

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

IDASA's goals are:

- To encourage South Africans of all races to reject apartheid and discover an alternative that is non-racial and democratic in the true sense of the word.
- To assist people to accept and work for a post-apartheid society as a way of allaying their fears.
- To mobilise the skills, knowledge and experience of all those who can assist the communities in the crisis areas of South Africa.
- To provide forums and opportunities on a nationwide basis to find democratic solutions to South Africa's problems.
- To assist in creating a climate for genuine negotiation towards a non-racial and democratic South Africa.

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EDITORIAL

The message we need to hear

The verdict on Mr Ronald Reagan's presidency of the United States has yet to be written. However, there is one area of his presidency in which he excelled. His so-called "fireside chats" on television and radio were classics in communication.

He made no attempt to impress or even to interpret his policies or lack thereof. What he did was to reassure and convince Americans that he was in charge and that he had their best interests at heart.

President De Klerk is going to have to take a leaf out of the former American president's book. This is in no way to suggest that he should seek to placate the lunatic fringe on the rightwing. They are a small, vocal and potentially dangerous group, but they are much in the minority and will not respond to reason or to reassurances, particularly if they should come from the man whom they believe has betrayed them. Nor should Mr De Klerk attempt to sweeten the pill as it were, in the sense of deluding the broad masses of whites into a belief that life is going to go on exactly as it has before 2 February 1990.

What he does have to do is to reassure his major constituency that it is in their own self-interest to accept a new South Africanism which embraces all South Africans and which affords equal opportunities for all, irrespective of race or ethnicity.

He has to take them into his confidence and he can best do this not by focussing on constitutional niceties, but rather to present them with a vision of what the new South Africa could be like: a South Africa free from discrimination, but also free from fear; a South Africa with justice for all, but the promise also of peace and security.

Mr De Klerk has rightly and commendably been strong on the need to break down the walls which have for so long separated South Africans from each other. He needs also to stress the bridges which have to be built so as to ensure a united South Africa. For more than 40 years the National Party has used every means at its disposal to inculcate within the white community a feeling of superiority over their fellow citizens. They have ruthlessly exploited fears and convinced whites that so long as apartheid is in place, their privileged future was assured. Now Mr De Klerk and his government must use all the resources at their disposal to break down the fears.

This needs to be done not because whites are more important or more special than anyone else. It needs to be done because unless it is, there will be further erosion of support away from Mr De Klerk in the direction of right-wing extremism and that holds serious and tragic implications for all who wish to see the emergence of a new South Africa.

Of course Mr De Klerk is not alone in his responsibility to help clarify the confusion

and deal decisively with fears which have arisen, particularly in the white community. All who are committed to a discrimination-free and just society have a responsibility at every possible level to bring a message not only of challenge, but also of hope.

In this regard the ANC has a particular obligation. Mr Mandela has on numerous occasions sought to give reassurance to white South Africans. However, he has to do more than this. He and the ANC should give serious consideration to three areas.

Firstly, they have to demonstrate that they are not having to be dragged to the negotiation table. Whilst the ANC has to set in place its structures and to handle the demanding task of bringing back the exiles, and a host of other logistical and political problems, it also has a responsibility to contradict the prevailing perception that they do not have the same sense of urgency as demonstrated by Mr De Klerk.

In the second place, whilst sanctions in many respects may be symbolic, and whilst it may be understandable that Mr Mandela and the ANC have to take a tough attitude on this score because of the deep-seated and historic suspicions within the black community, the ANC nevertheless ought to be much clearer in their timetable for the lifting of sanctions and in particular the sanctions on new investment.

When precisely will they accept that the shift away from apartheid towards an open and free society is deemed to be irreversible? Certainly the South African economy cannot afford to wait until the end of the negotiations or when the new government is in place. It is in the interests of all, including the ANC, that Mr Mandela and Mr De Klerk should jointly call for the lifting of sanctions.

The third and most important area of all is clarity on the whole question of violence which brings fear and uncertainty into the hearts of white and black alike.

Whilst the ANC commendably has called for the end to violence which has characterised so much of life in South Africa for so long, it needs to go much further than that. So long as they continue to emphasise the need for the continuation of the armed struggle, it is impossible for them to urge with conviction the end of violence in Natal or anywhere else.

South Africa is so close to writing a new chapter in its history. The stakes are high and enormous demands will be made on Mr De Klerk and Mr Mandela and those whom they represent. If the new South Africa is within our grasp, it can also be rudely and violently snatched away. If this is not to happen, a great deal will depend in the coming months on leadership, compassionate and strong, from both sides of the divide.

Alex Borraine
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