

LONDON TIMESDR F VAN ZYL SLABBERT

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- PRESIDENT P W BOTHA stated at the recent opening of Parliament that South Africa had "outgrown the outdated concept of Apartheid."

- MR OLIVER TAMBO, head of the banned African National Congress, which to all accounts draws support from the majority of Blacks in South Africa, is on record as saying that if Apartheid disappears completely, the ANC would reconsider its commitment to the armed struggle and violence as a means to bring about change and participate peacefully and legally inside South Africa.

- CHIEF MANGOSUTHU BUTHELEZI, President of Inkatha, the largest constituency based predominantly Zulu supported organization that claims more than a million registered supporters and operates legally in South Africa, is on record as saying that if there is a clear commitment on the part of Government to abandon Apartheid he would participate enthusiastically to work for an alternative. He also urges the unbanning of the ANC and the release of all political prisoners so that all organisations can compete openly and legally for support.

So what is the problem ? Surely the germ of a solution to the conflict in South Africa should be possible with such attitudes on the part of the major antagonists ?

It all depends what is meant by Apartheid. I have come across considerable confusion in the international community when asking people - "What do you mean when you say - Apartheid must go ?" Some mean white domination - the South African government responds by pointing out that racial/ethnic/group domination is not unique to South Africa. Others mean racial economic exploitation - again other examples can be easily found. Yet others mean racism and the point is easily made that racism is a pervasive phenomenon.

The outstanding characteristic of Apartheid is that it is not subject to ambiguity or controversy about whether it is more or less a case of domination, exploitation or racism than other situations where these problems exist. Apartheid is concrete, demonstrable and unique to South Africa. Apartheid is law. There is a law that classifies every South African at birth into a particular racial or ethnic group - it is called the Population Registration Act. There is a law which allocates residential and other land according to racial and ethnic definitions - it is called the Group Areas Act. In short, Apartheid is the most comprehensive system of legalized racial domination, exploitation and racism devised by any post-World War II government in the world.

It was the Afrikaner Nationalists attempt to cope with the challenge of post-war decolonialization whilst maintaining his position of dominance in the country. This dominance is called "self-determination" by the South African Government. Because he claims "self-determination for himself as a group, the Afrikaner Nationalists have used the bedrock of legalized Apartheid as the basis to provide for the "self-determination of other "groups" which the Afrikaner nationalists have one-sidedly identified and classified. This became the Separate Development aspect of Apartheid, and resulted in a new set of laws dependant on the generic Apartheid laws for their interpretation.

By opposing Apartheid one is not denying the reality of racial or ethnic groups or the fact that it may be difficult to find a democratic solution for them to live together in the same society. By opposing Apartheid one is opposing the right that one racial/ethnic group claims for itself to manipulate racial and ethnic groups for its own advantage and at the obvious disadvantage of other racial/ethnic groups.

When the ANC, Inkatha and other South African opposition groups say that Apartheid must go, they mean every law that the South African Government has put on the statute book to give effect to racial and ethnic group structuring has to go.

In short, that freedom of choice be restored on racial and ethnic grounds. Nothing more - nothing less.

As Leader of the Official Opposition in the South African Parliament, I set myself two objectives : to persuade as many whites as possible that Apartheid must go and to negotiate with Government to bring this about. After 6 years I have come to the conclusion that although the PFP, my Party has made some headway in the first respect, as far as the second objective is concerned, I was wasting my time. Why do I say this ?

The implementation of the new tri-cameral Parliament was a major, retrogressive step in getting rid of Apartheid. It, in fact, entrenched the generic Apartheid law, the Population Registration Act, as a basis for its functioning. Nevertheless I was willing to explore whether Government was going to use it to get rid of old Apartheid structures or whether it was going to extend its logic to new ones. My disillusionment became final when the State President defined the so-called guidelines within which the excluded black majority could be constitutionally accommodated. The South African Government has not the slightest intention to abandon compulsory racial and ethnic group membership as a basis for further constitutional development.

This is their fundamental pre-condition for any reform they are willing to consider. P W Botha never said Apartheid is dead or is going to be abandoned, his words verbatim are that South Africa "has outgrown the outdated concept of Apartheid." But not according to his Government and particularly himself, a new modernized concept of Apartheid. The "self-determination of Whites" could still be preserved by extending and using the logic of Apartheid as entrenched in the tri-cameral Parliament. I suggest that P W Botha be taken at his word and that concerned people should not read into his reform initiatives that which is not there.

I say this from personal experience as Leader of the Official Opposition. Last year I had at least five personal interviews with President Botha, I spoke to several Cabinet Ministers, as well as giving evidence to Cabinet committees. In all of this, I explored one question. Is the Government prepared to restore freedom of choice on a racial and ethnic basis by repealing Apartheid laws and practices? I came to the conclusion that they would only do so where it did not affect fundamental Apartheid institutions, i.e. segregated residential, education and political structures.

I had one last hope. Perhaps the traumatic events of 1985 would somehow persuade Government to change on this issue. The occasion where one could get a glimpse of this would be President P W Botha's speech to open the 1986 Session of Parliament and the elaboration on it during the No-Confidence Debate.

I told a few of my colleagues confidentially that if Botha really shifted on the question of freedom of choice, I saw some reason for continuing in my present role. If not, I had no further initiatives which I could offer my supporters and was in fact wasting their and my time by continuing.

I do not deny that it is necessary to protest against Apartheid also in Parliament and that therefore the PFP should continue to do so as best it can. But I am interested in getting rid of Apartheid not just protesting against it. I could not see how I could contribute towards getting rid of Apartheid by continuing as before. That is why I resigned but also to explore other ways of getting rid of Apartheid. The leaders of the ANC, Inkatha, UDF, AZAPO etc. are absolutely correct. There can be no negotiations, no stability, no co-operation, as long as the South African Government continues with Apartheid. Apartheid must go in every legal sense of the word.

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