

Mandela and the last Afrikaner leaders: A shift in power relations

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Abstract

The stability of the apartheid system and the Afrikaners' monopoly of power have been the subject of exhaustive scholarly analyses; by contrast, there have been few in-depth analyses of the unexpected transfer of power by the National Party government between 1989 and 1994. There is a strong tendency to present the Afrikaner leadership from Hendrik Verwoerd to PW Botha as being so beholden to the apartheid ideology and so intransigent that they missed all opportunities to negotiate a more balanced political settlement. Virtually no attention has been given to the informal attempts the leadership on both sides made to initiate talks about an alternative to white supremacy. The treatment of Nelson Mandela in the literature represents almost the complete opposite to that of the NP leaders. He has been presented as strongly committed to a non-racial democracy and a market-oriented economy. A reassessment of Nelson Mandela's career has only just begun.

Keywords: Apartheid; Afrikaners; Civilisations; Demography; Culture; Bantustans; Power-sharing; Majority rule; Minority rights; Constitution; Parliament; Winner-takes-all; Decolonisation; Nelson Mandela.

Introduction

During the period of National Party (NP) rule Afrikaner nationalists bluntly refused to yield power because they believed that their survival as a nation depended on it.¹ Some foreign correspondents shared the view that the Afrikaners were determined to cling to power indefinitely. One of them was Allen Drury, a Pulitzer Prize-winning American novelist and commentator, who wrote in the mid-1960s that the white community, which had established one of the world's most sophisticated and viable states, could not understand why they were expected to give it up. He added: "They will not do so".² This

1 A succinct articulation of this view in Parliament was given by AI Malan, father of a future Minister for Defence, cited in H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2003), p. 486.

2 A Drury, *"A very strange society": A journey to the heart of South Africa* (London, Michael Joseph, 1968), p. 451.

article discusses some of the neglected features of the apartheid era and in particular that informal efforts on the part of both NP and ANC leaders to avert a violent showdown. It discusses and offers a new interpretation of why the De Klerk government decided to cede power.

Academic perspectives

During the 1960s academics based outside South Africa tended to expect a violent revolution. The most prominent scholar propounding this view was Pierre van den Berghe. In 1965 he wrote that “the likelihood of revolution seems high. Mounting internal strains and external pressures doom white supremacy and racial segregation within the near future”.³ RW Johnson’s *How long will South Africa survive?* predicted that while the apartheid regime would survive the eighties, at some point later they would have to give in.⁴

But whether whites would give up power and under what conditions they would do so remained a matter of dispute. In 1971 Heribert Adam argued that the regime was a modernising racial oligarchy capable of devising ever more sophisticated means to exploit black labour and deflect assaults on white power. He did, however, anticipate that the interests would increasingly diverge in the white power bloc and that apartheid would be terminated once the dominant white classes considered it too expensive.⁵ Other analysts put the emphasis on military pressure coupled with Western sanctions. In his 1977 analysis of how long South Africa would survive, Johnson expected that the ANC’s military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), operating from bases in the neighbouring countries, would cause sufficient trouble on both sides of the South African border for Western powers to intervene and force the abandonment of white rule. Revisiting the theme in 2015, Johnson admitted that he had been wrong. MK, he concluded, was essentially “impotent” and Western sanctions were always more important.⁶

Sanctions were part of a general economic crisis, comprising runaway government spending on consumption, falling fixed investment, and growing external debt. A popular version maintains that the lack of international

3 P van den Berghe, *South Africa: A study in conflict* (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1965), p. 262.

4 RW Johnson, *How long will South Africa survive?* (London, Macmillan, 1977).

5 H Adam, *Modernizing racial domination: South Africa’s political dynamics* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971), pp. 15-17.

6 RW Johnson, *How long will South Africa survive? The looming crisis* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2015), p. 11.

investment funds led to “the collapse of white rule”.⁷ A more sober perspective is needed. The economy was indeed stagnating as a result of sanctions, but there was no real fiscal crisis. Derek Keys, managing director of General Mining Corporation who went on to serve as the last NP Minister of Finance, stated in 2010: “From a financial point of view, South Africa did not have to negotiate in 1990, but conditions were tightening ... [The] situation was serious but it is not as if we had fallen off the precipice. The economy could go on”. Barend du Plessis, Keys’s predecessor as finance minister, had made the same assessment that a government determined to cling to power could carry on for many years.⁸

The ANC’s switch in the early 1980s to what was called a “people’s war”, combining mass protests, consumer action and strikes with sabotage and occasional armed attacks, was much more effective than the strategy of guerrilla warfare of the 1960s and 1970s had been.⁹ But by the end of the 1980s the government had weathered the storm. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported in January 1989 that no fundamental changes were imminent. It stated that the government “has weathered more than four years of unprecedented domestic and international pressure”. According to the report, its aim was to delay fundamental change as long as possible, believing the security forces could guarantee continued white prosperity until well into the next century. Nelson Mandela was unlikely to be released unless the government was certain it could contain any black mobilisation. The report added that the ANC leadership realised that majority rule was not around the corner.¹⁰

Two important factors have been largely neglected in the scholarly assessments. The first is the grave error made by the apartheid planners in the early 1950s in expecting the black population to increase to about 20 million by the year 2000, and the government’s failure to adjust its policy after the error was discovered in the late 1960s.¹¹ During the apartheid period there was a fourfold increase of the black population, from just over 8 million to

7 S Robinson, Review of RW Johnson’s *How long will South Africa survive?*, *Sunday Times* (London), 16 August 2015.

8 H Giliomee, *The last Afrikaner leaders: A supreme test of power* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2012), pp. 316-317.

