

## OVERVIEW

F VAN ZYL SLABBERT

Since the beginning of 1991 a number of events have taken place which have supported the main thrust of my previous projections : The discussions between Inkatha and ANC, and between ANC and PAC show the beginnings of a greater tolerance and respect for diversity between political opponents and augurs well for the process of normalisation. The ANC document produced to commemorate 79 years of existence was a breakthrough in the stalemate around the idea of a Constituent Assembly. The alacrity with which the Government supported the idea of an All Party Conference demonstrates a mutual desire to get on with serious bargaining. The Joint Statement between De Klerk and Mandela on Article 3 of the Pretoria Minute is clear evidence that they wish to meet the deadline of 30th April for removing the last remaining obstacles to negotiation. De Klerk's speech at the opening of Parliament shows a keen awareness of international and domestic pressures for getting rid of Apartheid. Since then South Africa's international position is continuing to improve steadily. The question is not whether, but how soon, sanctions will be lifted. It is in any case becoming yesterday's debate.

In short, progress on normalisation is beginning to reach the stage where serious attention is being focused on the next set of problems : how to set up structures between the regime and its opponents to jointly manage the transition from there on. There are three concepts which have been referred to in the body of the Report which have suddenly shot into special prominence, and in a sense, epitomize the confusion on and absence of a shared strategy of transition between the regime and its opponents. These concepts refer to difference sets of problems during transition but are sometimes presented as if one of them can deal with all the problems. More often than not there is not a serious attempt to relate them in the process of transition itself. The concepts are : (i) a Multi-Party Conference (MPC); (ii) Interim Government (IG); and (iii) Constituent Assembly (CA).

Put briefly : A Multi-Party Conference has to identify the issues that have to be resolved before there can be a joint sharing of responsibility for transition. Issues such as how stability is going to be maintained; how will progress be monitored; what is the status of the de-facto government going to be during transition.

The idea of an Interim Government presupposes that the above problems have been resolved satisfactorily so that joint mechanisms for managing transition can become effective. Mechanisms to administer stability, education, housing, local

government etc., as well as discussing and debating further constitutional development.

The idea of a Constituent Assembly addresses the problem of how to test popular support for any constitutional proposals and interim arrangements that flow from jointly managing transition. Of course a referendum or plebiscite can also perform this function. The point is that a Constituent Assembly or referendum takes place at the culmination of a process of transition.

In the actual debate between the ANC, PAC, Inkatha and the NP Government, these three concepts are not related as clearly as has been done above. Sometimes a CA is presented as if it can solve the problems of both a MPC and IG. Other times, a MPC and IG is rejected out of hand in the hope that a CA will somehow simply happen. De Klerk's speech on 2 February demonstrates a fairly clear perception of the relationship between a MPC, IG and CA and no doubt the regime will drive the process of transition along this route. , The big question is - who will eventually stay out of a MPC and how strong will they be? One scenario is of a coalescing centre, e.g. NP, ANC, Inkatha, Homeland Governments, elements of PAC, and SACP with flanking parties on the left and right of a more militant/reactionary variety. (1) These flanking parties have the surprising effect of strengthening the centre and forcing a shared interest in making a success of interim arrangements.

Over the next 8 - 12 months the following events will have an important bearing on the quality and tempo of our transition :-

1. The relaxation of international isolation particularly on the sporting front and as far as access to IMF and World Bank and other loans are concerned.
2. The June Conference of the ANC where it will have the first opportunity to choose a fully elected organisation. The outcome of the election will be critical in resolving the current strategic ambiguity within the ANC. This ambiguity is reflected in a simultaneous commitment to mass protest action and serious negotiation. These different strategies relate to difference personalities and constituencies within the movement. June could for the first time present an opportunity to prioritize between these options. This will have a crucial bearing on further transitional arrangements.
3. The electoral relationship between ANC, SACP and COSATU will increasingly come under the spotlight. AN alliance for revolutionary liberation is something fundamentally different to parties entering to negotiation. It is self-delusion for the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance to pretend otherwise.
4. The Government is going to launch a massive programme of social upliftment on local government and regional level in

the areas of education, housing and community development.

This will raise a whole new order of problems for Civic Associations, Township structures and their relationship with regime created initiatives.

5. There will be concerted efforts to sanitize the problem of violence and the maintenance of law and order. Notice has already been given of improving the image of the Police and SADF. No doubt, there will be continuing initiatives to draw in more and more interest groups to assist and share responsibility to marginalise violence and combat crime.

All the above developments will determine whether some kind of transitional stability can be brought about sufficient to restore confidence for economic growth. This is the crucial variable. There can be no successfully negotiated transition on a declining or even disintegrating economy. No matter how long our economic recovery may take, if there is solid evidence of its beginning, this will have a galvanizing effect on progress in transition. All the political indicators are reasonably positive for progress. They need an economic underpinning to sustain them.

---oOo---

FOOTNOTE

- (1) Horowitz,, Donald L : A Democratic South Africa? :  
Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society, University  
of California Press, 1991, Ch. 7.