, however, is that while they perpetuated the Verwoerdian ideology with minor adaptations, De Klerk gave a death blow to what remained of the Verwoerdian ideology.

The true historic importance of his speech on 2 February was that he succeeded in a single speech to discard the Verwoerdian ideology which, for 30 years, had been accepted as a sufficient legitimisation for continued White supremacy in South Africa. This abandonment of the Verwoerdian ideology by De Klerk increased the hostility between the NP and the Conservative Party considerably. The CP remains as committed as ever before to the Verwoerdian ideology.

But can De Klerk and the NP claim that they are in a post-ideological phase since 2 February? Does 2 February witness the "end of ideology" for the NP? This is the impression De Klerk and his supporting media is trying to convey to the world. Unfortunately all kinds of red lights are flashing.

These red lights give reason to suspect that we are witnessing the making of a Klerkian ideology. If so, De Klerk's approach does not abandon ideology as such, but only replaces the Verwoerdian ideology of the period 1960 - 1990, with a new Klerkian

ideology suitable for the 1990's and perhaps even longer. The real purpose of the Verwoerdian ideology was to legitimise white supremacy in "white" South Africa by promising to the different "ethnic" nations separate freedoms and political sovereignty in independent and economic viable homelands. The Verwoerdian approach was par excellence an ideological one, because its economic implications were never considered and it was not intended to be implemented fully. Its true purpose was to put the whites and especially the Afrikaners on a moral high ground in spite of apartheid. After the first attempt on his life, Dr Verwoerd used his survival in a subtle way to also give a religious justification to his policy of Grand Apartheid.

The following four typically ideological features of the De Klerk approach can be distinguished.

Firstly, the government talks about the New South Africa that is going to be created in four year's time as if it is a fait complet. This is reminiscent of the ideological certainty with which the Verwoerd team presented their "final solution" for the racially torn South Africa.

One should expect that anyone accustomed with the complexities of the South African situation, with apartheid's accumulated injustices, with the built-in animosities, with the structural inequalities and with South Africa's relative economic poverty, should have the realistic insight that it is practically impossible to create, within four years, a truly New South Africa with a non-racial, multi-party democratic constitution that will endure the test of time. To discount the possibility of a New South Africa in four year's time, is not a plea to drag our feet, but a plea to acknowledge the necessity of a proper use of TIME in the transition to a truly New South Africa with a sustainable democratic constitution. The too often usage by government spokesmen of the term New South Africa has attained an unrealistic and even a cheap resonance.

We should remember that it is part and parcel of an ideology

to bluff people into a make-believe world and to create propagandistically the impression that the transition will be easy and advantageous to everybody. The government and its media's ideological oversell have become fully transparent.

Secondly, the De Klerk government is not only boasting too much about the "solution" it is going to "deliver", but claims prematurely the moral high ground and also that apartheid is no longer an issue. In doing this it is not only overplaying its hand, but also brings its own credibility seriously into question - not only locally but in due time also internationally. Experience has taught us that when an Afrikaner orientated government launches an ideological onslaught, it cannot be too much disturbed by the truthfulness of its exaggerated claims. To go overboard is normally part of the NP's ideological ball-game as is proven by nobody better than Pik Botha in full flight.

Thirdly a really disturbing ideological feature of the De Klerk approach is the attempt to present the NP as the only reasonable, sincere, honest and peace-loving partner amongst the great variety of partners that are supposed to partake in the negotiations about a New South Africa. The way not only the government, but especially its supporting media, exploit every real or alleged misconduct of other players to create doubt about their sincerity and ability, is ostensibly indicative of the "plot" that is going to unfold itself in the next decade or more in accordance with the script of the Klerkian ideology.

Everytime when negotiations break down, the government will be hailed by its powerful media for its sweet reasonableness, its efficiency and its brave longanimity, while all other partners will be reproached for their lack of organisation, their unreasonable demands and their inclination towards violence. Everytime when negotiations breaks down, the government and its media will make a plea for extreme sensitivity towards the demands of its own constituency, while they will show very little empathy for the demands of the deprived and disenfranchised constituencies of the other partners and for the problems encountered by other leaders to recruit the necessary support.

The best example of these differentiated measuring-sticks is the way others are blamed by the government for their violent activities, while the government is not prepared to lay bare to the bone the violence of the CCB as was originally promised by Pres de Klerk. The Harms Commission's brief and report on the CCB fit the pattern of an ideological orientation much better than the pattern of a government that has committed itself to build a New South Africa on the tested principles of the rule of law.

Lastly, nothing can strengthen the suspicion about a Klerkian ideology more than the conspicuous absence of any attempt from government's side to prepare the white electorate about the profound sacrifices a New South Africa will demand - in both material and spiritual terms - from the white community. What could be the reason for this neglect? Either the government is shockingly naïve in not realising how fundamentally different South Africa will have to be from a white perspective before it can qualify as a New South Africa, or otherwise it is deliberately misleading the whites for party political purposes. Whatever the case, both possibilities fit into the pattern of an ideological approach where the real purpose is not to deliver what is promised and where it is not regarded as necessary to confront (or to confuse) the whites with the hard and unpleasant realities.

It is quite meaningful that while deputy-minister Leon Wessels in his speech in Sweden got very close to a confession of guilt for apartheid and towards a commitment for restitution, Pres De Klerk has up till now done nothing of the sort. The only explanation that one can offer for Pres De Klerk's unpreparedness towards atonement, is that it is not regarded as reconcilable with the self-assurance and the self-righteousness that is typically demanded from an ideological approach.

What are the implications if the rather promising initiatives of Pres De Klerk turn out to be nothing more than a Klerkian ideology for the 1990's? Then the real purpose of De Klerk's initiatives is not to negotiate a non-racial constitution, but to offer a very sophisticated justification for the perpetuation of white political supremacy for at least another decade but ostensibly for much longer. Although this is almost too ghastly to contemplate, it is perhaps not too early to warn that we definitely cannot afford to be ideologically misled for yet another decade - not to mention the possibility of a three-decade detour as happened because of the ill-judged and highly emotional Verwoerdian ideology.

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