9 A Jeffery, *People’s war: New light on the struggle for South Africa* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2009), pp. xxxiii–xxxiv.

10 M Plaut, “CIA assessments of South Africa’s transition: How accurate were they?” (available at ever-fasternews.com, as accessed on 20 November 2011), first posted 22 July 2007.

11 JL Sadie, “The political arithmetic of the South African Population”, *Journal of Racial Affairs*, July 1950, p. 152; JL Sadie, “The political arithmetic of apartheid”, P Hugo (ed.), *South African perspectives* (Cape Town, *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, 1989), pp. 150-157.

over 31 million. During this time the white population grew from 2,5 million to a mere 4,5 million. The South African case calls to mind Auguste Comte's famous dictum: Demography is destiny.

Another factor is the resilience and determination of the white leadership to hold on to power. Conventional analyses of revolution often highlight the defection of a strategic stratum such as the intellectuals, the military or the clergy. In the Afrikaners' case, none of these strata had turned against the government.¹² The key shift happened at the top of the political power structure between June and December 1992 when a small number of people in FW De Klerk's inner circle decided no longer to insist on power-sharing. More than thirty years before it happened, the historian Arnold Toynbee highlighted this factor in a remarkably prescient essay.

Toynbee's perspective

In 1959 the journal *Optima* carried an article by the historian Arnold Toynbee. His reputation has diminished sharply in recent times, but in the first fifteen years after the end of the Second World War Toynbee was among the most cited historians in the world. In his twelve-volume work *A study of history* he argued that the critically important factor in the rise and fall of 26 civilisations in world history had been the success, or failure, of creative minorities and perceptive leaders in responding to challenges.

The article was written against the background of the rapid decolonisation of Africa by the European colonial powers that had started two years before. He pointed out the contrast between the empires founded by the Spanish and the Portuguese on the continent of South America and those built up by the British and the Dutch in Africa. The Spanish, for instance, also exploited the native peoples, but the division between first-class and second-class citizens was less overtly racist in allowing for some people of mixed ancestry to gain entry into the elite.

Barriers to the top were not racial, and hence not impermeable. The result was continued Spanish predominance even after independence. So, too, the people of European descent (or predominantly European descent) in the former Portuguese colony of Brazil continued to play a dominant role in

¹² H Giliomee, "Afrikaner Politics, 1977-1987", J Brewer, *Can South Africa survive? Five minutes to midnight* (Macmillan, London, 1989), pp.108-135.

many sectors.

In stark contrast to this stood the colonies that the Dutch and the British had founded in Africa (and one could add the British in North America). Political upward mobility for subordinate races was exceptionally difficult and intermarriage virtually ruled out. Toynbee pointedly observed that in the South Africa of the 1950s there was no easy way of entry into the dominant caste for an able and adaptable black person.

Looking ahead to changes in the balance of power, Toynbee stressed that a cultural struggle would be more drawn out and more morally complex than a clear-cut military struggle. But, he wrote, “the dénouement may be more tragic”. Sooner or later, Toynbee stated, ruling minorities had to accept the status of “an unprivileged minority” living under a majority they considered culturally inferior. The alternative was to hold on to their present supremacy by sheer force against a rising tide of revolt.

Toynbee warned that holding on against the tide was fatal for a minority. He warned: “Even if its belief in its own cultural superiority was justified, numbers would tell in the long run, considering that culture is contagious, and that an ascendancy based on cultural superiority is therefore a wasting asset”. He expressed sympathy with the dilemma of minorities: voluntary abdication in favour of a majority whom one feels to be one’s inferior “was a very hard alternative for human pride to accept”.¹³

The next sections revisit the apartheid period from the perspective of the leaders on both sides of the divide in order to establish how they saw the opportunities available to them. One can only gain a proper understanding of apartheid and of the nature of the settlement in 1994 by placing the main historical actors at a point where different courses still seemed open.

Looking ahead in 1948

Within the camp of the victorious Afrikaner nationalists there were contrasting perspectives on the unexpected NP victory in the 1948 election. Eben Dönges, Minister for the Interior who would introduce most of the apartheid laws, told a foreign journalist that for him and his colleagues the policy of apartheid was there to protect the present and next two generations

¹³ A Toynbee, “History’s warning to Africa”, *Optima*, 9(2), 1959, pp. 55-56.

against the dangers posed by the growing black and coloured population.¹⁴ By contrast, NP leader DF Malan said after the 1948 election: “Today South Africa belongs to us once more. South Africa is our own for the first time since Union, and may God grant that it always remained our own”.¹⁵ By that he meant the Afrikaner nationalists’ own.

