

The Status of the Dream

by Allister Sparks



Taking the oath of office, May 10, 1994

Nelson Mandela is soon to leave office after five history-making years as president of South Africa. The magnitude of the challenges his government faced—and of the progress it made—is only now becoming clear, for South Africa has been in the throes of three revolutions at once.



The inaugural scene. "It is not the kings and generals that make history, but the masses of the people," Mandela once said.

The inauguration of President Nelson Mandela on May 10, 1994, was the most stirring experience of my life. After more than 40 years of writing against apartheid, of exposing its iniquities and cruelties and the sheer lunacy of it, here at last was a kind of vindication, a kind of triumph. More than that, for the first time I felt the stirrings of a sense of national identification. It is a terrible thing to feel alienated from one's own people, and that I had felt my whole life. In my first book, published a decade ago, I had written that although I was a fifth-generation white South African, I felt myself to be "emotionally stateless": I could not identify with the land of my birth because it stood for things I abhorred; I felt no sense of pride when I heard my national anthem or saw my national flag.

Now here, in the grand amphitheater of Pretoria's Union Buildings, stood the tall, frail figure of Nelson Mandela, the miracle man, the liv-

With the country's second post-apartheid election due in June, there are some in South Africa, on both left and right, who are writing Mandela's covenant off as a failure.

ing martyr who had withstood 27 years of incarceration by one of the world's most heartless regimes, taking the oath of office. It was a clear, cloudless day, the bright-brittle sunlight crisp in the thin, high-velde air, with just the first chill touches of the Southern Hemisphere autumn. But from the crowd there throbbed an exuberant warmth. A hundred thousand people thronged the lower slopes of the hillside that sweeps gently down from the Union Buildings into the city, dressed in everything from rags to work clothes to tribal skins and feathers, come to see their hero take power from the oppressors. And up here in the amphitheater, in all its finery, stood a multinational crowd of extraordinary sartorial and political variety.

I had been to only one presidential inauguration before, a thin and soulless affair at which the tough militarist Pieter W. Botha was installed in the presence of just one foreign leader—the Angolan rebel, Jonas Savimbi. Now, the whole world was here: Hillary Clinton and Al Gore and Fidel Castro, John Major and Yasir Arafat, the kings of Belgium and Greece, Swaziland and Lesotho, the Duke of Edinburgh and the lord chamberlain to King Hussein of Jordan, Israelis and Arabs, Iranians and Turks and Greeks and Russians, Europeans and Asians and Latin Americans, and, of course, the whole of Africa. The pariah state had

emerged like a butterfly from its cocoon into the sunlight of international acceptance.

The Old Man stepped forward and the great crowd hushed. Tall and thin and still, with that immobile face, so like his own wax likeness in Madame Tussaud's, with not a muscle moving, not a flicker of emotion, until after the oath—and then the smile that everyone has come to know, broad, beaming, radiant. Then back

into its immobile mode once more for the speech. A speech that seemed aimed at all the alienated souls of Alan Paton's beloved country. The closing words, slow and measured, booming out across the great crowd: "We enter into a covenant that we shall build a society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity—a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world." And then the pledge, from a man who had once told the judge who was about to sentence him to life imprisonment that he was prepared to die for the cause of non-racialism. "Never, never, never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another, and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world."

A military band began playing the lilting harmony of the new national anthem, "Nkosi sikelel iAfrika" (God bless Africa), and I felt the hairs stand up on the nape of my neck. My first experience in all my three score years of a sentiment that was, what, patriotism? Six jet fighters, which only a few short years before had been strafing Mandela's men in the bush of Angola, flew low overhead trailing long smoke streamers in the colors of the new national flag, followed by six helicopter gunships flying the flag itself. Down below, a jazz band struck

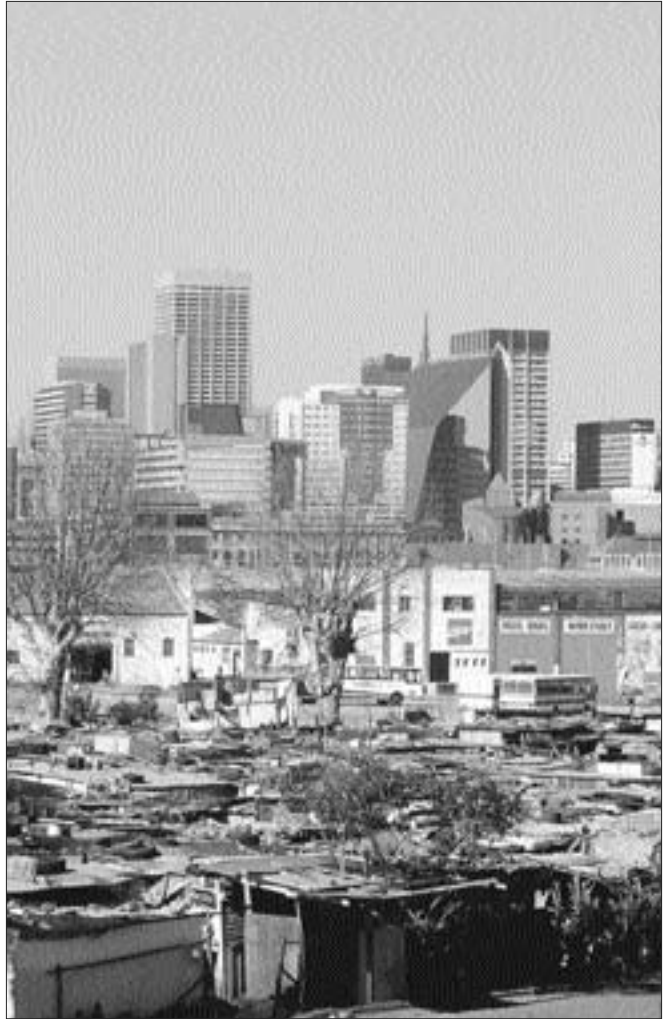
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up. The great crowd burst into song, swaying and jiving to the music and forming snakelike trains that wove through the crowds holding the new flag high in the air. The occasion turned, as is wont to happen in Africa, from formal ceremonialism into an impromptu music festival.

A rainbow nation. What a wonderful promise in a world riven by ethnic conflicts. What a stunning turnaround for a country bedeviled by half a century of institutionalized racism. Gripped by the symbolism of it, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Nobel laureate, was moved to predict that South Africa, with its own intersection of First and Third World populations, would transform itself from global pariah into global role model. "Once we have got it right," Tutu said, "South Africa will be the paradigm for the rest of the world."

But promises are one thing, fulfilling them another. Today, five years later and with the Mandela presidency drawing to a close, is the rainbow nation becoming a reality? Can South Africa, with its long history of racial intolerance, really buck the global trend and become a truly nonracial, multiparty democracy? Is nonracialism itself in any event not a pipe dream that ignores the hard realities of human nature? Is democracy not something that can exist in only a handful of developed countries with a high degree of homogeneity and what the social scientists call social balance?

With the South Africa's second postapartheid election due on June 2, there are some, on both left and right, who are writing the 80-



A squatter camp in the shadow of the Johannesburg skyline is a reminder of the continuing poverty of many South Africans.

year-old president's covenant off as a failure. With unemployment rising and the wealth gap between whites and blacks still painfully wide, it is easy to find disenchanting blacks who will tell you that Mandela has done too much to appease the whites and that for them "nothing has changed." Many are irked, too, by what they see as an unrepentant attitude among whites and a resentful reluctance to have any of the social and economic privileges they acquired under apartheid diminished. "Take note that we blacks are terminally fed up," fumed columnist Jon Qwelane in a recent article.

