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ARTICLE FOR MILLENNIUM

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At least two things are certain about our transition : it is futile to impose a time-frame on its duration and opinion polls will be notoriously unreliable as a basis for predicting reliable trends in political support.

Take the question of transition and political support. Research shows that very often the party that wins the founding election loses the subsequent one. In East Berlin before the wall came down, Neues Forum was out in the street, three-four hundred thousand strong, candles in the snow, singing, protesting, keeping up the pressure on Honecker and company. In the first election after the wall was down, it made no showing and the right of centre conservative party of Kohl swept comfortably into power, promising jobs and D-marks. Since then Kohl has avoided going to the East because of popular anger and rejection of his

government. Yeltsin was at the height of his popularity during the attempted coup and after he won the election comfortably for the Presidency. Already ordinary people are beginning to confront him at stores and public places, protesting the pain of transition. Does anyone still remember how popular Mikhail Gorbachev was - at home and abroad?

Precisely because uncertainty of the outcome characterises the kind of transition we are going through, people are unsure whether the discomfort of the present makes the ambiguous promise of the future worthwhile. Some of them even begin to hanker back to the untenable, but predictable certainty of past repression; rather than accept the dislocation of everyday life. There is very little doubt that the growing support for the Conservative Party is due to a protest against transition, rather than a vote for their solution to the very dilemma that caused transition in the first place. That support will drain away overnight if a new coalition or government can curse the uncertainty and relieve the discomfort of transition.

Other parties are also affected by the dynamics of transition. The NP may be experiencing a loss of white support, but since it became a non-racial party it has gained enough outside the white camp for the ANC to express public concern about it. The ANC, only 2-3 years ago, campaigned as the premier liberation movement demanding that people choose between supporting it or the NP government - the bargaining table was to have only two sides - 'us' and 'them'. At CODESA they sat primus inter pares, with

homeland "stooges", and tri-cameral "puppets". CODESA itself has become a political heart-lung life support system, and family and friends watch the 'blips' on the radar with relief and pride. Alan Hendrickse, leader of the Labour Party, has moved from being a Cabinet Minister to singing "We shall overcome" and "toy-toying' in the Parliamentary Chamber after losing control to the NP. The future is just not what it used to be for leaders and followers.

In short, the transition from domination to democracy is volatile and flexible as far as political convictions and support is concerned. The normal parameters within which electoral politics are conducted, and which serve to underpin the assumptions of questions in opinion polls, do not apply. We face realignments, pacts, breakups between, and of, political parties as constituencies shift and adjust to the demands of transition. In such circumstances the capacity of leadership to anticipate, guide and respond to changes becomes critical. As ordinary persons become less informed about what is happening they become more susceptible to exploitation. If those who wish to see a democratic outcome to this transition do not keep open lines of communication which they use to convey clarity of purpose, as well as realistic and achievable objectives, ordinary people will become the prey of demagogues and opportunists, who scavenge in political confusion and anxiety.

The fact that the major political opponents in South Africa, i.e. the NP and the ANC, have chosen negotiations as the means by

which they wish to move from domination to democracy, has precipitated a fundamental political realignment in South Africa, which is still under way. This realignment is between political organisations who co-operate in sharing responsibility for managing transition and those who do not. It is a realignment between parties in a government of transitional unity (GOTU), and those who oppose it, either from the left or the right. The GOTU begins as a fragile coalescing centre flanked by opponents who try to outbid the centre's capacity to deliver on the promises of transition. Opponents to the right will outbid by charging that any GOTU compromise is yet another nail in the coffin of minority privilege; opponents to the left will outbid by charging that the very same compromise is nothing but an incremental sell out to the promise held out by a total and sudden transfer of power to the majority. The outbidding of the flanking parties will drive the centre into performance and give a sense of urgency to the need for compromise. The central question is simply : Can the GOTU's capacity to deliver undermine the outbidding on its flanks. If it can, the dynamics of negotiated transition will prevail; if it cannot, there will be a return to repressive stability of some kind or the other. But then the whole process will have to repeat itself under different circumstances, because the conditions which gave rise to transition in the first place will still be unresolved.