Among leaders of the African National Congress, the oldest and most prestigious black organisation, there were mixed feelings about the 1948 election result. Albert Luthuli, a future winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace, said that with blacks little more than spectators of the political game, it was irrelevant which white party won. Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela, future ANC leaders, disagreed. Mandela recounts that Tambo said: “I like this. Now we know exactly who our enemies are and where we stand”.¹⁶

In 1950 Hendrik Verwoerd, an ex-professor of sociology, became Minister of Native Affairs in the NP government and he went on to serve as prime minister from 1958 to 1966. He made it his business to tell blacks exactly where they stood.

Shortly after becoming a cabinet minister, Verwoerd met with ex-members of the Natives Representative Council, who had disbanded the body. Among them were some ANC stalwarts. He ruled out direct representation of blacks in Parliament or in the provincial councils, but offered blacks what he called the greatest measure of self-government in the urban black townships. Verwoerd stated that in order to provide services for the townships, blacks would have to be educated and trained to be sufficiently competent in many spheres.¹⁷

This was the only occasion on which such an offer was made, and the proposal was in conflict with the NP’s 1948 policy platform. The black leaders attending the meeting rejected the proposal, insisting on representation at all levels of government. This was a possible turning point at which South Africa failed to turn. The black city councils could have been employed in the same way that the black trade unions were in the 1980s. The latter used their legalised status effectively in ways the government had never anticipated.

14 J Hatch, *The dilemma of South Africa* (London, Dennis Dobson, 1953), p. 93.

15 J Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa, 1948-1963* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971), p. x.

16 N Mandela, *Long walk to freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Randburg, MacDonald Purnell, 1994), p. 105.

17 AN Pelzer (ed.), *Verwoerd Speaks* (Johannesburg, APB, 1966), pp. 14, 24.

Verwoerd now embarked on a rigid policy of restricting black political rights to the eight black reserves, later depicted in the apartheid ideology as national homelands. These reserves in total made up 13 per cent of the land mass of South Africa. Until 1990 it remained policy to link even settled urban blacks to their respective homelands. It boiled down to restricting political rights for the rapidly expanding black population to the fragmented and overcrowded reserves.

Nelson Mandela, already an outstanding leader in the early 1950s, helped to steer the ANC into an activist but non-violent form of politics. It included boycotts, stay-at-homes, passive resistance and protest demonstrations. The state finally crushed the movement by charging 157 of the leaders, Mandela included, with treason. The trial, which started in 1956, dragged on for five years before all the accused were acquitted.

At the same time the cunning of history was at work. In the courts there was no segregation of the accused. The 157 accused were all seated alphabetically and had frequent opportunities for talking during breaks. Mandela had long been suspicious of some of the white communists, but before the Treason Trial he had become friends with Ruth First and Michael Harmel. He nevertheless wanted the ANC to remain an exclusively black organisation. Most members of the Communist Party were whites before the party was banned. Afterwards whites predominated on the executive, but the national chairman was an Indian and the secretary general was black.

During the Treason Trial Mandela mixed with white communists almost on a daily basis. He would remain loyal to his communist allies for the rest of his career. During the early 1960s he would briefly serve on the central committee of the party.¹⁸

Appealing to government

From the beginning of his career Mandela admired British political institutions, in particular the British Parliament. He saw those institutions as the cornerstone of a new political order in a free South Africa. In 1960 Mandela, on trial for treason, proposed that the black population be allowed

¹⁸ S Ellis, *External mission: The ANC in exile* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2012), pp.17-18; I Filatove and A Davidson, *The hidden thread: Russia and South Africa in the soviet era* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2013), pp.300-301.

to elect 60 representatives in the South African Parliament, which was slightly less than a third of the total number of seats at that time. He also suggested that the measure could be reviewed after every five years.¹⁹

This was the kind of measure Toynbee probably had in mind for whites if they wished to prevent a situation in the future where the ruling elite would be forced to capitulate without power and without honour. But apart from the fact that the white electorate was quite unprepared for it, there was another problem. In the dominant white group there was a division between the Afrikaners, forming 55 per cent of the electorate, and the English community, who was economically and culturally dominant.

The “winner-takes-all” electoral system, which today is still used in both Britain and the United States, is unsuitable for a deeply divided society like South Africa. It does not reward moderation but encourages the biggest ethnic group to mobilise separately and to become increasingly radical in defending its power.

In South Africa there was not only a sharp division between white and black but also between the two white communities. Implementing Mandela’s proposal of 60 black parliamentary representatives would almost certainly have set up a black-English alliance that would have meant the political death knell for the Afrikaners.

The killing of 70 black South Africans by the police at Sharpeville on 21 March 1960, followed by black protests in several cities and a capital flight, triggered the first serious crisis for white rule.