Sadly, an opposite criticism comes from the Democratic Party (DP), residual home



The case of the Sharpeville Six, black activists who were convicted of a political killing, was one of many rallying points in the last years of apartheid. The apartheid government eventually commuted their sentences.

of white liberalism and a party with a brave anti-apartheid record. In February 1998, the party brought out a stinging pamphlet called *The Death of the Rainbow Nation*, in which it accused the Mandela government of “a creeping reintroduction of race policies” under the guise of “corrective action” to redress the cumulative disadvantages suffered by blacks under apartheid. There was more. The government had polarized the political debate by accusing predominantly white opposition parties, including the DP, of sabotaging transformation. Noting that a new affirmative action law requires employers to draft a

plan showing how they intend to advance blacks in their workforce and then to submit annual progress reports to the government, the DP pamphlet complained that this measure has effectively reintroduced a system of racial classification and criminalized “color-blindness.” Somewhat extravagantly, it warned that “racial legislation is a very slippery slope: apartheid, American segregation, and Nazi Germany all had small beginnings.” The Afrikaners’ National Party—now renamed the New National Party (NNP) in a half-hearted attempt to distance itself from its past—has similarly labeled affirmative action racist, but its words have a hollow ring.

Meanwhile, John Pilger, a left-wing Australian journalist who was banned from the country for 30 years, has returned to make a television documentary called *Apartheid did not Die*, the central theme of which is that Mandela’s African National Congress (ANC) has sold out to big business and embarked on policies that leave the misery of the black masses untouched. On the right, Lester Venter, a former political correspondent of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, has published a book called *When Mandela Goes*, predicting a future of increasing disarray that leads the unhappy black masses to oust the ANC and vote in a new socialist workers party in 2004, with disastrous results.

Of course, South Africa has never lacked for doomsday prophets. Even at the time of the 1994 election, many international journalists arrived with their video cameras primed for a bloodbath, and when it didn't happen, they packed up and flew to Rwanda, where conveniently there was one. But what is even more responsible for the excessively gloomy assessments is a gross underestimation of the task that has confronted the new majority government over these past four-and-a-half years. It has been infinitely more complex and difficult than anyone imagined. South Africa is not simply undertaking a sociopolitical revolution, working to democratize the modern world's most deeply entrenched system of institutionalized racism and political authoritarianism, daunting though that is in itself. It is attempting three simultaneous revolutions rolled into one.

Even as it tackles the task of trying to integrate a society divided by several hundred years of white domination and 45 years of apartheid ideology, the new government must also undertake a gigantic economic revolution. It has been seeking to transform South Africa from an isolationist siege economy into a player in the new global market—a task that has destabilized a whole chain of emerging economies, from Russia and Malaysia in the east to Brazil in the west.

At the same time, South Africa is having to move urgently from an economy based on agriculture and mining to one based on exports of manufactured goods. This is the third revolution. The country's gold resources, once the richest in the world, are dwindling, and the price of gold is falling. In 1980, one-sixth of South Africa's total economic output was from gold; today it is a paltry three percent. South Africa's indus-

tries, meanwhile, have mostly been geared toward import substitution. Only a few, notably Rothmans, a major tobacco transnational; South African Breweries, which is the world's fourth-largest beer manufacturer; and the country's highly rated wine and fruit-canning enterprises, have been significant exporters. At the same time, the new government is withdrawing the fat agricultural subsidies the apartheid regime paid to its white farming constituents, many of whom are now succumbing to the hard realities of a climate that is arid in many regions.

What compounds the difficulty is a crippling conflict between the requirements of these simultaneous revolutions. On the one hand, the ANC faces the political imperative of having to deliver more jobs and better pay to its expectant and long-deprived constituencies. On the other hand, the harsh reality of competitive participation in the global market is that it leads to increased unemployment and pressure on wages, at least in the short term. In seeking to transform South Africa from producer of primary goods to manufacturing exporter, the government has to deal with the fact that the old economy required an abundance of cheap, unskilled labor, while the new one requires a smaller but highly skilled work force—and the apartheid regime, as a matter of policy, prevented the black population from acquiring skills. The purpose of the policy was not only to protect white jobs but to attempt the Sisyphian task of reversing the relentless influx of rural black people to the cities. They were sup-

Black people were deliberately given a separate and inferior education, barred from the major universities, and prohibited by law from doing skilled work.

posed to stay in their own little tribal “homelands,” which were one day supposed to become independent, leaving the greater part of the country as the white man’s land.

The result was that black people were deliberately given a separate and inferior education (most, in fact, got no education at all). They were barred from the major universities. They were prohibited by law from doing skilled work. Until 1979 they were not allowed to join trade unions, so they could not acquire skills by becoming apprentices. They were not allowed to form partnerships or companies. They could not establish businesses, except simple shops selling perishable produce—and even then their trading licenses had to be renewed annually. It must be the only instance in history in which a government deliberately crippled the skills base of its country’s working class. Cyril Ramaphosa, the trade union leader who became the ANC’s chief constitutional negotiator and is now a tycoon, has described this planned neglect as the worst of all apartheid’s crimes against humanity. Its legacy is now the new democratic regime’s greatest liability.

Seen in that daunting context, as well as the short space of time—there have been not yet 2,000 days to turn around the cumulative inequalities of more than 300 years—the criticisms of the new democratic regime look either self-serving or downright malicious. Certainly the charge that “nothing has changed” is nonsense. Radical change is visible

everywhere, particularly in the big cities, and most especially in the one where I have lived for the past 40 years.

I arrived in Johannesburg in February 1959, and immediately found myself both repelled and fascinated by the curious mix of vitality and tension that seemed to permeate the atmosphere of this extraordinary city. For Johannesburg was then, and still is, the cutting edge of the country’s racial and cultural interactions, the place where its First and Third World elements are drawn together by the irresistible magnet of a dynamic economy. I had grown up on a farm in the backwaters of the Eastern Cape Province, alongside the country’s largest black reserve, where I had come to know tribal people in all their slow and amiable ways. Now I was in the big city, where the black folk were sharp and streetwise and the whites brash and on the make. Though I had spent time in London, working for the big Reuters news agency on Fleet Street, this was different, with none of Europe’s assured maturity and depth of culture and courtesy. I found it frightening but also fascinating, for I realized from the start that it was a place of primal issues and moral challenges, a place to engage the passions like no other on earth. If I wished to understand my country, this was where to do it.

Quickly I came to realize that the essential character of Johannesburg stemmed from the fact that it was really an overgrown mining camp. It had that instant and transient air about it, as though everyone had come there for a quick buck and nothing was meant to last. The city had sprung into life only 68 years before, scarcely six months after a penniless gold prospector

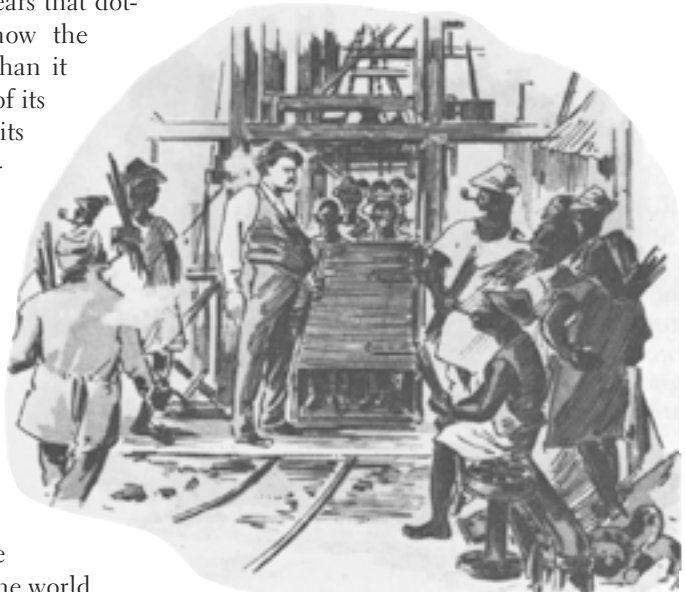
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stumbled upon a rocky outcrop that proved to be the signpost to the world's richest gold deposits. Because the gold was deep underground and expensive to mine, an elaborate financial structure soon followed. It took less than a year to establish the city's first stock exchange. Brothels and bars arrived almost simultaneously. The boom was so headlong that no one bothered to record which official, speculator, or digger had been honored in the city's name. It thus became the city of the unknown Johannesburg.

