

# New role for S. Africa: torchbearer of freedom

By BREMER HOFMEYR

**T**HE ENORMOUS leap forward which South Africa has made in the past year and a half is in part at least a triumph of the conscience of the Afrikaner.

Ten years ago I wrote an article for *The Canberra Times* on "The agony of Afrikanerdom". For 300 years the Afrikaner has fought on African soil against the British, against the Xhosa (Nelson Mandela's people), against the Zulus (the people of Mangosuthu Buthelezi, head of the Inkatha Freedom Party.)

Their one consuming passion was to be masters of their own fate. When the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948 they believed their struggle had been won, and that through the apartheid policy they would enter the promised land. The Afrikaans churches supported the Government, but this could not silence the Christian conscience of the deeply religious Afrikaner people. This inner conflict has been the agony of the Afrikaner.

At last it seems that their Christian conscience is rising above the claims of nationalism, for while many battered away at the stronghold of Afrikanerdom from the outside, the log-jam of apartheid has finally been broken from within the heart of Afrikanerdom.

I also wrote, "Some time the wielders of white power will have to sit down with the wielders of black power with open hearts and minds. We whites will need the grace to admit that we have put our own interests first and that we have to find a new way

together. If we are humble enough to say, 'We do not know the way. Can you help us?' I believe we might find a generosity of response that could unlock the seemingly impossible situation."

Certainly Mandela *the man* has more than fulfilled this expectation of generosity of spirit. I emphasise *the man* as there are two voices. There is Mr Mandela's own voice — that of a man who has been big enough to live above the reality of 28 years in prison. He is also the voice of the executive of the African National Congress/South African Communist Party alliance. It is the difference between the voice of reason and hard-line demands for systems that have failed in Europe and could cost South Africa dear. Yet the remarkable fact is that the wielders of white power and the wielders of black power *are* sitting down together, generally with open hearts and minds.

The many South Africans who have dedicated lives to see this miracle come about still stand in awe at the events. Even the most optimistic would never have believed that from the heart of the Nationalist Party could arise a President who in 17 months would remove from the statute book every piece of apartheid legislation. Yet this is what Mr F. W. de Klerk has done.

True, there are differences of interpretation which still have to be ironed out, such as what constitutes a political prisoner. Does a murderer who claims he did it in the liberation struggle qualify? But there is every expectation that these will be resolved.

At least five major problems remain. The first is the Afrikaners of the Right who will have no part in the reform process. They say Mr de Klerk has no mandate to do

what he is doing. Mr de Klerk says he fought the election on the platform of reform. The right wing say that if he had spelt out what he meant by "reform" he would not be in office. True perhaps, but today irrelevant.

The white hard-liners speak of the "third freedom struggle", after the Boer Wars of 1880 and 1899-1902. They hint at violence. It is going to be a giant task of statesmanship for Mr de Klerk, Mr Mandela and other leaders to find some way in which to accommodate the aspirations of this militant group in a new dispensation. The alternative seems to be to have a white terrorist movement within the country, well-armed, convinced that they are freedom fighters, perhaps not unlike the IRA in Ireland.

Then there is the question of the two elements in the ANC — the nationalists and the communists. It is tempting to think that this is a non-issue as communism has so patently failed in Europe. However, Joe Slovo, the head of the South African Communist Party, rejects this entirely, saying, "We will learn from their mistakes" and also "Everything we need will be achieved through nationalisation". Mr Mandela is intensely loyal to all who supported him in the freedom struggle — Gaddafi, the IRA, Arafat, Slovo.

There is no suggestion that Mr Mandela is going to say the time has come for the Communist Party to stand on its own feet with its own program. It will continue to operate through the ANC. Mr Mandela may see it as a matter of loyalty or as a matter of political necessity since he needs the party to secure majority support nation-wide.

Mr de Klerk is also faced with the problem of moving goalposts. Mr Mandela now

says his demand for a constituent assembly to write the constitution is "not negotiable". This is an entirely new ultimatum not mentioned in earlier discussions.

The argument in its favour is that it could afford a speedy move to a "one-man, one-vote" parliamentary election. But there seems no way that Mr de Klerk and other groups will hand over the writing of a constitution to an ANC-Communist Party alliance even if it represents an overall majority in the country. It has always been Mr de Klerk's concept that for a constitution to be honoured widely it has to be negotiated. The basic question is not how soon one can get a constitution, but how to arrive at a constitution with wide accep-

*'The real issue is what will put food in hungry mouths'*

tance.