In April 1960 the government banned the ANC and other organisations and imprisoned numerous activists. It called a referendum on a republic in which only the whites, forming only one fifth of the population, would participate. After a yes vote the government decided to proclaim the republic on 31 May 1961.

On 20 April 1961 Mandela wrote to Verwoerd on behalf of several black organisations, stating that the latter’s government, representing only a minority, was not entitled to take such a decision without obtaining the express consent of the African people. Blacks feared the proposed republic under a government which, in Mandela’s words, was “already notorious the

19 T Lodge, *Mandela: A critical life* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 68-70.

world over for its obnoxious policies". The danger existed, he wrote, that the government would now "make even more savage attacks on the rights and living conditions of the African people". This situation "could be averted only by the calling of a sovereign national convention representative of all South Africans, to draw up a new non-racial and democratic Constitution".

Three weeks after the republic had been proclaimed, Mandela again wrote to Verwoerd. He stated that no constitution or form of government could be decided without the participation of the black people which formed an absolute majority of the population. He demanded a National Convention of elected representatives of all adult men and women. The body should have sovereign powers to determine, in any way the majority of the representatives would decide, a non-racial democratic constitution.²⁰

Verwoerd's office failed to reply to Mandela's two letters. When he stood trial later, Mandela pressed Verwoerd's secretary to admit that the failure to reply to his letters would be considered "scandalous" in "any civilised country". The secretary replied that the letters had remained unanswered because the tone was aggressive and discourteous. Mandela later acknowledged that "there may have been something in this".²¹ But the demand for the calling of a national convention was also problematic from a white point of view. The majority would be able to write the constitution.

In the course of 1960 Mandela, along with some other leading figures in the resistance, decided to form an armed body, later called Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) to wage an armed struggle against the state.

They had to face the fact that Albert Luthuli, the incumbent ANC president, was firmly opposed to the ANC's embarking on an armed struggle. There was a meeting between Mandela and Luthuli to resolve the issue.

In his published autobiography Mandela acknowledges that the outcome of his clash with Luthuli was very messy since the latter retained his commitment to non-violence. According to Mandela, Luthuli agreed that "the military body should be a separate and independent organ, linked to the ANC and under the overall control of the ANC, but fundamentally autonomous". Mandela goes on to state that he enlisted some white Communist Party members. The

20 N Mandela, "Nelson Mandela to Hendrik Verwoerd" (available at www.nelsonmandela.org., as accessed on 20 April and 26 June 1961).

21 T Lodge, *Mandela: A critical life...*, pp. 104-105.

party had already decided to embark on violence and had executed acts of sabotage”.²²

The question as to whether it was the ANC or the SACP who made the decision to start the armed struggle, and that of Mandela’s role, remained dormant until Mandela’s death on 5 December 2013. Then the whole issue blew up. The South African Communist Party issued a statement in which it declared that Mandela had once been a member of the party’s central committee. Around the same time, two important works by professional historians appeared. The one was by the late British historian Stephen Ellis, holder of the Desmond Tutu chair at the University of Amsterdam.²³ The other one was by two Russian historians, Irina Filatova and Apollon Davidson.²⁴

According to Ellis, the SACP conference that resolved to take up arms took place in a posh white suburb. Of the 25 delegates in attendance, 8 or 9 were black Africans.²⁵ Filatova and Davidson write that Mandela was present as a member of the SACP’s central committee. They add: “The fact that the armed struggle was originally a decision by the SACP, not the ANC, is confirmed by documents from the Moscow archives”.

The controversy intensified when the Mandela Foundation released the 627-page original manuscript of Mandela’s account of his life, which had been smuggled out of prison.²⁶ It now appears that some very interesting passages were expurgated from the prison manuscript in producing the printed version of Mandela’s autobiography *A long walk to freedom* (1994).

There is now little doubt that Mandela was indeed a member of the SACP executive during the period 1960-62 when MK was formed. During his tour through Africa in 1962, just before his imprisonment, he discovered that several of the leaders of African states he met rejected communism. When he returned to South Africa, Mandela projected himself as a nationalist. Joe Slovo, SACP leader, complained: “We sent Nelson off to Africa as a Communist and he came back an African nationalist”.²⁷

22 N Mandela, *Long walk to freedom...*, pp. 260-266.

23 S Ellis, *External mission...*, pp. 17-18.

24 I Filatova and A Davidson, *The hidden thread...*, pp. 300-301; I Filatova, “Mandela and the SACP: Time to close the debate” (available at www.politicsweb.co.za, 24 June 2015, as accessed on 20 September 2015).

25 S Ellis, *External mission...*, pp. 16-17; R Malan, “The real story of Nelson Mandela and the Communists”, *The Spectator* blogs, 10 December 2013.

26 N Mandela, “Manuscript of Nelson Mandela’s autobiography” (available at www.nelsonmandela.org, as accessed on 1 May 2015).