The city still had a honky-tonk atmosphere when I arrived, an impression accentuated by the yellow mine dumps and ungainly mine headgears that dotted its periphery. Somehow the city seemed a lot bigger than it really was, partly because of its pace and partly because its black population, numbering two-thirds of the total, lived beyond its fringes in dormitory townships and thronged its streets by day. It was regarded as a skyscraper city, even though its tallest building, Eskom House, was only 12 floors high. But the paradox was that unlike every other metropolis in the world, this one died at night. At 5 p.m., when businesses closed, the inhabitants fled to their segmented ghettos, the blacks to their dormitory townships and the whites to their high-walled suburban homes. The central city streets fell silent, dark, and sinister.

I had come there to work as a copyeditor on the country's biggest morning newspaper, the *Rand Daily Mail*, which under a new editor was showing signs of becoming the first crusading paper for racial justice in South Africa's history. It was a challenging time for such a venture. African colonies were reaching for their independence, and as British prime minister Harold Macmillan warned during a visit to South Africa in

1960, the "winds of change" were beginning to blow through the continent. In the black population a new assertiveness was stirring. But in South Africa a new prime minister, Hendrik F. Verwoerd, had taken power and was beginning to elaborate the apartheid ideology and implement it with intensified thoroughness. Every day brought news of more forced removals as the bulldozers flattened black residential areas deemed too close to the "white" city, leaving their residents to be dumped on a stretch of open veldt a sanitary distance away in a new conglomerate to be called South Western Townships—Soweto.



"A busy, eager, restless, pleasure-loving town," as one visitor wrote in 1897, Johannesburg was built on grueling labor in the gold mines.

So the great multiracial metropolis was being segmented into a series of self-contained, inward-looking ethnic enclaves. But the African independence movement was pumping adrenaline into the young black intelligentsia, who were churning out books, poetry, and powerful pieces of protest theater. Many were journalists working for a black publishing house run by the disowned son of a pioneer mining magnate. The publishing house was just two blocks from the *Rand Daily Mail* offices, and some of us would meet up



Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd in 1960

with the black journalists at a drinking establishment known simply as Whitey's Place. It was illegal for blacks to enter bars or to buy or consume "white" liquor, even beer, but speakeasies like Whitey's, called shebeens, flourished everywhere and became the network for a whole subculture of black social life and interracial bonding. The shebeen queen who ran the joint paid the local police protection money, inflating the prices, but the clientele paid up cheerfully.

They were raucous, racy places, sometimes violent, and it was here that I came to know a whole generation of black journalists, writers, and artists, many of whom were doomed to die early, rot in jail, or wither away in exile. They were a colorful lot, the journalists writing in a Damon Runyon style of ribald township slang and sometimes affecting a pseudo-American accent gleaned from the movies. Only some years later did a spirit of anti-Americanism creep into the black community, as the Soviets began training and aiding the exiled ANC's guerrilla fighters.

I became political correspondent of the *Rand Daily Mail* in 1961, and for the next few years sat in the press gallery of the all-white Parliament in Cape Town listening to Verwoerd expound on the philosophy of apartheid in two-hour marathons. It was an eerie experience. He had been a professor of applied psychology, trained in Germany dur-

ing the 1930s, and he brought a chilling intellectualism to the crude racism that had propelled the Afrikaner National Party to power in 1948. Ethnicity, he explained with paternalistic patience, was the way of human nature, and any attempt to create a multiracial nation was not only fallacious but deadly dangerous. Apartheid, by contrast, was the way of liberation: each ethnic "nation" had a God-given right to its own identity and its own country, and so the white South Africans were prepared to give each black nation its own homeland even as they claimed their own for themselves. It sounded so plausible in that isolated, all-white chamber, cut

off like an ocean liner from the pulsating polyglot reality of the society outside. The packed ranks of Verwoerd's party supporters, hugely dominant in that Parliament and becoming more so with every election, sat in fascinated silence as they listened to him give this veneer of respectability to their bucolic prejudices. Outside the bulldozers crunched on, the tensions rose, and the ANC was outlawed.

There followed the bleakest of times. Verwoerd was assassinated in 1966, stabbed to death spectacularly in his seat of power by a deranged white parliamentary messenger. His police minister, John Vorster, took over. No intellectualism here, simply ruthless repression and increasing authoritarianism. Black voices were silenced as the ANC, its leaders imprisoned or exiled, tried to muster the resources to mount a guerrilla war against Africa's most powerful military establishment. The price of gold climbed in international markets and South Africa prospered, by political disaster and economic windfall, it was said. The country entered a triumphalist phase, soon reflected in the architecture of its cities. Real skyscrapers arose, 20, 30, 50 floors high, palaces of chrome and glass and conspicuous affluence. A Dallas on the African veldt. The centerpiece, the headquarters

of a bank, was a towering glass creation designed by a New York architect in the shape of a diamond.

Yet, as always, the reality of the city's heterogeneous character refused to disappear. The new extravaganza was located on a racial boundary called Diagonal Street, and across the road stood a row of decrepit two-story buildings officially licensed as "black shops" selling used clothes, cheap cuts of meat, and the herbal medicines that African healers prescribe. To their horror, the owners

of the sparkling diamond palace found this tacky strip obscenely mirrored in their glass. Since the business community at that time was trying to present itself to overseas critics as an agent of reform, it could hardly send for the removal squads. The best it could do was present the baffled shop owners with gifts of free paint, but to little avail. The heterogeneous reality of South Africa had triumphed against the odds, as it has continued to do.

It is these images that I hold in my mind as I listen to the protestations that "nothing



Taking over as prime minister in 1966, John Vorster inaugurated a grim new era of apartheid.



New customers enjoy the shopping in Johannesburg's upscale Sandton neighborhood.

has changed.” For today the city has changed again, more radically than ever before. Today Johannesburg has abandoned its pretensions to being a Dallas or a Minneapolis. It has become an African city, a huge Nairobi, with blacks thronging its streets, taking over its shops, moving into its apartments, and giving the whole a less glitzy, more Third World aspect. Black consumers now account for more than 90 percent of central city trade. Hillbrow, a high-rise apartment quarter that was once the residential heartland of young white Johannesburg and the center of the city’s nightlife, is now overwhelmingly black. From this core, blacks have spread outward into suburbia, to Yeoville and Brixton, to Mayfair and Vrededorp, and even into the most affluent suburbs, Houghton and Sandton. The demographic tide has swept in, and with poetic justice Soweto has taken over the city from which it was once expelled.

As the tide flows, many whites are withdrawing deeper into suburbia, their security walls rising ever higher, office blocks and all-purpose shopping centers following them to make it increasingly unnecessary ever to enter the city center. To that extent, a residual apartheid persists. There has also been a

fair amount of white emigration, a flight spurred by a postapartheid rise in the crime rate and a perceived loss of career opportunities because of the government’s affirmative action policies. No official figures are available, but one educated guess puts the number of white emigrants at perhaps 75,000 since 1994. Not significant overall, but it has meant a loss of valuable skills in professional sectors such as medicine, law, and the engineering sciences.

Inward and upward. As black South Africans have moved in from the townships, they have moved up, enjoying a new social mobility undreamed of before, into the boardrooms of big companies such as the mining giant Anglo American Corporation; into companies of their own, such as the highly successful Kagiso Media Limited; and, not surprisingly, into commanding positions in government departments and parastatal corporations such as Eskom, the national electricity supplier, and Transnet, the umbrella body controlling the national transportation network. Blacks are occupying middle-management and junior management positions, doing supervision and strategic planning and a host of other jobs that were closed to them before. They are driving Mercedes-Benzes and BMWs and moving into big homes and in every way emulating the nouveau

riche lifestyles of the white moneyed elite that preceded them. Their children now go to the same suburban schools, play on the same sports teams, and go to the same cafes and cinemas and rock concerts as the white kids. To that extent, an incipient rainbow nation is taking shape.

