



Chris Hani has a word of advice for Winnie Mandela

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account of his remarks. I was arrested by the security police in my office and charged in court for quoting a person silenced by official decree. Last week the selfsame Tambo — though handicapped by a stroke — walked and talked freely in Durban.

A tapestry of formerly forbidden political faces and events displayed in South Africans' living rooms, as a matter of routine reporting, by government-controlled TV and radio services apparently out to be less biased than in the past. Till recently, the same services had demonized the ANC. The course-correction was remarkable — and encouraging for the future.

So much for the conference.

Where do we stand as a nation? What are the prospects for peace and democracy? They are far better. The decks have been cleared for negotiations that lie ahead. A flagging economy sends urgent signals to all concerned to reach agreement quickly, and get on with the task of reconstruction.

One point about negotiations. From the applause and general responses at the conference, the delegates were more radical and militant than the top leaders chosen. The fact of a hawkish following and a dovish top leadership might

produce a dynamic combination which will lead to greater realism on the part of the De Klerk government in dealing with the ANC.

Mandela, who has discretionary powers and enough esteem to carry his followers into historic agreements with De Klerk when he wishes, can threaten, when in an awkward spot, to refer matters back to his more militant movement. De Klerk would know what THAT means. It could concentrate his mind, and make him continue to value Mandela's "moderation". This could strengthen the cement binding the two together; and that cement is arguably one thing which stands between South Africa and chaos.

The major and immediate obstacle to constitutional progress remains the violence in black townships as politically-emergent groups fight for turf. The ANC accuses the government and police of fomenting violence, and not doing enough to stop it. This the government denies. Whatever the truth (and I, for one, cannot believe that military destabilizers can be transported to angel status overnight), the violence must be reduced appreciably before constructive talks get under way.

Nothing that happened in Durban changes that reality. ●

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE WHITE LIBERALS?

LOOKING around the guests and other observers at the ANC's national conference in Durban, I was struck by how few white liberals there were. Especially English-speaking liberals.

Official invitations were sparse, I know, and perhaps English-speaking liberals are too genteel just to turn up and take pot luck the way many folk did. Even so, their numbers were so meagre as to provide an index of a troubling feature of our political life — the failure of the liberals, now that apartheid is on its way out, to come forward and embrace its alternative.

Helen Suzman was there briefly and so was Zac de Beer. They were the only "old Progs" who formed the Progressive Party in 1960. I saw no members of Alan Paton's old Liberal Party. By contrast there were a number of what might be called Afrikaner dissidents: Jannie Momberg, Pierre Cronje, Jan van Eck, Braam Viljoen (twin brother of the former Defence Force chief, Constand Viljoen), even UNISA's indefatigable Willem Kleynhans.

Foreign visitors outnumbered the local liberals.

It is a phenomenon I first noticed during the great black uprising of the mid-1980s, long before F.W. de Klerk and his *Pretoriastroika*, this reticence on the part of white liberals as the prospect of majority rule began to loom before them as something that might actually happen.

As the townships raged and P.W. Botha intensified the state of emergency, the liberal reaction became increasingly ambiguous: while they disapproved of

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'WHILE THEY DIDN'T LIKE THE CRUDITY OF THE NATS, THEY DON'T LIKE UNTIDY LOOK OF BLACK MASSES EITHER'

the brutal crackdown, there was a palpable shrinking from the swelling tide of the black revolt.

I wrote an article lamenting this tendency in June 1987. Noting the vital role liberals had played in keeping the spirit of dissent alive through the decades of apartheid, preventing conformity from engulfing all White South Africa the way it did in Algeria, Kenya and Rhodesia, I expressed concern that this now seemed to be faltering.

"They (the liberals) still believe in criticising the government for its oppressive policies," I wrote, "but they have become afraid to identify with the black struggle to replace apartheid with a new society. They are distancing themselves from it with the liberal's historic fear of radicalism, getting lost in a no-man's land somewhere between sympathy and antagonism."

Three years later, with the ANC unbanned and active inside the country again, the tendency became more pronounced. A proposal that the Democratic Party should form a pact with the ANC produced an emotional reaction at its congress last September, culminating in Harry Schwarz's shrill declaration that "a pact with the ANC will be a Warsaw Pact".