27 S Ellis, *External mission...*, p. 33.

From the early 1960s to the early 1990s both the ANC and the SACP depended heavily on Soviet Union support. In 1965-66 the ANC received \$560 000 and the SACP \$112 000 from this source.²⁸

On Robben Island Mandela never gave an indication of any communist leanings. A fellow inmate, Neville Alexander, who frequently debated issues with him, was convinced that Mandela did not subscribe to the so-called National Democratic Revolution, the key SACP doctrine. This sets out the party's plan to establish a socialist society under ANC rule through a two-stage revolution. In Alexander's view, the ANC's predominantly bourgeois leadership had no intention other than serving the interests of the capitalist class.²⁹

The unexpurgated prison manuscript was completed and smuggled out of prison in the mid-1970s. At that point Mandela had distanced himself from some of the SACP members on Robben Island. The differences were partly personal, especially with Govan Mbeki, a hard-line Stalinist. But there were also differences about strategy, particularly on how to deal with the Bantustans.

The overall impression one gets from the manuscript is that Mandela was no liberal democrat. He endorses dialectical materialism and considers anti-communism a sickness, contracted from going to missionary schools or listening to government propaganda. He argues that force could be used in the battle against the government, even if the black majority were against it.

From the early 1960s the state's security agencies received intelligence that the SACP had succeeded in infiltrating the ANC and that Mandela was a member of its executive from 1960 to 1962. The question is: How did this knowledge affect the treatment of ANC- or SACP-aligned prisoners? Mandela himself commented on this in his unexpurgated memoirs:³⁰

In comparison with the wave of detentions since 1963 that in 1960 was like a picnic. To the best of my knowledge and belief no individuals were then isolated, forced to give information, beaten up, tortured, crippled and killed as has been happening since 1963. Speaking comparatively, the security police still had a number of men who carried out their duties according to the law and who resisted the temptation of abusing their powers. Apart from keeping us in confinement, withholding newspapers so as to prevent us from

28 RW Johnson, *The first man, the last nation* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2004), p. 109.

29 N Alexander, *An ordinary country* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002), pp. 46-49.

30 N Mandela, "Manuscript of Nelson Mandela's autobiography" (available at www.nelsonmandela.org, as accessed on 1 May 2015), p. 302.

knowing what was happening outside, the atmosphere was generally free of the brutalities and acute tensions that characterize the subsequent detentions.

Piet Swanepoel, a senior security policeman to whom Mandela refers favourably in this context, recently stated that knowledge of the communist influence on the ANC triggered a “greater harshness” on the part of the security officers in their effort to dispel this influence.³¹ Torture of detainees and deaths in detention became common.

Considering Mandela’s release

The second prime minister during Mandela’s term in prison was John Vorster, who served from 1966 to 1978. Like other NP leaders, Vorster believed that Mandela was a communist and that the ANC, as well as the SACP, was a proxy of the Soviet Union. Initially the Vorster government enjoyed so much latitude that little thought was given to substantial reform or to the release of Mandela and some of his colleagues from prison. The economy was booming. During the 1960s it grew at an average rate of 5,9 per cent per year.

From the mid-1970s the tide turned against the white regimes in Southern Africa. The economy became bogged down by the sudden jump in oil prices together with a slump in commodity prices and growing demands from a much more assertive black work force.

The collapse of the dictatorship of Portugal in 1974 was the start of a rapid withdrawal of Portugal from its Southern African colonies. Soviet-aligned regimes came to power in Mozambique and Angola. A South African attempt to intervene in Angola misfired badly. The Soviet government airlifted some 30 000 Cuban troops to that country. US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger warned Vorster that due to opposition in the American Congress, the Ford administration would not be able to counter further Soviet intervention in Southern Africa.

In June 1976 a major uprising erupted in Soweto, near Johannesburg, and quickly spread to townships across the country. The political isolation of the white community was starkly exposed. The situation was so serious that on 8 August 1976 the Vorster cabinet had on its agenda the issue of the release

31 H Giliomee, interview, P Swanepoel, 29 January 2014.

of Nelson Mandela, who had been in prison for twelve years by that time.³² There is no record of the decision.

What would have happened had Mandela indeed been released in 1976? Neville Alexander records that in 1971 he and Mandela debated using the apartheid channels, flawed as they were.³³ Two years before the Soweto uprising, in 1974, Mandela had written a secret memorandum, entitled “Clear the obstacles and confront the enemy”, that was smuggled out.

In this document Mandela confronted the fact that the government of the Transkei, which was the putative homeland of most Xhosa people, had opted to take the apartheid-style independence in 1976. In terms of a 1971 law, Mandela who was born in the Transkei, would lose his South African citizenship.

Undeterred, Mandela wrote in his 1974 memorandum that the ANC faced an entirely new development: the independence of the Transkei, which was sure to be followed by other Bantustans. Mandela wrote: “The Transkei will have an independent legislature, judiciary and executive and may control its foreign relations”, and then added:³⁴

For the first time since conquest the people will run their own affairs. Now Africans will be able to be judges, magistrates, attorneys-general, inspectors of education, postmasters, army and police officers, and they will occupy other top positions in the civil service. Would it not be far better to consider independence as an accomplished fact and then call upon the people in these so-called free territories to help in the fight for a democratic South Africa?