What is happening, of course, is that a new class re-stratification is taking place, overlaying the old distinctions based purely on race. A multiracial middle class is emerging, growing socially more distant from the predominantly black working class and the huge underclass. A recent survey conducted for the advertising industry showed that 43 percent of people in the upper-income bracket were now black, and predicted that in five years' time blacks would be a majority. At the same time, white affluence is shrinking, some working-class whites are joining the big black trade unions, and a sprinkling of white beggars are appearing on the streets. For the first time since the Great Depression, poor-whiteism, the searing experience that hit the poorly educated white Afrikaner community particularly hard (and began the process of legally enforced job discrimination that culminated in apartheid) has shown its face again.

It is in this new class formation that the seeds of discontent lie. It is not that nothing has changed, but that things have not changed for enough people. The gap between the new multiracial middle class and the huge underclass is as wide as the old one between white and black, and it is growing wider. The trouble with this is the jealousy it arouses. Why should some blacks prosper so conspicuously while others continue to languish in poverty? What happened to African socialism and the fellowship of the oppressed?

Unemployment is estimated variously at 25 to 45 percent, depending on whether one counts informal sector activities, and

the country is losing 70,000 jobs a year. There are seven million people living in sprawling squatter camps, South Africa's favelas, on the fringes of the cities, and the millions of rural poor are still as destitute as ever. But even for them, there have been some significant improvements. In 1984, a comprehensive study of poverty in South Africa produced the appalling statistic that the average rural black South African woman had to walk eight miles every day of her life to fetch water and firewood. Today, after five years of ANC rule, three million of those rural dwellers have ready access to tap water and nearly two million have electricity in their shacks. They may still be desperately poor, but for those two million the quality of life has been transformed in a fundamental way.

And then there is education, formerly segregated and hopelessly unequal for blacks, especially in the rural areas. It is free and compulsory for all today, and though this has been accomplished amid great confusion and blown budgets, every school in the country is now integrated, most with large black majorities.

By far the most important achievement, though, has been on the political front: the enfranchisement of the black majority and the entrenchment of a democratic constitution. Sitting today in the press gallery where once I spent all those hours listening to Hendrik Verwoerd drone out his crazy fantasies of "separate freedoms," I sometimes get the feeling that what is before me now cannot possibly be real. The change is too great. The building and furnishings, even the procedural rituals, are still the same, and the same old ghosts still stalk the corridors and haunt my head. But where before there were serried ranks of white males, all alike in their dark suits and closed faces and immovable ideas—except for the solitary woman,

With poetic justice, Soweto has taken over the city from which it was once expelled.

the brave and combative liberal, Mrs. Helen Suzman—today the whole of South Africa’s multihued population is represented.

A system of proportional representation with no minimum cutoff line has meant that seven political parties are represented. In a National Assembly of 400 members the ANC alliance holds 252 seats, having won 63 percent of the national vote in 1994. (It also dominates the Senate, Parliament’s upper house.) Next in line is the party of the old regime, the New National Party, with 82 members, followed by Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi’s Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party with 43. The remaining parties have fewer than 10 seats each: the far-rightist Afrikaner Freedom Front, the Democratic Party, the black militant Pan-Africanist Congress, and the tiny African Christian Democratic Party.

The chamber presents a kaleidoscopic picture of ethnic and sartorial variety: colorful saris, flowing African gowns, long white Muslim robes, gaudy head scarves, and of course the dark suits. One-third of the members are women, including the sari-clad speaker and her deputy. The mood is much less inhibited: the honorable members some-

times cheer, clap, or even sing. There has even been a fistfight on the floor of the Assembly—not, as it happens, involving the new African lawmakers, but between two white Afrikaners, one representing the new regime and the other the old. At moments of special enthusiasm, some of the women are liable to break into ululation. When Mandela was first installed in his seat of power, an *imbongi*, or praise singer, was in attendance, clad in skins and beads to prance and chant the new president’s history and virtues. Here, certainly, is a rainbow legislature.

The change of content is even more striking than the visual picture. In the old Assembly the white men, every one a self-appointed amateur ethnologist, would talk endlessly about the black South Africans who were not present—what they were like, how they thought, what their real aspirations were, how they were different in their wants and ways. Now the black people are there to speak for themselves with a riveting authenticity. The old sense of unreality that used at times to overwhelm me has gone. With that has come a new openness, for what has happened is much more than just the abandoning of apartheid and the enfranchising of the black majority. It has also been a change from authoritarianism



Voting for a new South Africa in April 1994, the country’s first free democratic election

to democracy to a degree unique in Africa and equaled in only a handful of developed countries. The new Parliament gives expression to one of the most liberal constitutions in the world, with an entrenched Bill of Rights guaranteeing all the fundamental human rights, including the right to life, liberty, and freedom of expression. The result has been some of the most progressive decision making in the world, including the prohibition of the death penalty and legalization of abortion.

The meetings of Parliament and its committees are open to the public and the news media. Analyzing South African politics used to require divining skills similar to those of Soviet-era Kremlinologists. By contrast, today's ministers are highly accessible, both formally and informally. A year after Mandela's installation, my wife and I happened to be vacationing in Cape Town. As we returned from the beach one day, she remarked that she had never been on the grounds of Tuynhuys, the gracious old Dutch-gabled presidential office building alongside Parliament. Impulsively, and as something of a test, I suggested we knock on the door and ask to see the president's media spokesman, a long-standing friend. Not only did the spokesman invite us in to look around, but we were shown into the president's office and chatted with senior aides, still dressed in our beach clothes.

As a journalist, I have found the openness of the government and the commitment to media freedom the most liberating and encouraging features of the new regime. Not that there were censors in our newsrooms under apartheid. The control system was more insidious than that. There were 120 pieces of legislation that one way or another restricted what could be published on pain of pros-

The Assembly chamber presents a kaleidoscopic picture of ethnic and sartorial variety: colorful saris, flowing African gowns, long white Muslim robes, gaudy head scarves, and of course the dark suits.

ecution; the effect was a form of self-censorship imposed by the journalists themselves. The worst of these laws effectively silenced the authentic black political opposition by prohibiting the publication of any information about it—except for the damning statements issued by the government itself—or the quoting of anything said by opposition leaders. Some newspapers, particularly the *Rand Daily Mail*, which was internationally acclaimed for its courage at the time, tried hard to negotiate this minefield and present a more balanced picture to the public, but it was a hazardous business. During my own four-year editorship of the paper during the 1970s, I was in court six times.

What was particularly galling in those years was that, while some newspapers did their best to expose the injustices of apartheid, the national public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), became the most blatant propagandist of the regime and its odious ideology. It was initially modeled on Britain's BBC, but soon after the National Party came to power it subverted the SABC's independence. The party packed the board of directors with political appointees, who in turn filled all key editorial positions with ideologically reliable apparatchiks. No journalist who was not a true believer could hope to work there. No critical item ever made it on the air. Moreover, no other broadcaster was per-

The one conspicuous failure during the Mandela years has been in bringing about economic revolution.

mitted to operate, giving the SABC a monopoly in both radio and television.

It is difficult to exaggerate the impact of this systematic brainwashing on white attitudes over three decades following the 1960 banning of the ANC and other black political organizations. To illustrate the point, a 1982 opinion survey showed that 80 percent of whites believed the government line that communism, not black discontent, was the greatest threat to South Africa's future; 81 per cent of whites supported cross-border military attacks on ANC bases in neighboring countries; and a staggering 71 percent believed that South African blacks were basically content and had no reason to try to overthrow the apartheid regime. The prevailing white view, instilled by years of managed news reporting, was that South Africa was not facing a domestic threat but an external one, a "total onslaught" directed from the Soviet Union. To detoxify such a group mindset obviously requires a transformation of the media that helped create it.

That process has begun. Today the media scene is substantially changed. The 120 laws are dead letters. In their place is a near-equivalent of the American First Amendment: a constitutional clause guaranteeing freedom of speech and a free press. Whereas in the past all of the country's newspapers were white owned, today one of the four big publishing companies is black controlled, and four major dailies and two weeklies have black editors. The greatest change, however, has been in broadcasting. The SABC today has a multiracial board of directors with a black chairman. It has a black

chief executive, and the heads of both radio and television news are black. At the same time, to prevent another political hijacking of the airwaves, the SABC's monopoly of broadcasting has been ended. South Africa now has 16 public, 15 commercial, and 82

community radio stations, and three television broadcasters putting six channels on the air.

