

FOR : "THE STAR""A LOOK INTO THE 80'S"F VAN ZYL SLABBERT

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I have never really been one to believe in inevitability when it concerns social, political and economic change. I really believe that the decisions that people take do affect the outcome of events. A decision in favour of A rather than B does make a difference - not only to the individual who takes the decision, but also to those involved and subjected to the decision. However, it is also equally true that people never take decisions in a vacuum - that events and circumstances narrow down the options and predisposes one to consider one range of alternatives rather than another. What will the political, social and economic options be for South Africa in the 80's? Let us begin to speculate on this by deliberately excluding external factors: i.e. external military intervention; big-power manipulation; O.A.U. politics; crises in Zimb.-Rhodesia and Namibia, etc. What are the internal trends and cycles that will narrow down the options for political, social and economic decision makers in the 80's?

One thing is certain, South Africans, whatever their race or persuasion, are going to have babies and they are going to need food, shelter and employment. This is a simple, elementary fact of life.

Because we know this, we also know that:

- (a) For the next 20 years our population will grow to roughly 42.5 million (whites will form 12% of the total).
- (b) In the same period more than 8 million workers will come on to the job market of which 80% will be black.
- (c) Annually between 30 - 40 thousand skilled black workers will have to be produced to maintain a growth rate of 5% in the economy. (At present the growth rate hovers between 2% and 3% and a 5% rate is seen as essential to cope with the demands).
- (d) Also over the next twenty years more than 4 million houses of some sort or the other will have to be built by either the Government or the people themselves.

Against the background of these basic trends one has to judge the adequacy and ability of the existing political, social and economic set-up to cope with the pressures that are going to develop. Let me highlight this with a few key questions:

1. What is the population - land ratio in South Africa and how is this expected to change? To put it slightly differently: Who at present controls the availability and disposability of land for residential, industrial, commercial and agricultural purposes, and what is the distribution of people over these different categories of land. (One of the amazing contradictions of the Group Areas Act is that it assumes that population groups with the highest birth-rates

should be confined to the smaller land areas - a recipe for trouble if ever there was one). Concretely put: If we expect the population of Soweto to double over the next 20 years - must the people live in the same geographic area? If not where? Two options appear to be available - either in the rural areas (a non-option on closer analysis) or in the urban or peri-urban areas. If the latter option is the one, who is going to take the decision to make more land available for residential expansion? And remember what applies to Soweto applies equally to Mdantsane, New Brighton, Garankuwa, Langa, etc., etc.

2. What are the social resources (schools, hospitals, housing, transport, community facilities) available to the individual in order to improve his/her life chances. These social resources usually determine the quality and scope of the labour market available to the economy. In South Africa we still have a relatively small and restricted skilled labour force. Ideally the labour force should in terms of distribution of skills have a diamond shape \diamond rather than a triangular one \triangle . If this is to be only approximated in South Africa in the 80's it will mean a radical transformation of the availability of social resources in South Africa if conflict is to be avoided.
3. Who controls state and private capital in South Africa? The answer is self-evident and poses fundamental problems for the economic system of South Africa in the 80's. Already there is a growing awareness in business and Government that if the majority of the people are deliberately excluded from the rewards of the economic system, economic problems will attain major political and social significance. At the same time it is also accepted that to give the majority of the people access to the rewards of the economic system would demand major social/political/economic changes.
4. Who at present initiates and controls the rate/tempo and extent of economic growth and development. In short where does entrepreneurial talent come from in South Africa and why? Again the answer is self-evident. Mainly from the whites either through the state or through private enterprise or from foreign investment. To put it differently what was the ratio of white to black businessmen at the Prime Minister's conference on 22 November? (One must feel uncomfortable in answering that one).

These four questions were of course deliberately chosen. Why? Because they basically refer to the factors of production in a free enterprise economy: Land, labour, capital and entrepreneurial talent. To judge the adequacy of our present political, social and economic set-up to cope with the pressures and trends of the 80's take each factor, i.e. land, labour, etc. and try to group the number of laws and statutes as well as social conventions which inhibit the performance or use of any factor of production. By 1976 we had more than 400 laws and statutes pertaining to racial affairs alone. This gives one some idea of the kind of change that will have to take place in order to cope with the problems of the 80's. (It is good to have a vision of a "Constellation of States", it is far better to have the courage to abolish the Mixed Marriages Act).

Another fact we do know is that all the right political decisions will not be taken to cope with the problems I have identified. Society is not like a computer that can be fed with information and have built-in checks to weed out mistakes. So on the balance of probabilities one has to say: Given all this and given some bad and some good political decisions (and may the good ones be more than the bad ones) what will be the major sources of pressure most likely to shape political decisions in the 80's. The following seem to me to stand out:

1. Urban migration on an ever increasing scale. South Africa can try to modify, but cannot escape what the rest of the third world countries have experienced and that is an unprecedented process of urban migration. In fact the Homelands policy is guaranteed to escalate urban migration in the long run unless it is radically changed. At present one of its major consequences is to concentrate population on rural economically underdeveloped areas thus further putting a strain on resources which once they have been exploited will increase the pressure to move to the cities. Even if one looks at the problem in terms of rural economic reform - whether labour intensive or not - it is clear that some people will have to move away from the land. One of the major problems for the 80's is going to be: How can South Africa control the social and economic consequences of urban migration?
2. As a consequence of urban migration, problems of housing and community development will dominate in the urban areas. I have no doubt the residential face of South Africa is going to change in the 80's. The present housing policies will be shown to be inadequate and I do not doubt that the quality; scope and provision of housing will undergo fundamental changes.
3. Because of an almost unanimous acceptance to stimulate the economy and improve the quality of life of all population groups problems of labour and the machinery to cope with them will continually be in the forefront in the 80's. At first it will be mainly white vs black labour, but more and more it will involve labour vs Government and labour vs management. South Africa in the 80's will experience labour problems that flow from industrialization as never before.
4. The ever increasing need for skilled labour in order to maintain a reasonable growth rate will have a profound effect on the way in which labour is trained and prepared for the economy. Consequently a great deal of pressure is going to be exerted on the availability of training facilities as well as on problems relating to closed shop trade-unionism. The 80's will see how the social infrastructure of South Africa is going to be overhauled. For whites this may very well be the most painful area of adjustment. These sources of pressure (and of course there are more) simply underline the fact that in many senses of the word the 80's will be a crucial decade for South Africa. One way or another the manner in which our conflict-situation is going to be resolved in South Africa will be determined by the political decisions taken during the 80's. I have always maintained, and still do, that political decision makers in South Africa have the option of either involving all the leadership potential in our society in order to find a relatively peaceful and evolutionary solution to our problems or else they can try to go it alone and fan the flames of revolutionary or violent change. Political decisions will create the framework within which social and economic change has to take place. For the life of me I cannot understand how peaceful, constitutional change is possible if political decisions are based on the assumption that:

- only whites finally determine the constitutional structure for South Africa;
- no blacks can enjoy South African citizenship;
- the individual is compelled to belong to a racial/ethnic group.

It just does not make sense, does it? I can tell you one thing though - in the 80's all this will be sorted out one way or the other and you and I and our children will feel the consequences of the decisions taken. As I said at the outset - there is nothing inevitable about the way change takes place, we do have a role to play in the outcome of things.