Mandela would never have recognised the independence of Transkei in the way in which the government conceived it. However, if he had proceeded to use the structures of an independent Transkei to fight apartheid and promote liberation, the existing strains in the ANC might well have become too great to contain. A major split might well have occurred in the movement, putting South Africa on a quite different course than the one it took between 1976 and 1990.

32 E-mail: Jamie Miller/H Giliomee, 7 February 2015. Miller’s book on the term of John Vorster will appear shortly.

33 N Alexander, *An ordinary country...*, p. 47.

34 N Mandela, “Nelson Mandela and the Bantustans” (available at www.politicsweb.co.za, as accessed on 14 May 2012), re-publication of Nelson Mandela, “Clear the obstacles and confront the enemy”, ca 1974.

PW Botha's offers to Mandela

In 1978 Vorster resigned. He was succeeded by PW Botha, who had transformed the South African military into a formidable military force. Botha believed South Africa was facing a so-called “total onslaught”, the aim of which was to subvert and ultimately overthrow white rule. In this an important role would be played by the ANC, which Botha also considered a Soviet proxy.

Botha firmly believed that Mandela was still a communist.³⁵ He had, however, become receptive to the advice of National Intelligence that Mandela had become the main icon of the worldwide anti-apartheid struggle and that it was counter-productive to keep him in prison.

In 1985 Botha offered to release Mandela provided he forswore violence as a political instrument unconditionally. This was the sixth such offer since he was imprisoned. As before, Mandela refused. He did not believe that the ANC was capable of overthrowing the state, but he was quite certain that eventually the government would be compelled to negotiate for the simple reason that blacks formed a growing demographic majority. Like Toynbee had predicted 25 years earlier, he thought that the government would only with great reluctance embark on negotiations. He resolved to do anything possible to prod government on this way.

One way of making it easier for government to negotiate a democracy was to reduce the total number of blacks that could vote. By the early 1980s there were already 8 million out of approximately 22 million blacks who were considered citizens of so-called independent states, and as such deemed by government to be disenfranchised. Early in 1986 Mandela told a journalist, Benjamin Pogrund, that he was prepared to consider recognising the independence of the Bantustans. As Pogrund states, this was “an unusual and significant view contrary to that of the ANC in exile”. When Pogrund asked whether he could report this view to a cabinet member, Mandela said yes.³⁶ One does not know what strategic objective Mandela had in mind when he communicated this very controversial view to Pogrund. He always rejected the Bantustan policy and would never consider endorsing it in exchange for his freedom. At the same time, he was prepared to work with anti-apartheid homeland leaders.

³⁵ E-mail: N Barnard/H Giliomee, 26 February 2015.

³⁶ Letter: B Pogrund to the editor, *Mail & Guardian*, 3 February 2015.

Initially Mandela seemed flexible over a controversial issue like minority rights. Like the Bantustan option, it was abhorred by the ANC in exile, which would not budge from the first-past-the-post electoral system coupled with the rule of the-winner-takes-all. Yet, even after his release Mandela said he was flexible over all the fundamental issues, including minority rights.³⁷

A major uprising

A major uprising broke out in 1984, and the turmoil did not subside until the government proclaimed a nation-wide State of Emergency in 1986. Thousands were detained without trial. In his ill-fated “Rubicon speech”, held on 16 August 1985, Botha rejected the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela, who had become the focus of the worldwide campaign against apartheid. He made it appear as if Mandela and his comrades had been motivated solely by communist convictions in the early 1960s. There was no reference to grievances that were widely considered legitimate, and he presented no evidence that Mandela was indeed a communist. More than anything, this speech and the rejection of the demand for Mandela’s release destroyed the government’s credibility as an agent of substantial reform.

President Botha had to accept that the state was no longer able to force blacks into the institutions the government had unilaterally created. It had become necessary to talk to the leadership of the ANC. The government’s secret polls showed that the movement enjoyed the support of at least 60 per cent of the population.

Mandela knew from the early 1960s that overthrowing white rule by means of insurrection was impossible and that only in negotiations could whites be persuaded to cede power and live under a democratic system in which their rights were guaranteed. To prepare himself for such negotiations, he learnt Afrikaans in prison and studied Afrikaner history. He told his Afrikaner interlocutors in prison that he saw distinct similarities between the Afrikaner struggle for freedom against overwhelming odds in the very first years of the twentieth century and the black struggle for freedom.

The electorate, however, was far from ready to embark on a radical change. A large proportion rejected the conventional form of majority rule on which the

³⁷ *Weekly Mail*, 16 February 1990.

African National Congress (ANC) insisted. A poll conducted in 1988 among whites in the Witwatersrand area, the biggest urban conglomeration, listed five political preferences for a new constitution. Only 11 per cent of the white English-speakers against 3 per cent of the Afrikaners endorsed the option of “A single mixed parliament with the majority in control”.³⁸

In 1988 Botha instructed Niel Barnard, head of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), assisted by three other senior civil servants, to discuss the possibility of a negotiated settlement with Mandela. Forty-eight such meetings took place. Barnard reported back to Botha after each session.