It has to be said, though, that there needs to be greater tolerance of the freedoms the new constitution guarantees. Perhaps through a sense of insecurity, many in the new regime are hypersensitive to criticism and quick to lash out with intemperate attacks, often aimed at the media. Although this has not reached the level of overt threats, there is a worrying tendency to equate criticism with racism and to imply that black journalists have a duty to support the new regime. At the same time some of the new black news directors at the SABC are too close to the ANC leadership for comfort, raising the concern that as the heat of campaigning mounts in this election year, we may see the new commitment to editorial independence begin to waver. But even if it does, at least the public broadcaster won't be the only voice on air. The democratization of the airwaves has gone too far for South Africa ever again to be without alternative voices.

The one conspicuous failure during the Mandela years has been in bringing about economic revolution. Fulfilling the government's pledge to improve the quality of life for South Africa's people—to create jobs for the unemployed, to build a million houses in five years for the seven million homeless, to provide health care for all and education for every child, to bring clean water and electricity and telephones to the rural poor—requires one thing above all. Growth. To stop unemployment from becoming exponentially worse, simply to

stay in the same place, the country needs an average growth rate of five percent a year for several years, a pace not seen for more than two decades.

Under the direction of a Reserve Bank governor, Chris Stals, inherited from the old regime, South Africa has followed an excessively conservative monetary policy that has made reducing inflation and defending the currency the top priorities, not growth and jobs. High interest rates, which reached an unprecedented 25.5 percent last October, have cut inflation from 22 percent in the late 1980s to seven percent at the end of last year. But coupled with labor inflexibility (the Labor Relations Act makes it difficult to

mid-1998. A billion dollars left the country in the third quarter of that year, while currency speculators attacked South Africa's currency, the rand.

Part of the economic problem is structural, stemming from the socioeconomic distortions caused by apartheid and aggravated by the exigencies of the global free market. It is no easy task trying to transform a sophisticated economy shaped to provide a First World lifestyle for five million whites to one supplying 40 million South Africans with the basic necessities of life—and to do that without shattering the country's entrepreneurial and skills capacity by triggering a white exodus. There is an enormous financial burden involved in



With unemployment widespread, creating jobs will be a top post-Mandela priority.

fire incompetent workers) and a notoriously high crime rate, steep interest rates have deterred risk investment, particularly direct foreign investment, and brought growth to a standstill.

The high interest rates have attracted foreign investment, but this is speculative, easy-come-easy-go money. It left South Africa vulnerable to the wave of nervousness about emerging markets that swept the world in

advancing the black population, and, because of the income gap, only a small number of taxpayers bear this burden. Five percent of South Africans contribute 80 percent of the tax revenue. But it is true, too, that the country did little in the way of advance “think-tanking” about the economic aspects of the triple revolution it is now embroiled in. Economic issues were hardly debated at the great all-party Negotiating Council that drafted the country's post-apartheid constitution. They

were eclipsed by the huge drama of black enfranchisement.

Moreover, the country's politicians are not well equipped intellectually to deal with the economic revolution. Even as the ANC was legalized in 1990, its ideological universe collapsed. Although there was great variation in the degree of its members' commitment to socialism, there is no doubt that the fall of communism and the discrediting of socialist economics generally left the ANC in an ideological vacuum. This has made the economic transition doubly difficult for it. Nor was there help to be had from the New National Party, which for the first two years formed a government of national unity with the ANC. It, too, had no coherent vision of how the economy should be reformed; for years it had run a siege economy designed chiefly to survive international sanctions, and it had a history of massive intervention in the economy in order to maintain white dominance.

Under the circumstances, the ANC has shown a commendable pragmatism. The only economic policy it had when it came to power was a pledge contained in its Freedom Charter, drafted at a "congress of the people" in 1955, to nationalize key sectors of the economy. "The national wealth of our country . . . shall be restored to the people," the charter read. "The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks, and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole. All other industries and trade shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people." The charter also pledged that "all the land [shall be] redivided amongst those who work it, to banish famine and land hunger."

At the time of Mandela's release from prison in 1990, the Freedom Charter was still holy writ, and soon after he came home Mandela recommitted himself to the nationalization pledge. I wrote an article at the time criticizing his statement and pointing out that the nationalization of Zambia's copper mines in 1974 had crippled that desperate country's economy. President Kenneth Kaunda had borrowed heavily to compensate the mining companies, after which the copper price crashed,

leaving Zambia with an enormous debt to service from depleted copper earnings. It has never recovered. Mandela telephoned me after reading the article. "Come and have lunch with me," he said. "I want to discuss this matter with you."

We lunched and talked in his Soweto home. It was evident he understood little about economics, but he told me he wanted to study the matter further. Today the nationalization pledge is dead and buried. Instead, the government has adopted from Germany the concept of a social market economy which is embodied in a catch-all growth, employment, and redistribution (GEAR) policy. The key financial ministers and their departmental heads have shown themselves to be fast learners. They have moved, though perhaps too timidly, to remove the exchange controls and trade barriers that were put in place during the sanctions years, and to negotiate new trade agreements. This has opened the way for South Africa to enter the global market, but it has also exposed the country's soft underbelly—its inflexible, poorly skilled, and underproductive labor market.

Through all the complexities of the economic revolution, one conclusion seems self-evident: to succeed in the global marketplace and at the same time reduce the burgeoning unemployment problem, the government's logical course would be to emulate the newly industrialized countries of Southeast Asia and follow a low wage-high employment policy. That would increase competitiveness and encourage direct foreign investment by manufacturers seeking access to the huge African continental market. But for a liberation movement that has pledged to free its people from the gross inequalities of apartheid deliberately to hold down black working-class wages while allowing the rich white entrepreneurial class to grow richer is politically unthinkable. It is also politically impractical, for the labor unions are too strong and the ANC is bonded in a Siamese-twin relationship with them. Indeed, it is in a tripartite alliance of long standing with the labor

