

OPENING ADDRESS DAMELIN COLLEGE

BRAAMFONTEIN CAMPUS

F van Zyl Slabbert

24 November 1992

1. When one is caught up in the immediacy of fundamental transition, it is often easy to ignore the usefulness of a comparative perspective :
  - one begins to think no other country is experiencing, or has experienced the same problems of transition;
  - also that there are no guiding principles or solutions to the peculiar problems we face.

- before I elaborate on a comparative perspective, let me state one unchallenged generalisation : all countries going through transition experience anxiety and uncertainty; a feeling of working through some predetermined programme without an agenda. We are not alone in our anxiety.
2. That South Africa is undergoing fundamental transition is beyond question. It is not just a question of negotiating a new constitution, even though this enjoys most of the attention. Together with constitutional change, we are grappling with problems of social and economic transformation. There are emerging forums on a national level specifically focusing on the economy, housing, electrification, local and regional government, land reform, health and education. Overriding all of these is the crucial problem of stability and the maintenance of law and order. Right now, we have a crisis of credibility that is being confronted on the role of security forces during and after transition. In fact, what South Africa is trying to do in its attempt to have a successful transition, is to simultaneously solve the problems of stability, legitimacy and development : a tall order for any country.
3. If we place what we are doing in a comparative perspective, one is struck by the fact that one of the most distinctive international trends of the last two decades of the 20th Century is the movement of countries away from some form of authoritarian government to a rather uncertain democratic

outcome. In the beginning of the seventies, it started in Portugal and Spain, moved across to Latin America, then to Central and Eastern Europe, USSR and now to Africa and shortly to China and some Pacific rim countries. Whether countries are ready or not, whether they have the same understanding of it or not, the quest for democracy, in the sense of multi-party competition for power with accountable and transparent government, is germane to Chile, the Ukraine, Poland, Indonesia, Philippines, Peru, Argentine, Taiwan, Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa. It is this quest which inspired Francis Fukuyama to rather pretentiously talk about "the end of history". By this, he meant that "liberal democracy" as a preferred form of government has become one of the most significant victors of the Cold War. With a few qualifications one can agree with him without going over the top about the "end of history".

4. Together with this quest for democracy, we have an equally powerful international trend and that is to find the successful path of development. By development, is meant the material improvement in the quality of life of the majority of people in society through the correct relationship between growth and redistribution. Universally, almost, bad management of the economy is seen as an insult and crime to the members of society.
5. These two values : democracy and development are described by the World Bank Report as a combination of good government and sound management of the economy. They have extracted

a wealth of comparative research material in terms of which governments and development agencies judge countries as suitable recipients for development aid or not.

6. However, if one reads comparative research on democracy and/or development, some curious anomalies or even paradoxes appear :

(a) Development without democracy is possible - Pacific Rim.

(b) But so is Democracy without Development. Chile 1971-73

(c) Democracy with Development.

(d) No/little Development and no Democracy.

7. Yet, even if one can show comparatively and historically that there is no certain or inevitable relationship between Democracy and Development, it is a fact that almost without exception countries are engaged in the quest for democracy, because the people in them believe that it will bring about development. This is what elsewhere I called the "burden of democracy". It is quite clear that if this burden becomes too great and a country tries too long to have democracy without development, then democracy will collapse.

8. South Africa has used up its authoritarian capital to pursue Apartheid and not Development. The white minority will not be trusted or given the opportunity to, as in the Pacific Rim, use a further period of authoritarian domination to go for development. We have no choice, but to democratise and develop at the same time. One thing is compellingly obvious : if we approach our transition as a simple matter of political democratisation without giving serious attention at the same time to problems of socio-economic development, the future holds very little democracy or development for South Africa.
  
9. But what does development mean in the South African context ? It must mean that we address problems of poverty, unemployment, housing, health, rural neglect in such a manner that it also stimulates growth and the development of a sound market economy. This is precisely what the NEF, the NHF say they wish to address and this is very encouraging.
  
10. But research shows, again, almost without exception, that behind every successful developing country, whether democratic or not, is a sound and successful educational system. An educational system that imparts basic skills to its recipients, teaches them to be flexible and adjustable, i.e. to manage change and to be innovative and creative in coping with challenge. This is true for formal education, pre-school, adult and on the job education. Another fundamental trend, as we run out of time in the 20th

Century, is the explosion of information and knowledge. Countries that can channel information and knowledge efficiently and productively will survive the challenge of transition. Increasingly the cybernetic principle of systems high in information will control systems high on energy, or conversely systems low on information, but high on energy, will be controlled by systems low on energy but high on information will become the order of the day.

11. It takes no great intelligence to conclude that the legacy of Apartheid education has made all of us singularly unprepared and unready to meet the challenge of transition. The challenge of transition is precisely to make compatible the demands of democratisation and development. Many South Africans fear change and the challenge of transition; many simply lack the basic skills to cope with it in any practical way. This is because many of them have been systematically taught to react to the challenge of the future in a stupid and ignorant way. Is this not perhaps one of the obvious explanations for the current violence, intolerance and anger. So part of our transition has to be a fundamental transformation of our educational system. This in turn means a restructuring of that section of the civil service that has to provide state supported education for future citizens of this country. There is abundant evidence that South Africa is experiencing the trauma and pain of educational reform.

12. But the whole country cannot simply wait until politicians and civil servants get their act together as far as education is concerned. People have to be taught now how to cope with the dynamics of transition and develop appropriate skills to provide for themselves and their dependents. This is where private enterprise and broadly accessible education can play an important bridging role. They can be enclaves of entrepreneurial innovation and educational flexibility in a rapidly changing environment. This I see as the major challenge to and contribution from a college like Damelin as South Africa faces the twin problems of democratisation and development in its transition. That is why I am happy to be here and wish you well in your endeavours.