When Barnard’s team raised the issue of Mandela’s alleged sympathy for communism and his refusal to break with the Communist Party, Mandela replied that while in his youth he had found aspects of communism attractive, he was not a communist. Yet he refused to break with the SACP, the ANC’s main ally: “If I desert them now, who have been in the struggle with me all these years, what sort of ally would I be to you or to the government?” He answered his own question: “[People] would say that Mandela is a man who turns the way the wind blows; he is not to be trusted”.³⁹ It was a shrewd answer that was difficult to counter.⁴⁰

The officials also explored other issues. Was the ANC genuinely interested in a peaceful settlement? Mandela made it clear that majority rule was non-negotiable, but added that the new system had to be balanced and that it had to ensure white domination would not be replaced by black domination. “Minorities have a legitimate interest in security,” he said.⁴¹

Mandela kept pressing for a meeting with the president, and Botha finally agreed. Prior to the meeting Mandela wrote to Botha that one of the key points in future negotiations would be “the [ANC] demand for majority rule in a unitary state and the concern of white South Africa over this demand, as well as the insistence on structural guarantees that majority rule will not mean the domination of the white minority by blacks”. He continued: “The most crucial task which will face the government and the ANC will be to reconcile these two positions. Such reconciliation will be achieved only if both parties

38 H Giliomee & L Schlemmer, *From apartheid to nation-building* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 156.

39 M Louw, interview, P Waldmeir, 29 May 1995, Manuscripts Collection, University of Stellenbosch.

40 For an account of these talks, see N Barnard, *Geheime rewolusie: Geheime van 'n spioenbaas* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2015), pp. 176-184.

41 N Barnard, “NIS wou sonder middelman na ANC gaan”, *Die Burger*, 18 February 1992.

are willing to compromise”.⁴²

On 5 July 1989 the meeting between Botha and Mandela took place in the president’s office. Botha had suffered a stroke a few months earlier. By all accounts he was no longer the same man as before. By meeting Mandela, Botha clearly wanted to signal to his cabinet that he was still in charge.

In his autobiography Mandela wrote about the meeting with Botha: “He completely disarmed me. He was unfailingly courteous, deferential and friendly.” When I interviewed Mandela early in 1992, he told me that a stranger would not have been able to tell who the prisoner and who the president was. “We met as equals”, he recounted.⁴³

Mandela told me, along with several other people, that one of the greatest disappointments in his life was having to negotiate with De Klerk rather than Botha. After 1994 Mandela continued to speak highly of Botha while frequently criticising De Klerk, sometimes unfairly. The main reason was that Mandela and De Klerk were competitors for electoral support and the international limelight.

Another reason was the difference in age. Mandela and Botha were of the same age while De Klerk was nearly twenty years younger. Having been Minister of Defence before he became leader, Botha embodied the military’s toughness and discipline. De Klerk, by contrast, could easily be mistaken for a professor of law, which he nearly became, or a modern-day bureaucrat.

We shall never know all that was said at the meeting between Botha and Mandela because Barnard gave orders that the tapes of the meeting had to be destroyed. Botha was furious when he discovered this, but it was clearly the sensible thing to do because Mandela had not been informed that the meeting was being taped. Barnard’s account of the meeting, based on his notes, showed that the meeting was very cordial and that no substantial issue was discussed, except the release of one of Mandela’s fellow prisoners.⁴⁴

Botha did not discard his original views about the nature of the insurrection that Mandela had plotted way back in 1960. Interviewed in 1995, he said that Mandela “was led into this affair by the communists and international

42 H Ebrahim, *The soul of a nation: Constitution-making in South Africa* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 447.

43 N Mandela, interview, H Giliomee, 1 March 1992.

44 N Barnard, *Geheime rewolusie...*, pp. 215-220.

forces". He seemed to suggest Mandela was manipulated by these forces. He told the interviewer that he had warned Mandela against the dangers of international Marxism and communism.⁴⁵

It would be unwise to describe Botha's musings as those of an anachronistic Cold War warrior. An informed observer like Barnard stated recently: "Mandela totally underestimated the influence of the SACP".⁴⁶

Giving up power

In August 1989 the National Party won the general election and De Klerk was elected president. Two months later, on 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. De Klerk later wrote that he immediately considered it a golden opportunity to negotiate what he thought would be a balanced settlement with the ANC. He calculated that without the substantial Soviet support the ANC had enjoyed since the early 1960s, it would find itself off balance for a long while and would be compelled to modify significantly its demand for majority rule.

When he first met Mandela in December 1989, De Klerk observed that the inclusion of group rights in a new constitution would ease the concern of minorities over majority rule. But with Mandela a free man, it was a new ball game. Mandela told De Klerk that the ANC had not fought apartheid for 75 years to accept a disguised form of it.⁴⁷ Mandela knew that both power-sharing and group rights were anathema to the ANC in exile, and he would not concede group rights easily.