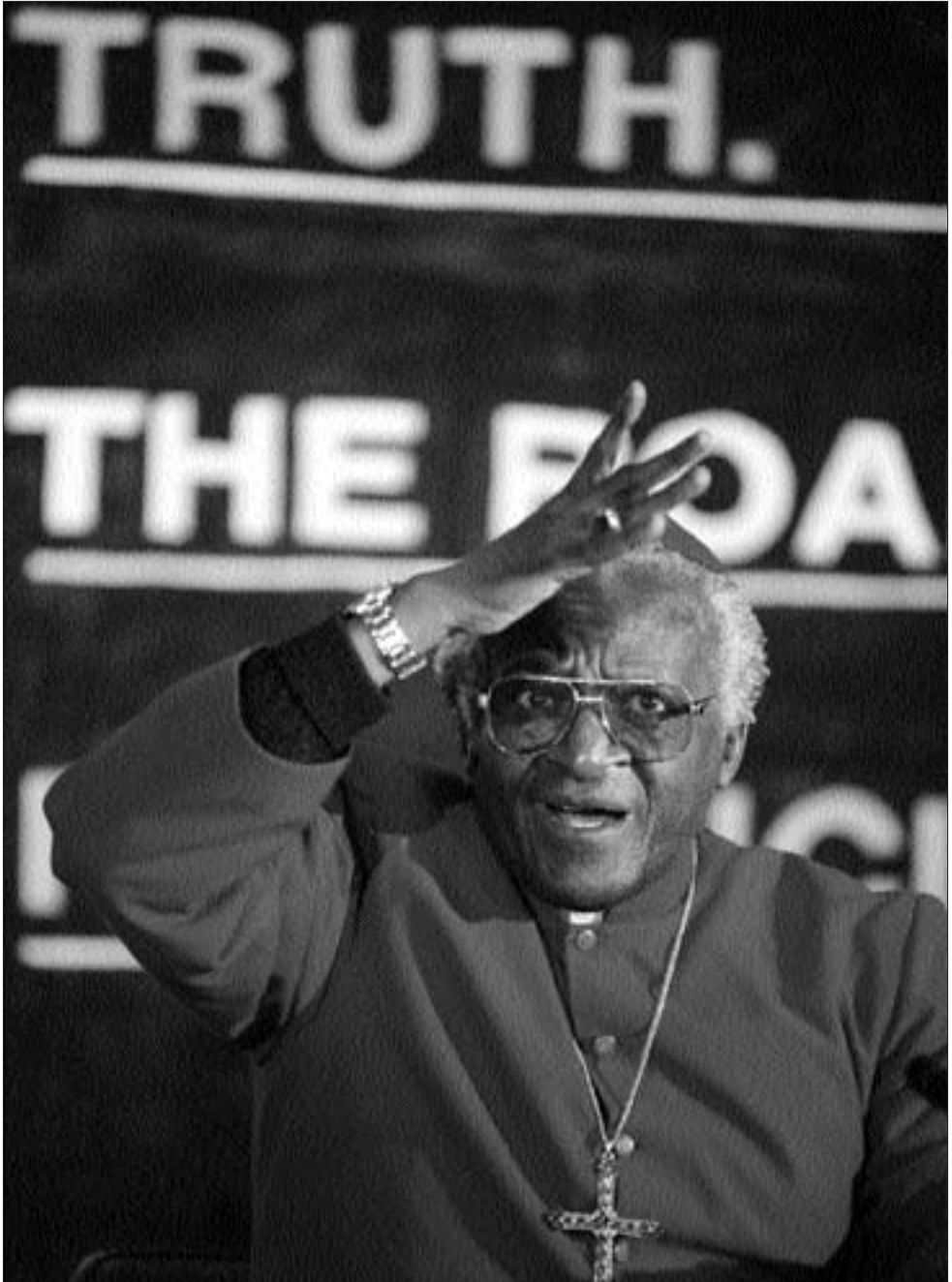


Memories of apartheid: a Soweto scene from 1980

movement, as embodied in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the South African Communist Party. While the Communist Party is small, Cosatu is by far the best-organized and most muscular political organization in the country. It is generally reckoned to be powerful enough to block any strategy of economic development that would hurt the interests of organized workers. Certainly the ANC would hate to see Cosatu break away from the alliance and turn itself into a socialist workers party, for it could quickly become a formidable challenger for power.

As the winds of economic change blew more icily through the Southern Hemisphere in the winter of 1998, when first Japan and then

other Asian economies triggered a flight of investment capital from all emerging markets, South Africa suffered a triple whammy: the gold price fell, layoffs increased, and speculative raids on the rand sent it plummeting 26 percent in two months. Both Cosatu and the Communist Party began calling loudly for the scrapping of GEAR, but the government held its ground. At Cosatu's national congress in June, both Mandela and his heir apparent, Deputy President Mbeki, chided the unionists for their disloyalty. "Why do we still call each other comrade?" Mbeki asked pointedly, while Mandela warned that public attacks on ANC policy by other alliance members could have serious implications. "GEAR is the fundamental policy of the ANC," he declared, wagging



Archbishop Desmond Tutu opens the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Its final report implicated not only the white regime but ANC members, Inkatha leader Buthelezi, and others in human rights violations.

a finger at his audience. “We are not going to change it because of your pressure.”

More significantly still, the ANC leaders told Cosatu members they would not get a block allocation of seats on the ANC ticket in the 1999 election, as they did in 1994.

Their aspiring candidates would have to be nominated by their local ANC branches, meaning they would have to demonstrate their comradely fidelity or they would be out. That implicit threat stated, Mbeki went on to tell the unionists bluntly that the government

If there is ever to be a true spirit of national unity among South Africa's diverse racial groups, then there must first be a great act of reconciliation between the victims of oppression and the perpetrators.

would not accede to their demands for a moratorium on layoffs, and indeed intended to amend the rigid Labor Relations Act to allow for special low youth wages and to make it easier for employers to dismiss some workers. Unpopular stuff, but the chastened unions accepted it. "ANC Tells Cosatu To Jump

In Lake," ran one front-page headline after the congress. An exaggeration, certainly, but also an acknowledgment that the government had shown political courage in facing up to a difficult issue.

Encouraging though that was, it is still unclear whether South Africa is capable of weathering the storms of globalization and domestic economic transformation. To succeed, it must attract substantially more direct foreign investment, and a major deterrent here is South Africa's wretched crime rate. Although the tales of hijackings, robbery, and rape have become more lurid in the retelling abroad, the crime rate is bad and foreign corporations are reluctant to put their personnel at risk. South Africa has always been a violent place. But whereas in the past the worst violence was largely confined to the black ghettos and ignored by the public media, now it has spread into the central city areas and into suburbia, hitting both the white population and the front pages. There is no doubt, too, that it has worsened as it has widened.

There are many reasons for this, the most critical being the collapse of effective policing. For generations, the South African police were the frontline troops in the enforcement of the laws of segregation and oppression. In the final years of turbulence, through the 1980s, the conflict between police and protesters escalated into something close to a civil war, during which the police were given extraordinary powers of

indefinite detention without trial and during which they raided and tortured and killed with relish. They did so in the indoctrinated belief that they were fighting a holy war for *volk* and fatherland against the evil forces of communist terrorism. Then suddenly their political leaders did a deal with these supposedly heinous enemies, who in a few short years became their new bosses—leaving many of the police bewildered, disillusioned, and in many cases bitterly angry. Some have quit the force, going into the one form of activity they know best, which is organized crime. Others are simply dispirited and unmotivated.

At the same time, the ending of isolation and of sanctions has seen the country's borders open and a flood of new arrivals enter. Only half a dozen airlines used to fly into the pariah state; now scores land daily from all parts of Latin America, Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Europe, North America, and other parts of Africa. They bring with them the drug trade and international drug syndicates, which were quick to spot the opportunities presented by a country with a weakened law enforcement system. Drugs and cars and guns. There is a brisk trade in stolen vehicles smuggled across South Africa's porous borders into corrupt and poverty-stricken countries to the north, where they are exchanged for drugs that are brought back to be sold or re-exported. And there is a proliferation of guns in a region that has seen four long guerrilla wars over the past 30 years.

Getting on top of the crime wave requires rebuilding the police force and establishing

a bond of trust between it and the public—a bond that has never before existed in South Africa, for the police have always been seen as the people’s oppressors. It will be a slow and painstaking task, but without it there will be no end to the crime, and without controlling the crime there will be no economic revolution—and without that there will be no rainbow future.

If there is ever to be a true spirit of national unity among South Africa’s diverse racial groups, then there must first be a great act of reconciliation between the victims of oppression and the perpetrators. And reconciliation, all the great religions tell us, can come about only if there is

tion. Thus, the archbishop’s commission became a giant public confessional. In three years it investigated 31,000 cases of human rights abuses during the apartheid era, and last October it came up with a report of one million words.

South Africans have seen on their television screens a burly security police torturer, Captain Jeffrey Benzien, squat on the back of a black victim lying facedown on the floor and demonstrate how he pulled a wet bag over the man’s head to suffocate him to the edge of death. They have heard others testify how they “tubed” political prisoners, pulling a strip of rubber tubing over the prisoner’s nose and mouth and sometimes keeping it there too long, so that the victim died.



Benzien testifies about torture before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

first confession and atonement. Hence the establishment of a remarkable institution called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, headed by that prince of compassion, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. You cannot have Nuremberg trials after a negotiated settlement, with executions and imprisonment of the guilty, and so South Africa settled for a kind of deal—the exchange of truth for amnesty. Those who committed atrocities could make their confessions and be indemnified from prosecu-

When the victims suddenly voided their bladders, one torturer explained, “then you knew they had gone to another place.” They have heard officers in a special chemical warfare unit explain how they developed special poisons that could be sprinkled on the clothing of black leaders, and how they tried to develop a pill that would render black women infertile and so cut the black birthrate. They even considered developing a drug that would damage Mandela’s brain and render him mentally ineffectual before

his release from prison.