What was particularly noticeable was that, while many new Afrikaner "progressives" like Momberg were all for a pact, it was the old Progs, the "true blue liberals", who were most passionately opposed.

Now we have this visible coolness towards the ANC's first full-blown national conference inside the country for 33 years — surely an historical moment for everyone who waged that long struggle for a nonracial democracy.

I find the reaction astonishing. All their lives these liberals have abhorred apartheid and believed in the inalienable justice of democratic majority rule. But now as that prospect draws close they find themselves unable to go out to welcome and applaud it.

It is particularly disappointing in the light of the ANC's continued commitment to the principle of nonracialism. Considering the offensiveness, the insult,

the sheer brutality of apartheid — the 18-million pass-law arrests and 3,5-million forced removals, the shattering of families and the torture in detention — I find it amazing that the country's major black nationalist movement should not have set about mobilising its people on the basis of an out-and-out counter-racism — Africa for the Africans and whitey go home.

But no. The ANC has clung unwaveringly to the principle of nonracialism and the dictum of its Freedom Charter — "South Africa belongs to all its people, black and white" — often in the face of criticism from Africanists elsewhere on the continent.

Surely white liberals should make some kind of responding gesture to that remarkable generosity of spirit?

Surely, too, there should be a recognition of the ANC's commitment to multi-party democracy, instead of the surly scepticism one finds? Again and again at the Durban conference Mandela and other speakers stressed the need for political tolerance and the rights of other parties to express themselves freely.

"We have no desire whatsoever to impose our views on everybody else," Mandela said. "We have never claimed that we have a monopoly on wisdom and that only our views and policies are legitimate. As a democratic movement we shall continue to defend the spirit of all our people to freedom of thought, association and organisation. It is precisely because of this that we have firmly committed ourselves to the perspective of a multi-party democracy."

In a continent still edging its way tentatively towards such thinking, that must stand as the most unequivocal commitment to multi-partyism by any African leader.

Yet the coolness persists. Why? One suspects the reason is that, while the liberals didn't like the crudity of the Nats, they don't like the untidy look of the black masses either. It turns out that the majority whose cause they have been championing are not classical European liberals like themselves but a proletarian mob of African socialists from whom they shrink in alarm. ●

ALGERIA

Colin Legum

ALGERIA, which has been ruled as a single-party state ever since it won its independence from France 30 years ago, is currently engaged in establishing itself as a multi-party democratic society. The first elections for a new parliament were called off when a boycott of the polls by a Muslim fundamentalist party, the Front for Islamic Salvation, ended in serious violence. The FIS has been accused of seeking to turn Algeria into 'a second Iran'. The country is now in a 'state of siege', that is, it is under emergency laws. But the false start has not deterred President Chuali Benjedid's ruling party, the Front for National Liberation (FNL), from pressing ahead with its promise to usher in a new era of democratic politics. It has only postponed the elections for six months.

This bold experiment to create a pluralist democratic society in Algeria is important not only for the 30 million Algerians, almost all of whom are Muslim, but because it is a key country whose influence extends beyond North Africa, deep into sub-Saharan Africa, across into the Middle East and into France, where some two million Algerians and other North Africans live, mainly as migrants.

However, what happens in Algeria will have its most immediate repercussions on its closest neighbours — Morocco, Libya and especially Tunisia, which is also engaged in re-establishing itself as a multi-party democratic state. Tunisia faced a violent coup attempt by Muslim fundamentalists only a month before the debacle in Algeria, and it has not yet eliminated the threat from that quarter despite the government's retreat from the secularism favoured by modern Tunisia's founder, Habib Bourguiba, as well as from its formerly Western-orientated foreign policy.

Fears of turning Algeria into 'a second Iran' are expressed not just by Westerners but also by the country's democratic politicians like Hooïna Ait Ahmed, leader of the important Socialist Forces Front (FFS). In the Algerian context, 'a second Iran' is a code-word for an Islamic fundamentalist state, not necessarily one modelled on Khomeini's ideas. Algerian Muslims are mainly