

The battle for a non-racial state

By RONEL SCHEFFER

The battle for a one-nation state in South Africa has been won, but those committed to a non-racial democracy still have a long haul ahead of them in the view of Dr Van Zyl Slabbert, IDASA's director of policy and planning. In particular, the shift by the National Party from a multi-nation partitioned state to a one-nation integrated state has produced new challenges for mass-based organisations who may have to review certain hallowed strategies and tactics of the past.

In a paper delivered at a Bonn conference recently, Dr Slabbert argued that the state's shift from "segregation" to "integration" may demand a new exploration of structures and opportunities on the part of the democratic movement. He said the NP leader F W de Klerk's declaration of intent to work for an acceptable one-nation state was already being taken seriously by the United States and Britain, and in certain respects the USSR. It was not improbable that, after the election, De Klerk could produce an attractive package which could persuade many to throw in their lot with the NP on the road towards a one-nation state.

"The skilful manipulation of Mandela's release, the partial unbanning of some organisations, the lifting of the State of Emergency may create a whole new set of allies who would seriously consider participation towards a one-nation state whilst they would never have done so for a multi-nation state," said Slabbert.

He added: "The critical question is how will those who struggle for a non-racial democracy respond strategically to this challenge. The debate in favour of a one-nation state for South Africa has been won, but not the struggle for a non-racial democracy."

The struggle for a non-racial democracy had to be renewed and invigorated, particularly if the government adopted a policy of "co-optive inclusion" to attain its version of a one-nation state.

Slabbert said the collapse of the apartheid/separate development state may be a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for a non-racial democratic alternative. One reason depends on the response to the implications of this shift in white politics. Another has to do with the future of those structures that were created under the old regime and would continue under different goals and circumstances in the new regime.

He said one of the persistent misrepresentations of the South African state structure was that of an "embattled white minority warding off the determined attacks of the vast majority of disenfranchised blacks".

This was not borne out by reality. Said Slabbert: "If one defines the South African state in the broad sense of consisting of all those structures controlled and/or financed by the executive decisions of those who drew up and present the annual South African budget, and this would then include so-called 'independent dependent states', then more people who are classified not white, work for and maintain the South African state than otherwise."

"Certainly at the apex of this structure there is clear white minority domination but increasingly it is a white domination that will depend on black support to maintain it."

The significance of the shift from segregation



DR VAN ZYL SLABBERT

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to integration for the state structures lay in the rationalisation and legitimisation for participation. "It is one thing to expect people to participate in state structures that will lead to their final exclusion as citizens of South Africa; it is quite another matter if such participation promises full citizenship in a one-nation state," said Slabbert.

He added: "One can expect those who govern to encourage more and more people to participate and help to build a 'one-nation state' where there will be 'no domination' and 'no discrimination' and where a future constitution can 'be negotiated without pre-conditions'. The real dilemma is that such a constitution will not necessarily be non-racial and democratic."

The strategic challenge facing the vast majority of South Africans who have to live under these structures, said Slabbert, concerned identifying the course of action to be taken under these circumstances. He added that the shift had opened up a fertile new strategic area for those committed to a non-racial democracy in South Africa, but that it could demand breaking with past strategic taboos.

He suggested that a possible way of looking at the situation would be to classify areas of activity in terms of "more or less control or autonomy" from the executive centre. The political structures like the tricameral parliament, homeland governments and the regional services councils would be less autonomous than socio-economic structures like those in education and labour. Certain areas like the informal sector would be highly autonomous, even "illegal" (eg. hawking, squatting) while

formal "legal" economic areas would be almost establishments approved and fairly autonomous.

"In all these areas of activity the implications of the shift are going to play themselves out and the central question will become not whether South Africa is going to be a one-nation state but what kind of one-nation state are we going to become."

This question, Slabbert said, might have been answered with a great degree of consensus and ideological clarity within mass based organisations whose control and representative leadership operated outside of apartheid state structures and whose popular support may, to a larger or lesser extent, be involved in those structures. It has, however, not been resolved to the same extent within the state structures which are being maintained to a considerable extent by the disenfranchised.

"It is very likely that it is in this arena (state structures) where the De Klerk era will seriously begin to explore the idea, and search for allies, for the new one-nation state in South Africa, and also where many concerned whites searching for new symbols of national unity will be pulled into the 'new debate'," he said.

He also emphasised that it would be a strategic error if mass based organisations remained aloof from this debate or assumed that it would die and wither away because "the masses" or "the people" or "some historical inevitability" would not tolerate its existence.

Slabbert said the state of the economy and the international commitment to a "political solution" in South Africa were two developments which would encourage movement in the "new debate". Contrary to conventional wisdom on the issue, he believed that the stagnation and even decline of the South African economy would strengthen the state's search for its view of one-nation state allies. "It will of necessity offload the costs of economic decline on those who cannot/will not be incorporated, and will try to marginalise those organisations and leaders who challenge its concept of the one-nation state."

The international world has for the time being abandoned the revolutionary paradigm and has substituted it with "the long haul to negotiations". Of necessity this meant a re-evaluation of existing structures and above all, a renewed interest in "the whites", and whether they would "change". Any "reasonable" response by the state would almost automatically be inflated beyond its potential. Indicative of this was the fact that the catchword for the 1989 election, both inside and outside South Africa, had already become "let's give FW a chance".

Slabbert said the shift had fundamental implications for whites as well as for the future of those structures created under apartheid and separate development. "The search for new symbols of unity and nationhood amongst most whites is real. The transient nature of the structures created by the apartheid state is no longer questioned. However, even if the battle for a one-nation state in South Africa has been won, the struggle for a non-racial democracy has to be renewed and invigorated."

"The seventies saw the collapse of the partition state, the eighties saw the shift to the integrated state, the nineties will see the battle for the non-racial democratic state."