The process of realignment is still incomplete. Parties/individuals presently in CODESA may break away and join the flanks and those currently in the flanks may do the same and

join CODESA. Out of CODESA's deliberation may very well, and sooner, rather than later, emerge a GOTU. Exactly how, is precisely the current topic of debate and compromise. A very likely outcome would be the decision between parties of CODESA to declare themselves a GOTU and to seek popular support in a referendum by asking for a mandate to :

- (a) curb violence or crime;
- (b) create growth and employment in the economy;
- (c) negotiate a constitution that will provide stability through consent.

Such a referendum must give clear demonstration of black and white majority support. Very few referendums are called voluntarily with the prospect of failure in mind and in this case, it is very unlikely. A GOTU with popular support can then change the current constitution; create an interim one and begin to manage transition with broader based legitimacy than is currently the case. How long will this GOTU period last? This is the first certainty mentioned in the opening paragraph. Nobody knows, and it is futile, even ridiculous, to try to impose a time constraint. No doubt parties will posture and do precisely this to create the illusion of being in control of the agenda of transition. Thus the ANC talks about 18 months to 2 years and the NP talks of 10 years, the one to feed the expectations, the other to quiet the fears and anxiety of their supporters. At best, this is understandable political pantomime, at worst dangerous self-delusion. The duration of a GOTU depends

entirely on its ability to deal with the formidable problems of transition that have to be resolved to make a democratic outcome feasible. If it does not succeed, there will be no democracy, simply a new form of domination to succeed the old one.

What are these problems? Given that negotiation is the dominant mode of transition, these can be stated in the form of major contracts or pacts between dominant interest groups in the country.

(a) A Civil-Military Pact A GOTU has to come to terms with the civil service and its transformation towards a democratic outcome. The military or security establishment (which includes the Police), epitomises the sensitive relationship between a transitional government and stability. The civil service provides administrative continuity and the security establishment's contribution in this regard is to provide stability or 'law and order'. This is currently one of the most critical problems facing South Africa and an unresolved security situation is part of the reason why there is escalating crime and arbitrary transitional violence. De Klerk exhorts everyone to 'trust and support' the Police and Defence Force. The ANC charges that they are part of a plan of deliberate destabilisation of opponents to the regime and that De Klerk either knows and approves of this, or is unable to control them. It is inconceivable that there can be successful negotiations under such circumstances, let alone a transition towards a democratic constitution. Such

a constitution stands little to no chance of survival if a new government is confronted with a recalcitrant civil service, and particularly, an antagonistic security establishment. It is well to keep in mind that the current civil service is a bureaucratic monster, carefully created over 4 decades to pursue a policy of apartheid and separate development. A GOTU is a dramatic contradiction and indictment of that policy and one of its major challenges is to transform the civil service so that it can come to terms with the new policy of pursuing a democratic and non-racial constitution. There is no doubt that part of the outbidding on the right flank is to exploit the discomfort of civil servants who have to adjust to transition - particularly in the security establishment. A GOTU can only dissolve itself in favour of a democratic constitution, if there is sufficient trust in, and comfort with, the civil service to provide administrative continuity, and particularly the security establishment to provide sufficient non-partisan stability to make democratic elections fair, free and feasible. Otherwise, what is the point of the whole exercise?

- (b) An Economic Pact ; The conventional description is to talk about the relationship between labour-state-capital. The concept of "the State" has become too amorphous to do justice with what is meant here. Essentially, this pact refers to some agreement between major economic actors, e.g. government/civil service/business/unions about the basic

guidelines of the economic system. These guidelines relate to aspects such as state intervention in the economy, investor confidence, the relationship between growth and stability, the appropriation, ownership and disposability of land for whatever use, workers rights and responsibilities etc. These guidelines are not part of some economic plan, but rather the general framework in terms of which economic actors can make a reliable assessment of the prospects for investment and growth. At present there is still far too much confusion, talking at cross purposes and posturing between the major parties in CODESA on these issues, to instil any confidence about a smooth transition to a democratic constitution. If a GOTU continues to govern in the absence of growth in the economy, it will spend most of the time dealing with political conflict and outbidding on its flanks. Such a situation does not invite transition to a democratic constitution - it invites repression.