The cascade of horror has been numbing. As Antjie Krog, a prize-winning Afrikaner poet who headed SABC Radio's reporting team covering the Truth Commission, wrote last year, "Week after week; voice after voice; account after account. It is like travelling on a rainy night behind a huge truck—images of devastation breaking in sheets on the windscreen."

After 20 years of cover-up, South Africans have learned at last who killed the Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko; how his head was bashed against a prison cell wall, causing fatal damage to his brain. And how Matthew Goniwe, a young activist of the 1980s who was a friend of mine, one of the brightest and most charming young people I have ever known, was abducted on a lonely road one night in 1985 along with three friends, all of them dragged into the bushes, beaten unconscious, stabbed to death, their bodies and faces mutilated and burned to conceal their identities. One of Matthew's hands was cut off and kept in a bottle of formalin to terrify black political prisoners during interrogation. "What kind of person, what kind of human being," asks Krog, "keeps another's hand in a fruit-jar on his desk? What kind of hatred makes animals of people?"

But the most horrifying stories by far came from a two-year court trial of the apartheid regime's chief assassin, Colonel Eugene de Kock. A squarely built man with thick-lensed spectacles, De Kock was found guilty of murdering 65 people and sentenced to 212 years' imprisonment. He has applied for amnesty and has still to appear before the Truth Commission's special Amnesty Committee. He may yet go free. But his accounts of what he did have burned themselves into the pages of South African history.

Now 48, De Kock has been in the killing business all his adult life. He began in the 1960s, fighting in a South African police unit sent to Rhodesia to help Ian Smith in

Diplomats call it the WHAM question—What happens after Mandela?

his futile bid to stave off black majority rule in that neighboring country. De Kock perfected his brutal methods fighting guerrillas in Namibia and Angola, returning in 1985 to Pretoria, where he was given command of a special

unit code-named C-10. Its task was to undertake covert operations against "enemies of the state," meaning supporters of the ANC. It was there that De Kock's unique talent for violence earned him the nickname "Prime Evil." Over the next eight years he and his unit, consisting largely of turned ANC guerrillas called *askaris*, killed scores of people; De Kock told the court he didn't really know how many. Senior police officers around the country would telephone him and give him the names of people they wanted "taken out." Some of the killings were wantonly savage. Once De Kock cleaved a victim's head open with a garden spade.

Members of the unit usually disposed of bodies by wrapping them around a stick of dynamite and blowing them to smithereens. They mailed poisons and booby-trapped bombs hidden in pens, manuscripts, tape recorders, and radios to exiles living in Swaziland, Tanzania, and Zambia. They blew up the headquarters of the South African Council of Churches and the Congress of South African Trade Unions in Johannesburg, as well as the ANC headquarters in London. And they were rewarded by the authorities. De Kock became one of the most highly decorated officers in the South African Police Force.

It is difficult to judge how this outpouring has affected the South African public. For some black people, it seems to have been cathartic to be able to tell their stories and to hear the confessions. For others, it has been infuriating to see the guilty get amnesty and walk free. Many whites accuse the commission of being a witch hunt and of stirring up hatreds that will make reconciliation impossible. Some have react-

ed with fury and sent death threats to Tutu and the other commissioners. The New National Party threatened to take the commission to court for bias. Yet others have tried to ignore it with a sullen withdrawal. But for a few, mainly white Afrikaners, there is a deep sense of guilt and soul-searching, for theirs was the ruling group and these confessing monsters are their own people. Antjie Krog, the Afrikaner poet, speaks for them.

"Some of us may deny it," Krog said at an event marking the publication of her book, *Country of My Skull*, last July, "but deep down Afrikaners know the truth. We are embarrassed, we are deeply ashamed and isolated in our clumsy, lonely attempts to deal with our guilt." Saying the Truth Commission had shattered the self-image of Afrikaners, she added: "We now know exactly what we as Afrikaners are. A people capable of indescribable evil. But also a people of an honesty to walk the road of this country and this continent."

A few weeks later a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, Dr. Ockie Raubenheimer, invited Tutu in his capacity as chairman of the Truth Commission to preach in Raubenheimer's suburban Johannesburg church. It was a significant invitation: the Dutch Reformed Church, the main denomination of the Afrikaner community, was a pillar of support for the apartheid system, earning for itself the sobriquet of "the National Party at prayer." Raubenheimer, moreover, was a chaplain in the Defense Force and thus an integral part of the regime's repressive machinery, while Tutu was a symbol of enmity to Afrikaners throughout the apartheid years. Now the two were together before a congregation of Afrikaner notables.

The service began cautiously enough, with Raubenheimer speaking of the Afrikaners' role in the past, saying there was much to be proud of but there had also been some mistakes. But after Tutu's sermon, in which the little archbishop referred to the "evil deeds" of the past and the need for a leader to step forward and help the people come to terms with what had been done, Raubenheimer unexpectedly stepped forward. "I am not scheduled to speak now and

actually I am not sure what I am going to say," he began. Then, turning to Tutu, he said: "As a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church for 20 years, as a chaplain in the Defense Force, I want to say to you we are sorry. For what we have done wrong we ask the Lord for forgiveness." He ended in a whisper, choked by tears. Tutu got up, put his arm around the distraught minister, and for an emotion-charged moment the two men stood there hugging each other as the congregation rose to its feet and applauded.

Perhaps this was a beginning.

South African diplomats call it the WHAM question—What happens after Mandela? The question itself, and the frequency with which it is asked, echo the old doomsday expectations, a feeling that somehow the new South Africa is too good to be true, that it happened only because of one magic man, and that without him it will surely return to its predestined road to disaster.

On the contrary, South Africa is about to undergo the most predictable and orderly succession outside British royalty, and certainly one unique in Africa, with the ANC certain to win the June elections overwhelmingly and 56-year-old Thabo Mbeki long since anointed to succeed Mandela. As deputy president, Mbeki has effectively been running the country for the past two years, with Mandela increasingly in the role of constitutional monarch. Moreover, with a master's degree in economics from the University of Sussex, he is better qualified than Mandela to deal with the most pressing issues now facing South Africa. Nor will the June election cause any significant shifts. The most comprehensive opinion poll in the first quarter of 1999 indicated that ANC support was holding steady at 54 percent, just nine points down from its 1994 level, which is impressive given the level of political excitement during that "liberation" election. The only real change is likely to be a shake-up among the opposition parties, with both the holdovers from the apartheid era, the New National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party, now in free fall: the NNP down by more than half to a miserable nine



A ceremonial event in Durban before the end of apartheid saw Inkatha leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi (left) in good spirits. Long a political rival of the ANC, Buthelezi may win a top post in the next government.

percent support in the poll, and Inkatha likewise down, from over 10 percent to five percent. Only the Democratic Party has shown growth, from just under 2 percent to six percent, but this is mainly white support that has shifted from the NNP and has little relevance to the predominantly black electoral power center. So, for the next five years at least, Mbeki will rule from an unassailable support base.

Two other factors also set this succession apart from the general African pattern. One is Mandela's decision to retire after only one term as president, in a continent where politicians tend to cling to power for life or until it is wrested from them in a coup. The other is that several of Mandela's ministers, all old comrades, have followed suit and announced that they too will not be available for re-election, thus giving Mbeki a freer hand to choose his own team. These are positive indicators of an intrinsic democratic culture lacking elsewhere in Africa.

Of course, stepping into the shoes of such a moral colossus is not a role to be envied. Comparisons are inevitable and bound to

haunt Mbeki. The two men are also sharply different, in stature and in style. While Mandela is tall and regal, Mbeki is a small man. He also lacks Mandela's natural charisma. Although affable in company and very good in one-to-one situations, he is uncomfortable in crowds and does not project well before them.

Mbeki is in truth an enigma. He is polished, urbane, and highly able. He is a consummate politician who has spent his whole life in the ANC since joining its Youth League at the age of 14, and who served the organization's president-in-exile, Oliver Tambo, as chief aide, troubleshooter, and ambassador-at-large. He is an experienced diplomat who knows the ways of the world and is at ease in the company of its major leaders. He is a man of superior intelligence with a fine British education. He is cultured and highly literate, an authority on Shakespeare and on the poetry of Yeats, which he often quotes. He writes his own speeches, some of which have a literary elegance, as when he berated



Heir-apparent Thabo Mbeki, currently deputy president, shares the spotlight with Mandela.

