

Ballot box or Pandora's box?

South Africans of all persuasions should start preparing for an election. Rapid movement to a transitional government – based on an elected constitution-making body – is increasingly becoming a popular political option.

When Codesa 2 stuttered and then failed, negotiators from the various parties – and in particular the ANC and the government – had reached remarkable agreements on a variety of subjects including mechanisms for transitional government.

The fallout from Codesa and the subsequent despair and anger evoked by Boipatong has led to people questioning whether those in working groups were actually speaking the same language or were just pretending to agree. The mass action campaign in progress at the moment was designed either to remind the government of the urgency of establishing peace and democracy or of removing it from office and replacing it with interim measures which would be more responsive to the needs of the country.

Whatever the outcome of the mass action and of the various third party interventions which it has provoked, leadership – whether through a revived negotiating forum, through an interim authority, or by unilateral decision – will be looking quite soon at least at some of the recommendations of Codesa as they provide formulas about which there is already some common cause.

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Elections may get SA back on track

BY PAUL GRAHAM



‘ This is a day of mourning. This is a day of shame – the events of Boipatong have shocked our nation and the nations of the world so that even the most apathetic, the most anaesthetised among us, recoil in horror and shame and have to say “Enough!”

Enough of this carnage, this brutal slaughter, this degrading inhumanity. Enough of this political opportunism at the expense of defenceless children and woman and the aged; enough of this blood-letting. Our country, each of us, is stained with blood deep into our very souls. We are no longer white or black or coloured – we are all *red* with each other's blood.

Apartheid, which has made pariahs of the people of South Africa in the international community is now in its death throes

Live the dream now!

At a memorial service for the Boipatong victims on June 29, the Anglican Dean of Cape Town, Colin Jones, called on ordinary South Africans to give the lead in building a society based on justice, peace, humanity and compassion. These are extracts from his address.

making of us an abomination in the eyes of the human family...

These are bleak days indeed. We cannot just bury our dead and get on with life in South Africa – because life in South Africa is about death and the constant burying of our dead.

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An approach by business, labour and churches, a visit by UN special envoy Cyrus Vance, and proposals by the Commonwealth have been among those third party interventions. The UN special session which produced the resolution enabling an envoy to be sent was a clear indication that the international community had linked the questions of violence and the stalled negotiations and wanted South Africa to resolve its transition to democracy as speedily as possible. Growing consensus on the time frames available to parties to negotiate a settlement will help to focus attention on the gains made through the various negotiations including Codesa.

And the central feature – with some details to be worked in or worked out – is an elected constitution-making body which also has the authority to govern during the transitional stage.



What was at issue was the power that this body would have in relation to constitutional frameworks established in Codesa working groups. The 75 percent solution which collapsed the 19-party summit was an attempt to ensure that the Codesa frameworks stood, whatever the composition of that constitution-making and transitional body. The Codesa frameworks included a number of democratic principles such as a Bill of Rights, the separation of powers, representative government at local, regional and national levels, and universal suffrage in a proportional representation system.

There has been controversy about the creation of principles which will bind those drafting the constitution. However, negotiators seemed willing to affirm certain values

and principles in order to re-assure those fearful of an anti-democratic takeover of power.

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So South Africans are looking at, sooner or later, an election for such a body. Given the breakdown of Codesa, the urgency of ending the violence and creating stability for investment and economic growth, and the continuing exposé of the present National Party's patchy track record as a competent government, rapid movement to a transitional government is on an increasing number of agendas.

Preparing for an election can have a number of consequences for the country. Firstly, it focuses the energies of people and gives them a common goal – the uncertainty of the transition has, in the words of General Bantu Holomisa, taken us from "total onslaught to total exhaustion". The uncertainty is having serious effects, not least of which is the increasingly bloody violence and criminality. The common cause of beginning to prepare for elections may even provide the added pressure needed to complete the negotiation process.

Secondly, it sets a time limit on the present filibustering and electioneering which seem to be characterising some politicians and government officials. It also offers those with skills and cash who are close to packing it all in and leaving a definite period in which to reassess their positions. And it offers to the dispossessed, a moment of hope rather than the interminable and intangible negotiations.

Thirdly, it allows a re-emergence, within a controlled environment, of the grassroots political activity and organisation which had characterised South Africa before and which is so essential to our survival as a democracy and in our transition from anarchy and violence.

There is already an indication that such citizen participation is growing – with attendance at conferences, workshops and public

events increasing, new organisations and networks of organisations emerging, and the challenge of mass action redeveloping organisation skills, bringing people together, and ensuring the development of a broader leadership base.

There are fears that an election under the present conditions will lead to intimidation and further violence. There are also fears that a straight national election will override the many regional interests and differences in the country. More detailed work on an electoral act and the composition of the body or bodies being elected cannot be avoided.

However, preparing for elections requires organisation, political programmes, training, development of organisational records and a range of organisational tasks. In addition, the establishment of electoral commissions, monitoring groups and codes of conduct are required. All of these act against political violence and may even serve to reduce the reactionary violence which seems in part to be fuelling the conflict in order to subvert the movement to democracy.

Of course this scenario is based on the assumption that there remains sufficient goodwill and common commitment to South Africa to ensure that it survives and prospers. It requires an act of will to remember that it is not very long ago that books were being written with titles such as, "Will South Africa Survive?"

South Africans of all political persuasions joined hands to pull us back from the abyss then. It is surely not too much to expect that we can do it again – and do it quickly enough to avoid those options of the mid-1980s: the "Lebanon" option, the civil war, the repressive stalemate and the "wham-bam" (reform/repression) strategy – and their bedfellows: economic stagnation, the "brain drain" and development inertia and misappropriation.

In politics a week is a long time. *Democracy in Action* deadlines mean that this article is written in the midst of the urgent multi-layered and multi-level talks. It may be that this article is more a statement of hope than of what emerges as parties seek to come to terms with the violence and with the genies that are let out the bottle as a result of mass action.

The government's ability to persuade others that it is finally taking the violence seriously and acting trustworthily – and the ANC's ability to re-enter negotiations for a non-racial democracy without losing its presently angry and bitter constituency – are going to be tested. Whatever the outcome, all South African citizens need to continue working for democracy.

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