

Bleak winter if FA fails to come in from the cold



YET another last-ditch attempt has been made to persuade the Freedom Alliance to participate in the forthcoming election. South Africa must be one of the "ditchiest" countries in the world!

But the stakes are so high that efforts made by the ANC and the government to include as many parties as possible in the election can only be applauded. Should the Freedom Alliance continue its rejection of the Interim Constitution and refuse to register by the extended date of 4 March, the possibilities for a reasonably free and fair election will be seriously diminished – or, some would argue, ruled out altogether.

If right-wing parties and the Inkatha Freedom Party deny their supporters the chance to influence the legislative process at national and regional levels, the long-term implications for their futures as parties could be seriously damaging.

The short-term implications for all South Africans are, however, deadly serious. As far as the right-wing parties are concerned, judging by the threats that have been made and the incidents which have already occurred, there will be attempts to protect white exclusivity at all costs and to frustrate the process of the election as far as possible.

We can expect aggressive defence of public property, particularly in small towns and villages, as if this property was the sole right of white residents. The use of resistance tactics and worse will take place in local areas where blacks are most vulnerable.

It is almost certain that there will be widespread intimidation of potential voters, whether they be white or black. Non-co-operation by farmers, for example, could well be organised and carried out. More seriously, there could be destruction of property and widespread sabotage. Vigilante groups, geared to attack individuals, groups and property, will no doubt be formed. The possibility of assassination attempts must also be taken into account.

If right-wing whites do orchestrate a resistance campaign that goes beyond constitutional and peaceful opposition to the election, it will follow that blacks who are victims of the campaign will not take this lying down. They will react forcibly. The result is that the precarious fabric of our society could be in danger of being torn apart.

The saving grace may be the interdependence of blacks and whites in South Africa, whether or not the right wing or left wing wish to concede this. As a result, one can only hope that common sense will prevail and that the hard-line reaction will be confined to a small, militant group.

The above scenario is not intended to frighten or dismay, but simply to emphasise the importance of attempts that have been made over the last few weeks to include rather than exclude right-wing groups.

The situation in Natal/KwaZulu is even more grave. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, after resisting the process leading towards an election for months, has now played his king card

and it will be extremely difficult for the ANC and the government to ace this.

In modern times, the Zulu monarchy has not played a major role. But it has always been of great significance to all Zulus, particularly in the field of culture, history and tradition. Now the monarchy, which should be a unifying symbol, has become a source of increased conflict, bringing greater hurt rather than healing. As a direct result of the action by the Chief Minister, conflict has been institutionalised. There are no Zulus who wish to sideline the monarchy or denigrate the king, irrespective of the party to which they belong. But what many do object to is his public siding with one particular political party. If this continues and if the king, under Buthelezi's influence, continues to demand secession, the possibilities of something close to civil war in Natal/KwaZulu cannot be ruled out.

Even if at this late stage the ultimate decision is reversed and the IFP participates in the election, enormous damage has been done and it will be difficult to contain the strong feelings between ANC supporters and IFP supporters.

The key to the resolution of conflict lies not with the king but with Buthelezi. He has the power and the influence to remove the potential for bloodshed at a level that we have not yet witnessed, even in the Killing Fields of Natal. Should he persist in encouraging the king to hold out for secession, and should he continue to demand that the IFP not participate in the election, then he will have to accept responsibility for the tragic consequences which will unfold.

PERHAPS because he does hold the key it will take a meeting between Nelson Mandela, F W de Klerk and Buthelezi to try to bridge the current gulf and bring about a measure of reconciliation, thus ensuring IFP participation in the forthcoming election.

One thing is clear: the election will proceed with or without the Freedom Alliance. Should the Alliance not take part, then a critical question will be the issue of whether the government, the ANC and other participating parties can count on the loyalty of the South African Defence Force and the South African Police.

Despite the establishment of a Peacekeeping Force, there can be no doubt at all that the only forces that can keep the peace are the existing security forces. A huge responsibility will therefore lie with the Transitional Executive Council, the Independent Electoral Commission and the government itself. They must ensure that this loyalty is in place and that the leadership of the SADF and SAP does not succumb to any party political pressure. They must see to it that the security forces do the work of maintaining law and order throughout the run-up to the election and on the critical election days and the days that follow.

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