

EDITORIAL

Dangerous times

WE ARE back to living in dangerous times. Many of us thought, after President De Klerk's February 1990 speech, that we had seen the last of them. The way ahead might be rough, we thought, but never again could it be really dangerous.

So failure to reach agreement at CODESA 2 was seen by many commentators as just another rather more serious hiccup in a negotiating process which would soon get going again. There was always the danger, however, that that hiccup could turn into something more serious. And so it has.

The Boipatong massacre, President De Klerk's insensitive and ill-advised visit there, and the police shootings which followed, have thrown our whole future into the melting pot. The ANC has not only withdrawn from CODESA, it seems no longer willing to talk to the Government at all. A campaign of mass action which can only heighten tension, lead to further public recrimination, almost certainly give rise to further loss of life, and batter an already punch-drunk economy, looms before us.

Can anything be done to stop this dangerous slide to national flagellation? The presence on the Goldstone Commission of respected overseas observers may help. So may the Government's belated willingness to turn to the United Nations Secretary-General. However, unless the Nationalist Party is prepared to take one final step and concede that it will never again be able to direct the course of events here, the deadlock will continue.

FROM WHAT we have heard from Democratic Party and Labour Party and other participants, who have no reason to support the ANC's case, it was on this rock that CODESA foundered. The Nationalist Party could not bring itself to take that final step which would

effectively hand over control of the future of the Afrikaner people, and white South Africans in general, to somebody else, and who can blame them? They are being asked to do something for which there are no precedents. They are assured that the ANC's commitment to a Bill of Rights, multi-party politics, regular elections, an independent judiciary, and other accoutrements of the civilised modern state coupled with their technical and financial skills, will guarantee whites a secure and honourable place in the new South Africa. But who can wonder, as they look around them at the world and continent in which they live, and some of the people to whom they are being asked to hand over power, that they hesitate? It is an act of considerable faith that they are being asked to perform.

AND YET, there is no other way. The step has to be taken. But for the faith in which it is taken to be justified, there has to be mutual trust; and there is precious little of that in evidence between the main negotiating factions.

It will need some dramatic act to re-establish it.

Could the Government's acceptance now of a 70 percent majority in our constitution-making body, the sticking-point at CODESA 2, be it? We certainly hope so and that CODESA will soon be called together again.

If it is, the Nationalist Party must take the plunge, accept that it probably won't control the next government, get the best deal it can, including as much regional devolution of power as possible, and hope that the predictions of the continuing influence of our minority communities on our future will be as great as the optimists proclaim they will be.

The alternative is chaos, anarchy and destitution for us all. ●

Join the debate on changing South Africa. Write to:
The Editor, Reality
P.O. Box 1104, Pietermaritzburg 3200