

## Emergent Themes in South African Propaganda

Briefing Notes: Commonwealth Committee on South African  
Propaganda and Censorship. London May 31st. 1989

1. Midst of major propaganda offensive that will gather pace in coming months leading up to the Commonwealth Summit, but with peaks around the De Klerks forthcoming visit to Europe and US, the SA elections in early September, and the meetings of the Negotiating Banks for loan rescheduling.

2. Objectives of Offensive:

--- To defuse struggle inside country, demoralise, opposition especially the democratic movement, and create confusion among activists.

--- To break out of isolation, re-enter international community and especially the international financial community. (Loan rescheduling due 1990)

--- To 'regain' recognition for S A's 'rightful' role as the regional power, with whom the superpowers have to deal on regional matters, and to whom other countries in the region have to defer. 'Regain', as that role in days of British Empire.

Note: Making fundamental changes in South Africa is not one of the objectives.

3. S.A. propaganda not crude, but very sophisticated. The image of the hick Boer farmer leaving muddy trails with his boots no longer valid... now Maddison avenue, and the Washington lobby.

.... white referendum, used Saatchi and Saatchi to sell tricam to own supporters. Since then best P.R. techniques.

--- selling a whole package, like the President ... work on policies, initiatives, timing as well as presentation. Have co-opted language of their opponents, and use with great skill as code words for their own refashioned apartheid policies: one person one vote, non racist (Never non racial), democracy etc.

4. Incorrect to focus only on censorship - because regime not simply hiding facts and events, or keeping them from public eye. Not faced with empty words - deeds will follow as part and parcel of the offensive. Faced with sophisticated P R. one has to pay greater heed to interpretation and the overall picture that is being presented, and most importantly to locate and evaluate events in their proper context. . e.g.

--- release of detainees .... restrictions ... report of Human Rights Committee.

5. Problem in coming months will be how these events and actions are to be interpreted. Already regime setting scene

for interpretations that suit its objectives, and creating a climate of expectations.

6. Elements:

--- Things have changed and are changing in S A.

--- The regime has decided that apartheid must be abandoned and white domination brought to an end.

--- Therefore opponents of apartheid (domestic and international) must change their strategies. ... the time now is for negotiations and participation by all, time for encouraging those committed to making change.

7. This morning De Klerk. Last week Pik in Rome.::: Regime committed to end apartheid. Old story - Vorster 9 months, ... at UN "give me 6 months"

Now refreshed by 2 new slants:

--- Cabinet divided - now military has been 'tamed' and losing power. The reformers need to be strengthened by showing they can deliver in terms of reducing international pressure.

--- A new leadership is taking over prepared to deliver reforms. It needs to be given a chance and encouraged. Note use of the same phrase "new generation of leaders" on both sides of the Atlantic.

8. Behind talk, need to look at reality of policy of this "new generation".

Reforms and all offers based on group rights which is non-negotiable. De Klerk has made clear rejects majority rule and it is not negotiable. His concept of a S A divided on racial and ethnic lines in perpetuity in contrast to progress all over world. One country where power sharing based on group rights is Lebanon.

Change must be limited to content and pace acceptable to whites - and there is white veto within system.

9. Notion that regime is bringing about change is a crucial element in propaganda, and acceptance of it has important consequences:

--- legitimates regime as agent of change - a role denied them by people of S A , and which regime seeks from international community.

--- used to argue that must encourage regime and not put pressure, give them incentives to make changes.

--- people from S A to ask international community, then directed to make representations to Pretoria and work through its institutions.

--- if there is acceptance of regime as agent of change, there is also acceptance of its reforms and its ideology as the objective of change in SA i.e. a permanently divided S.A. People of SA not entitled to democracy as the world know it.

10. If *bona fides* of regime accepted, then also argument that it is time for change of strategies by opposition.:

participate in apartheid institutions

give up armed struggle

no sanctions, but incentives. This added to continuing arguments about sanctions don't work, blacks don't want sanctions, blacks will suffer etc.

11. If regime could succeed in creating a climate of expectation of change through negotiation (stress that no sign that it has succeeded), then can argue, why struggle, why sacrifice, when can negotiate.

12. Let us look at the kind of "negotiations" on offer:

Within a council/ forum/ institution created by Pretoria, composition and terms of reference decided by Pretoria. It is purely advisory - any recommendations would have to go through present parliamentary structures with white veto. Non racial democratic South Africa is not on negotiating table.

13. Set out view of ANC on negotiations:

--- regime not ready to negotiate - continues to ban and restrict organisations, groups committed to non-violent change also not allowed to function freely, leaders charged with treason.

--- climate not right - state of emergency, detentions, restrictions etc.

--- regime can create climate and act. No negotiations necessary to release leaders, unban organisations, repeal apartheid laws etc.

--- ANC believes all leaders and people should be involved in process of consultation about whether to negotiate, when to negotiate, who negotiates, what to negotiate. Can only do so in right climate. ANC committed - no secret negotiations.

--- negotiations have to be for an agreed objective - not between parties trying to go in opposite directions. Zimbabwe NIBMAR, Namibia R435 etc.

14. How to interpret what likely to happen in next few months??

--- ask and understand why SA negotiated over Angola and Namibia. Not miraculous evangelical conversion (refer Huddleston!), but objective conditions on ground.:

Military defeat - role of sanctions, and high cost in equipment and lives.

Water in Namibia and impossible to maintain forces in north without air superiority  
popular resistance  
economic cost

--- why present offensive?

failure to sell apartheid despite repression and bribes of upgrading - note Council election results  
failure to get negotiating partners  
economic pressures due sanctions  
impossibility of carrying out their policies in face of international political and economic isolation.

--- be clear about objectives (above) of offensive

If clear on these then can interpret events. Important for Commonwealth in its statements and publications to counter SA propaganda and anticipate developments.

15. Very important that we do not confuse the signposts with the objectives:

--- lifting of state of emergency not objective of sanctions. Welcome, but result of pressure, not success of regime or failure of opposition.

--- release of Nelson Mandela and other prisoners - very possible. But again that is not objective of struggle, or reason why international community opposed to apartheid. Must in our propaganda claim release as a victory for resistance and international pressure. Must ensure that any release is totally without conditions - allow free movement, access to open consultations with everyone, free association etc.

--- "offer to negotiate" mere statement not enough (above explanations). Also must be clear objective of struggle was not to get regime to negotiate, but to liberate SA.

16. Very important to counter SA propaganda by explaining contextualising regimes initiatives, making clear they arise because of continuing resistance and success of international pressures, and stressing that what is necessary is not a relaxation of pressure but their intensification.

*frene n ginwala*