

The sudden altruistic fears about sanctions fool no one



By EDWARD KENNEDY
(who visited South Africa this month)

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Anyone who travels to your country still encounters an awesome natural beauty, made more striking and ironic by the ugly and unnatural works of apartheid — the hostels, the relocation camps, the bannings, the political prisons, the rigid segregation of neighbourhoods.

It is hard to believe that the same country can contain both the soaring splendour of Table Mountain, looming joyously over Cape Town, and the sad graveyards filled with black children at Onverwacht, where the Government official in charge did not even know the rate of infant mortality.

I knew I would encounter a difficult situation, yet I also thought it might be more hopeful than it was in 1966. After all, the passage of time should heal some wounds — and provide some chance for people to move closer together.

Instead, I found a South Africa of increasing polarisation and alienation, of suspicion and mistrust on every side.

As one black person said to me when I commented that Azapo's enmity toward whites was a form of racism in reverse: "But you have to understand, Senator, when it comes to racism, we've had the best teachers in the world — the whites of South Africa."

The Star, for example, still publishes separate editions for blacks and whites, as though even the truth has a colour line. And even the so-called moderate or liberal Press seems, in large part, to reflect a prevailing and narrow view.

Bishop Desmond Tutu becomes an object, in the newspapers of his own country, of absurd assaults on his integrity, and mindless charges that he proposes to "ruin" South Africa.

The Rev Allan Boesak, one of the bravest and most decent men I have ever met, becomes the target of a smear campaign.

Yet these are the very leaders to whom not only black, but also white South Africans, ought to look as the best chance for peaceful change.

Rather than deriding, dismissing, or even hating the Tutus and the Boesaks, South Africa's dominant powers ought to be talking and negotiating with them — and certainly with Nelson Mandela.

Isn't it far better to plan a non-violent transition to the future than to have the future come, as it otherwise will, in chaos and destruction?

Yet I sensed a resistance in the white community far deeper than that which prevailed 20 years ago, perhaps because the question now is less petty apartheid than the more fundamental one of equal political rights.

What good does it do a black worker in Soweto to have the "right" to go to a restaurant in Johannesburg — if he has to travel an hour and a half on a bus to get there, show his pass on demand, spend half a week's wages on a meal, and take another hour and a half returning, assuming he can even find a bus which is still running?

In South Africa today, arguments about issues

like this are seldom met on their own terms; rather, the tendency is to dismiss anyone who raises questions on other grounds, no matter how irrelevant or untrue.

I was told, for instance, before I came, that the *Financial Mail* was an influential, moderate, respected voice of the business community. What, then, is one supposed to make of an article which, among the forest of basic factual errors, "reports" that I ran for President in 1968 and 1976 — a blatant falsehood which even the most elementary fact-checking could have prevented?

Or how is one supposed to respond when, after a visit to Onverwacht and its cemeteries, the reaction in most of South Africa's Press is — Kennedy must be running for President?

If that had been my purpose, I would have been better off visiting

Keokuk, Iowa, than Durban or Johannesburg.

As I said while I was in Cape Town, the real question is not whether I will run for President at some future date, but whether, and when, a black person will be able to run for and win the State Presidency of South Africa.

The most irrelevant argument of all is that somewhere else blacks are badly off, and therefore their plight in South Africa is either bearable, or even a comparatively positive achievement.

I was astounded that Foreign Minister Pik Botha sought to discredit my visit by citing statistics about the conditions of black people in America — conditions which are far different, and far better than those in South Africa; conditions which I have fought long and hard to improve — and which have been aggravated in recent years primarily by the domestic policies of President Ronald Reagan.

Perhaps the Foreign Minister should address his complaints about the injustice of the Reagan Budget cuts to the Administration's Ambassador in Pretoria, Herman Nickel.

In my own country, in the 1960s, I rejected the spurious contention that we did not need civil rights legislation because, as some said, black Americans were better off than the black people in other countries, including South Africa.

In the 1980s, I am not prepared to accept the same spurious excuse for apartheid inside South Africa. Nor am I prepared to accept criticism about intervening in internal affairs from a South African Government which has illegally invaded Angola and which illegally occupies Namibia.

I have spoken against violations of human rights in the Soviet Union; I can do no less in South Korea or South Africa.

The challenge for South Africa is to put aside the arguments of convenience, a pawn in a debater's game, and face the inescapable realities. But there is very little evidence that the challenge is being met.

Instead, during my visit, I found almost an obsession with the question of where I would stand on economic sanctions. The very intensity of the response belied the notion that sanctions would be ineffective. And the record of continuing, callous disregard for the rights of the black majority belies the insistence that whites oppose sanctions because of their sudden concern for the welfare of black South Africans.

On my trip, I was talking not about sanctions, but about conditions in South Africa. Now that I am home, I will do what I believe I should and must; and despite Mr Nickel's reassurances, I believe the South African Government will be hearing increasingly unpleasant news from Washington.

If things do not change, tough action will be taken — for the vast majority of Americans reject both apartheid and any complicity in it, even if that complicity, in the spirit of Orwell's *1984*, is misnamed "constructive engagement".

In the end, however, the issue is not what I will do, or even what America will do — but what South Africans, white and black alike, will do to change the course of a history heading for disaster.

In your country, the extremes seem to me at certain ominous points — the provocations of Azapo and the brutality and the overreaction of the secret police; the old

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