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Should we really be so surprised that this all ended in a declaration of a State of Emergency ?

Recently Professor Schlemmer, Director of the well-known Centre for Applied Social Research in Durban, Natal, after extensive analysis and research on the current unrest in South Africa isolated 14 key factors which he regarded as being responsible, or at least contributing to the present unrest in our country. Some of them can be regarded as the normal factors which one would expect to find in situations of urban conflict, urbanisation, and rapid social change. However, within the South African context these so-called normal factors have an additional dimension. Twelve of the fourteen factors are aggravated or complicated by deliberate acts of Government policy. For example, problems in education, unemployment, bus fare increases, constitutional change, over-crowding in township housing, lack of local government structures and leadership, etc. etc. can be directly related to aspects of Government policy with regard to Black economic, social and political circumstances.

This is not a recent phenomenon. South Africa has experienced riots, unrest, demonstrations and protests over the last twenty-five years and Government has appointed its own Commissions of Inquiry into some of these incidents to find out what the underlying causes were. Almost without exception, the Commission Reports identified the same factors which Professor Schlemmer isolated. Thus we have had the Mbekweni riots of 1962 and the subsequent Snyman Commission; the Erika Theron Commission Report on the Socio-Economic and Political position of the Coloured Population; the Cillier Commission Report on the 1976 riots in Soweto. Outside of Government Commission Reports, we have had extensive and comprehensive research done by, for example, the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute in Freiburg, West Germany, published in South Africa - "The Prospects for Peaceful Change", after that to the Rockefeller Foundation Report titled - "Time Running Out", then we have had the Buthelezi Commission Report, the Quayle Commission Report, etc. etc. With monotonous regularity social and economic inequalities that flow directly from Government policy were pointed out, Time and again, the hopelessly inadequate constitutional position of Blacks were identified as well as the conflict potential of policy measures such as Influx Control, Group Areas Act, Population Registration Act etc. etc. Black, White, Coloured and Asian political leaders from moderate to radical warned the Government that it had to move, that it had to address the problems identified as underlying factors for unrest and dissatisfaction. So far Government has always responded with too little, too late. Very often Government argued that to make concessions, to make reforms, would be giving in under pressure. This is of course a self-defeating argument, because what would be adequate to cope with pressure five years ago, becomes hopelessly inadequate when those reforms and concessions are postponed, precisely because the pressures build up and the demands escalate.

For example, if the Government had come unilaterally with the repeal of the Immorality Act, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, with the announcement of the State President's initiatives at the beginning of the year before the tri-cameral Parliament was implemented, and before we had been caught up with the present state of country-wide unrest, I have no doubt that such steps would have contributed significantly to lowering the temperature and locking other interest groups into the process of reform. Now, those measures tend to pale into insignificance and the demand for significant changes in Government policy has escalated considerably. Thus we find ourselves in our present predicament where the initiative for reform has slipped away from Government and it has been forced to concentrate on problems of stability and order. That is why they declared a State of Emergency. There is no more simple admission of failure for any Government than when it has to use extraordinary measures to maintain stability and order.

However, despite the seriousness of the situation, and it is very serious indeed, South Africa is not caught up in a revolution in any classical sense of the word. Nor is it even in a state of civil war, which by definition means that the opposing parties rely only on violence to achieve their objects and goals. But what we are getting caught up in, unfortunately, is the beginnings of a state of siege. In other words, a period of sporadic and inconclusive violence where problems of stability and order outweigh all other political, social and economic considerations. That is why a period of prolonged "State of Emergency" has an extremely detrimental impact for any effective steps to bring about reform. Inevitably, a State of Emergency, because it depends on extraordinary measures from Government, affects attitudes and has a direct impact on the free flow of information.

In addition, people who will have to inevitably play a role in getting discussions or negotiations underway, become alienated, arrested or detained during a State of Emergency, and this makes

their subsequent co-operation even more difficult. But, there is still hope. One of the extraordinary findings in all those research reports that I have referred to, has been the willingness and the patience of the vast majority of South Africans, to seek evolutionary and peaceful ways to achieve their political, social and economic goals. If Government, even at this late hour, does not recognise and reward this patience by committing itself to work towards one Constitution, based on one common South Africa citizenship and to eradicate all forms of statutory and official discrimination, then I am afraid there is no way in which that patience can endure through a period of inconclusive violence or a prolonged State of Emergency.

What I am saying is nothing new. It was said many times before, in Commission Reports, both outside and inside Government, by political leaders, Black, White, and Coloured. The only relevant question now is, can this Government hear it this time ?

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