

## 7 How The Coloureds Can Unite The Whites

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For real understanding of the new constitutional proposals, they must be evaluated within their historical perspective.

The Progressive Federal Party is not prepared to support the proposals. It regards them as irrelevant because the blacks are excluded.

On the other hand, the Conservative Party rejects them as dangerous and the thin edge of the wedge that will bring blacks into Parliament.

These parties both stress the black problem – albeit for completely opposite reasons – and focus attention on the blacks to such an extent that the groups actually involved in the constitutional reform – the coloureds and Asians – are lost from sight.

This kind of propaganda, which blurs the strategic importance of especially the coloureds in the South African political and constitutional history, is unjustified and unfortunate.

It is 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 secondly, without building a strong middle-ground consensus on the process and methods of gradual and incremental constitutional reform between Afrikaans and English speakers, albeit not necessarily within the same party.



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 classified group within a heterogeneous South African society, I 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 logically have 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 Progressive Federal Party demands and as the Conservative Party fears). I am convinced that these demands and fears will not materialise.

On every occasion in our constitutional history, when forms of parliamentary representation, especially for the coloureds, were abolished the argument was that coloured representation in a Westminster-type Parliament might in due course have a destabilising and even destructive effect on the body politic.

The argument was that, given the tension between 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 roll 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 priority in constitutional reform.

One can deplore the long and exhausting struggle that has taken place – and to a certain extent is still taking place

– between the two language groups. But it is an historical fact that cannot be denied.

This unfortunate struggle has absorbed so much time and energy that the whites have spent only a fraction of the time and energy necessary to find reasonable solutions to 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, urbanised and internationally orientated, they projected a strong superiority complex.

They controlled the economy and regarded themselves as 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 adapt 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 underdog and blamed the poverty and the inferior conditions of the Afrikaners on British imperialism and exploitation.

Although it succeeded in capturing 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 also demanded and erected protective measures against real and imagined black and coloured threats.

In the 1950s the coloured vote on the common roll was the central bone of contention in the struggle between the two white establishments. The struggle reached its zenith when this vote was abolished.

Whereas the coloured vote on the common roll was the



dividing factor in the 1950s, the accommodation of the coloured in a separate House in Parliament could prove to be the strong and perhaps the unifying force in establishing a strong middle-ground consensus for on-going incremental reform between realistically orientated Afrikaans and English speakers.

This could prove to be indispensable for successful future constitutional development.

Roughly 60 per cent of Afrikaans and English speakers might 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 this 60 per cent of the electorate will not unite in the same political party.

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

From its position on the far left, the Progressive Federal Party fossilises 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.

From their position on the far right, the Conservative Party and the Herstigte Nasionale Party fossilise the narrow and inward-looking ideology of an immature nationalistic obsession and project not only the escapism, but also the inferiority complex, the ethnic fear, and the underdog mentality typical of the Afrikaner Establishment in the 1950s.

Whereas the two white establishments – each with their 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.

We have reason to believe that neither the Progressive

Federal Party on the far left, nor the Conservative Party and Herstigte Nasionale Party on the far right is representative of real English and Afrikaner South Africanism of the 1980s.

They stand 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 hard road lies ahead, the possibilities created by the new dispensation are promising.

The ideological obsessions that have dominated white politics for many years could become of secondary importance if a new middle-ground consensus between realistic and reform-orientated Afrikaans and English speakers could be established spontaneously and the coloureds and Asians could receive a relatively effective form of parliamentary representation.

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