- (c) A Development Pact : Whereas an economic pact essentially has to do with growth in the economy, a development pact has to do with the political redistribution of the benefits of such growth. Essentially, it has to do with transforming the budget to adjust it to the demands of a democratic system of government. The demand for parity in expenditure is the most unambiguous political demand that a GOTU will face. This is where demand and performance, i.e. redistribution and growth, have to be held in some kind of creative tension. One danger is that the newly created

political space will be used by parties to force demands that will hopelessly outstrip the capacity of the economy to deliver, thus further aggravating an already stagnant economy. Another is that a GOTU can become so obsessed with reviving the economy that it sacrifices democratisation for growth, and creates new conditions for political revolt. In both cases, repression rather than a democratic constitution could be the outcome. A development pact means that parties in a GOTU as well as sectors in business, labour and the civil service agree on the significance of items on the budget and prioritise expenditure on them. Consensus on priority of expenditure is necessary because of scarcity of resources, i.e. there is not enough money to pay for development in equal measure in areas such as housing, education, health etc. If there is no consensus on priority, then the very attempts at development can become a source of dispute and instability between parties. For example, it is futile to make funds available for low-cost housing if activists encourage bondholders not to pay premiums on the bonds because the houses 'belong' to them in any case; or if one party believes housing should enjoy priority over education and another believes exactly the opposite. For a while, there can be development without democracy - this is the challenge facing a GOTU - but democracy without development has a very short career. Development does not just happen - it comes about as a result of a particular relationship between growth (economy) and redistribution (polity). Clarifying this relationship

and making it politically palatable, is perhaps the most important challenge that a GOTU will have to overcome if there is to be a transition towards a democratic constitution.

- (d) A Constitutional Pact : The Declaration of Intent agreed on by the parties attending the first meeting of CODESA gives us the outlines of a possible future constitution for South Africa. Taking into account the absence of consent from flanking parties outside CODESA, and how elements from within their ranks could influence the constitutional debate, it is clear that a constitutional pact on some future democracy will have to reach finality on the operating principles and procedure of a democratic constitution, the relationship between the political units in such a constitution, i.e. central, regional, local government, the separation of powers, i.e. judicial, legislative, administrative and very important, the kind of electoral system under which such a constitution will operate. An electoral system that builds in incentives to reward moderation and consensus stands a better chance of being sustained in South Africa than one which rewards radicalism and ethnic/racial outbidding. Such incentives can be found in different varieties of proportional representation, transferable votes and vote pooling. It would be an extraordinary irony if some future democratic constitution in South Africa is used for its first elections to destroy the democracy that has been created.

Hopefully, from the above, the point has been made with sufficient clarity that transition towards a democracy in South Africa is not a matter of making unobjectionable speeches, shaking hands and backslapping at a multi-party conference. More important, that the dynamics of transition are such that it is impossible to know beforehand how political loyalties will shift or how long the transition will last. At best, one can say that the sooner clarity is reached on these four pacts, the sooner transition towards a democratic outcome will have been effected and the clearer political preferences will have become. Put differently, if the coalescing centre can hold and deliver, it will consolidate and increase support. If it cannot, support will drift to the flanks and problems of stability will intensify. In such a situation, the outcome will not be democracy, but repression. It is also not beyond a popularly mandated GOTU to use repressive stability in its attempt to bring about growth and democratic transition.

The most exciting thing about South Africa's future is its open-endedness. We have come from a political world that for decades defied our intelligence. Now we are entering one which never stops challenging it. If for nothing else but for this, De Klerk and Mandela deserve our gratitude. At least now, we dare to hope.