Africa's power-hungry dictators last August for their greed and corruption and appealed for an "African Renaissance" to restore the continent's dignity and self-respect. "The thieves and their accomplices," he said, "the givers of the bribes and the recipients are as African as you and I. We are the corrupter and the harlot who act together to demean our continent and ourselves."

But despite all this ability, there is somewhere within Mbeki a hint of insecurity. More than any other ANC leader, he has shown a hypersensitivity to criticism and been particularly touchy in his dealings with the media. It has also become a matter of concern among many analysts that he has surrounded himself with aides and officials who are less than impressive, people whose main attribute appears to be their personal loyalty to him. "Not for Mbeki," wrote political scientist Robert Shrire of Cape Town University in a recent article, "the Kennedy and Roosevelt style of leadership where strong and independent personalities are brought into the presidential team." Mbeki's team is composed of courtiers rather than advisers.

Coupled with this is a dislike of face-to-face conflict. Even in the parry-and-thrust

of parliamentary debates, Mbeki avoids verbal jousting and never shows anger. He prefers to operate behind the scenes, where he is an acknowledged master of the strategic move who skillfully sidelined all competitors for the position he now holds. In all this, Mbeki's style and personality differ markedly from Mandela's. Where Mandela's leadership style is transparent and collegial, Mbeki's is likely to be less open, resembling the upper levels of a business where a small coterie of leaders make decisions which they expect those below them to obey. The decision making is also likely to be more strategically focused.

Some analysts believe the difference between the two men stems from their different experiences during the long years of struggle against apartheid. Indeed, there are three different sets of experience that have produced three markedly different political cultures within the ANC. They do not always mesh comfortably. There are those who served long sentences together on Robben Island, the political prison offshore near Cape Town, a harsh experience that induced humility and

encouraged a strong sense of equality and comradeship despite what are sometimes sharp ideological differences. Then there are the “internals,” the activists of the black townships and the trade unionists who formed a loose alliance called the United Democratic Front that took to the streets and confronted the apartheid regime’s security forces during the great black uprising of the 1980s. Because of the looseness of their alliance, they developed an elaborate system of collective decision making and had a strong aversion to any cult of leadership or any one person having overriding authority. Third, there are the exiles, who lived a peripatetic and often precarious existence scattered about the globe, many associated with the ANC’s efforts to wage a guerrilla war against the apartheid regime. It meant that being in the good graces of an individual leader could decide whether you were located in relatively comfortable circumstances, such as a posting in Europe or North America, or given an uncomfortable and even dangerous assignment somewhere in the African bush. So, individual loyalty became a primary consideration. More important still, the exiles were vulnerable to infiltration by agents of the apartheid regime, and over time the devastating successes of these spies engendered a paranoia within the ANC’s exiled leadership. It discouraged openness and led to a more imperial kind of decision making that emphasized obedience to rules and orders from the top as essential to survival.

Mandela, with his easy style of leadership, comes from the prison experience; Mbeki, with his touch of paranoia and his more insider-oriented leadership style, comes from the exile group, having spent 30 of the most formative years of his life abroad.

What do these differences portend? Mbeki’s South Africa will probably be a little less open, and to that extent less democratic, than Mandela’s. But it is also likely to be more strongly focused on the critical issues facing South Africa, on the flagging growth rate, on crime and unemployment. Mbeki’s

strategic approach is to seek consensus for what he wants to do by neutralizing opposing factions through co-optation or isolation of their leading figures. So stand by for an offer of a deputy presidency to Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party, which would help end the endemic black-on-black violence that has ravaged KwaZulu/Natal province for nearly two decades; and for the appointment of Sam Shilowa, general secretary of Cosatu, as minister of labor, to open the way for more flexibility in labor policy. There will be more emphasis on discipline

Mbeki’s South Africa will probably be a little less open, a little less democratic, than Mandela’s. But it is also likely to be more strongly focused on the critical issues facing South Africa.

and conformity, and less tolerance of indiscretions and individuality. Expect, too, more focus on socioeconomic transformation, less on racial reconciliation. Mbeki has, rightly in my opinion, identified the main future political threat to stability as more likely to come from the unfulfilled black masses than from white right wing counterrevolutionaries, who were Mandela’s big worry.

But the key question is: Will, can, Mandela’s successor fulfill his promise of creating a rainbow nation? It is difficult enough to follow in the footsteps of a giant; to realize another’s dream seems even more unlikely. Except that this is really a collective dream, for the ANC has been committed to the principle of nonracialism since its formation 87 years ago. So the question really is: What, after five years, is the status of the dream?

Are the doomsayers right, or is it still on track?

There can be no doubt that South Africa today is still a country of great ethnic diversity riven by social inequality and historical resentments. There can be no doubt, too, that the transition has encountered unexpected obstacles, especially on the economic front, compounding old problems and throwing up new ones. It is a dauntingly difficult place. But South Africa is also a country of great energy and enterprise, a regional superpower with enormous potential both for itself and as a stabilizing force in the world's most marginalized continent. I believe the same fundamental dynamics that drove it toward a negotiated settlement that the rest of the world thought impossible are still operating and will continue to propel it forward.

First of all, the country is too economically integrated, its races too mutually interdependent, for ethnic dismemberment ever to take place. It was this interdependence that defeated history's most determined effort to enforce ethnic partition; if it had been even remotely possible, half a century of apartheid would have achieved it. Second, unlike most African countries, South Africa has no dominant ethnic group, which means there is no political advantage to be had in whipping up tribal nationalisms. The Zulus are the largest tribe, but even they number only one-sixth of the total population. Thus any political party that defines itself in ethnic terms, as Inkatha has done, runs the risk of taking itself out of contention for national political power. Only one of South Africa's nine political parties can be identified in ethnic terms, and that is Buthelezi's Inkatha. It has lost more than half its support since 1994 and could even lose control of its only regional powerbase, the provincial government of KwaZulu-Natal, in this year's elections.

The third and most important factor is the decline of any prospect of a white counter-revolution. This was the most real, and feared, danger at the time of the 1994 election, when right-wing Afrikaner extremists formed themselves into militia movements that threatened to link up with the Afrikaner-led Defense and Police Forces and take over

the government by force of arms. But the threat was defused when an attempted putsch in one of the tribal "homelands" collapsed ignominiously. Mandela then met with the putative leader, former Defense Force chief general Constand Viljoen, and persuaded him to campaign for his separatist cause by constitutional means instead. Since then, Mandela's reconciliatory approach and the general moderation of the ANC's policies have reduced white fears, if not yet many whites' complaints about the loss of preferential treatment. Most Afrikaners have adapted to the new South Africa with a surprising ease and speed, a fact reflected in the dramatic decline in support for the New National Party.

Finally, with the experience of four years of secret talks and another four of formal negotiations leading up to the end of the old order, this deeply divided society has developed a culture of negotiation that has made it a world leader in the art of conflict resolution. South Africans have been called in as consultants in the conflicts of Northern Ireland, Rwanda, and Nigeria. At home, sophisticated consultative councils have been established to resolve labor disputes and to formulate consensus policies on a range of issues. Negotiation and consensus seeking have become the *modus operandi* of the ANC government, and Mbeki, who was the first ANC exile leader to hold secret talks with Afrikaner dissidents and the apartheid regime's secret service agents back in 1987, is its prime practitioner.

In sum, I believe the signs point to a continuation of South Africa's miraculous transformation from apartheid state to rainbow nation. There are still many problems to be overcome, but ethnic conflict is not the fundamental one. Those posed by the new global market are the most dangerous. If South Africa fails, the cause will be the defeat of its economic, not its political, revolution. But looking back at the perils of 1994, there can be no doubt that we are through the worst. And when you have escaped Armageddon, it is no time to become a pessimist.