Then there is the issue of group rights, which will certainly be a battleground. Mr de Klerk, Mr Buthelezi and some others believe some form of minority protection is vital. The ANC opposes it. Government forces point to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as illustrating how strong regional and ethnic feeling are when central control is lifted. The French in Canada have very powerful minority rights through their provincial government. When the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group was in South Africa, former Nigerian leader Olusegun Obasanjo was most understanding of our situation. He made no bones about the fact that the Nigerian state boundaries were

drawn on ethnic lines to keep the peace.

Finally there is the disaster of black education. The gross inequalities of the past are well known. But now the problem is more than the need for money to build more schools and train more teachers. The tragedy is that learning, which was once a passion among black children, is now at a discount. Pupils drift into schools if and when they want, go home when they choose, tell their teachers to wait in the staff room until they are summoned, dismiss headmasters.

The policy of "Liberation before Education", widely touted in the 1980s, has supposedly given way to "Education for Liberation". Parents and political leaders endorse it, but students ignore it. This has more or less been the case since 1976, so there is the giant problem of some three million uneducated black youths with no work ethic.

These are formidable problems, but manageable in comparison to what has already been accomplished. Yet the removal of apartheid is only the beginning of our task. What Africa urgently needs is a demonstration that a viable, free society is possible on this continent of which the international community is beginning to despair. This should be South Africa's role.

The removal of apartheid legislation is just clearing out laws that should never have been on the statute book in the first place. It only puts South Africa on a par with the rest of the continent. The supreme opportunity that faces us now is to be a torchbearer of freedom for the continent.

The colonial powers left Africa with multi-party constitutions that have been

largely torn up. Military dictatorships, one-party states and total chaos have become the pattern, along with massive debts that can never be repaid.

One exception is Botswana, with its small population of 600,000 and a generous injection of foreign aid. There is also Namibia, with a democratic constitution, but it has not yet had time to prove itself.

The African claim that you can have democracy within a one-party state is not in fact becoming a reality. One of the better-run African one-party states has this simple expedient. The president is the chairman of the party, with power to expel a member as he sees fit. So if a member of parliament steps out of line he is expelled from the party and so automatically from the one-party parliament. Consequently, gross abuses of privilege that should be aired by the opposition in parliament pass without protest.

Can South Africa succeed where by and large the rest of Africa has failed?

One beacon of hope is that the Government, the ANC and Mr Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party all talk of a multi-party democracy with regular secret-ballot elections, a Bill of rights, and an independent judiciary to interpret the Bill.

Another hope is that although our economy is stagnant South Africa has paid its debts despite being throttled by sanctions.

There is also a certain experience of, and respect for parliamentary procedure. The white population has scrupulously observed parliamentary procedure within its own ranks for 81 years.

This is not to suggest that a democracy of a minority in any way represents a true

democracy. But the fact that some have lived with and cherished democratic parliamentary procedure for so long may prove a leaven in a larger true democracy. Even the indefensible Indian and Coloured Parliaments, and the homelands, which will be phased out in a free South Africa, bring some experience with them. A man like Mr Buthelezi, the Chief Minister of Kwa-Zulu, has 15 or more years of experience in parliamentary government and administration in the Zulu world.

Many South Africans of all races now share the vision of a viable, free, democratic nation pioneering the road of freedom for a continent. If we can live this out it is our hope that the international community will see how high are the stakes for which we are playing and share in the venture for the sake of the whole of Africa.

Eastern Europe has clearly demonstrated that democracy can only survive if it is underpinned by a viable economy. South Africa would love to play cricket and rugby against Australia again. But the real issue is what will put food in hungry mouths, work in idle hands, and hope in empty hearts. It is here that we need urgent help.

Since this article was first drafted the US Ambassador to South Africa, William Lacy Swing, has expressed a similar sentiment.

"We Americans see in South Africa's future the possibility of a model for Africa and the Third World," he said. "We believe that no other nation on this continent has a greater chance than South Africa to succeed politically."

Bremer Hofmeyr, a Rhodes Scholar, is a freelance South African journalist who has played a part in breaking down racial barriers.