When De Klerk set out to negotiate, he did not intend to drop his insistence on group rights. Robin Renwick, British ambassador to South Africa, who often met De Klerk, described the discussions between him and De Klerk in the form of a diary.

In an entry dated 26 October 1989 he stated:⁴⁸

As De Klerk was continuing to talk about the need to protect group rights, I suggested to Gerrit Viljoen and others that this terminology should be

45 P Waldmeir, interview, PW Botha, 1 March 1995.

46 E-mail: N Barnard/H Giliomee, 26 February 2015.

47 P Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a miracle: The end of apartheid and the birth of a new South Africa* (New York, Norton, 1997), p. 148.

48 R Renwick, *Mission to south Africa: Diary of a revolution* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2015), p. 107.

changed to emphasize minority rights. De Klerk told me that he was not in the business of “reforming himself out of power”. What he was thinking of at this time was power-sharing, not a transfer of power.

On 11 December 1989 Renwick wrote:⁴⁹

Mandela met De Klerk at the Tuynhuis...Mandela said that the National Party concept of “group rights” was seen by his people as a way to preserve apartheid. De Klerk’s response was: “We shall have to change it then”.

Renwick’s entry for 19 March 1990 reads:⁵⁰

In the future constitution, he [De Klerk] considered the key to be the protection of minority rights... [The] protection of individual rights would not of itself protect minorities. He talked about some form of power-sharing, and was, he said, in a hurry in his search for a solution. The ship he had launched would never be turned around, but he insisted he was not about to commit suicide.

Protests again flared up and the country was soon in an acute state of instability, resulting in a higher death toll than in the 1980s. In assuming the dual role of presiding over the transition and leading the National Party in the negotiations, De Klerk had put himself in a very difficult position. During the 1980s he resented the way in which he and some other ministers had been side lined in the discussions about the state’s response to the uprising. He told Barnard, chief of the NIS: “I intend to restore civilian government in its full glory”. He acted as if it could be done immediately and did away with the core parts of the National Security Management System, which President Botha had used to restore order.

De Klerk did not rely on the assessments and advice of the heads of the security services and intelligence agencies. Barnard believes that De Klerk thought “he had enough political acumen to handle everything personally, which was a great error of judgement”. In 2007 General Chris Thirion, former Deputy Head of Military Intelligence, wrote in an open letter to De Klerk: “If I think of De Klerk, I think of a president who did not trust his security forces”.⁵¹

Mandela persisted in alleging that government forces were responsible for most of the violence, but was rarely in a position to give concrete evidence.

49 R Renwick, *Mission to South Africa...*, p. 109.

50 R Renwick, *Mission to South Africa...*, p. 126.

51 H Giliomee, *The last Afrikaner leaders...*, p. 368.

Examining court records, Anthea Jeffery was able to call into question many of the allegations made by ANC spokesmen or press reports at the time.⁵² The subject of the extent of the involvement of members of the security forces would probably remain a highly contested one for many years to come. Nevertheless there is some consensus that the ANC, together with Inkatha, a primarily Zulu organisation, were responsible for most of the over 20 000 deaths that occurred in the violence between 1984 and 1994.

A complex proposal

In September 1991 the NP federal congress accepted a complex proposal of power-sharing on different levels as the negotiating position of the party. For a national legislature the NP proposed a bicameral system, with the First House elected by universal franchise on the basis of proportional representation. The Second House would give representation to nine regions, each of which would get an equal number of seats to be filled by regional elections. Each party that won a specified minimum number of votes in a regional election would be given an equal number of seats. The Second House would vote on matters affecting regions and minorities. A weighted majority would be used in the voting in the place of a conventional majority vote.

On the executive level the NP proposed a presidency consisting of the leaders of the three biggest parties and a rotating chairmanship. Decisions, including the appointment of the cabinet, would be by consensus. The cabinet would be a collegial one, also operating on the basis of consensus. De Klerk described these proposals as an indication that power should not be vested solely in the hands of a single individual, political party or group – and as a rejection of domination of any kind.

The government called a referendum, which was held on 17 March 1992. The voters were only asked to endorse the negotiating process, but NP speakers and NP-supporting newspapers insisted that a yes meant support for the sharing of power. Izak de Villiers, editor of *Rapport*, called for a yes vote on the grounds of the “undeniable fact” that the government “insisted on power-sharing and would never accept giving up power”.⁵³ In a full-page advertisement in *Die Burger* the day before the referendum, the NP exhorted

⁵² A Jeffery, *People's war...*, pp. 496-511.

⁵³ I de Villiers, *Strooidak en toring* (Cape Town, Umuzi, 2009), p. 195.

voters to vote yes if they rejected the ANC's demand for majority rule. On 17 March 1992 two-thirds of the white voters voted yes.

Colin Eglin, who represented the Democratic Party at the negotiations, later observed that De Klerk was being "very naughty" in claiming he kept to undertakings he had given. In the referendum, he said, De Klerk referred to the party's September 1991 proposals "and put them out saying I am not asking for a blank cheque, I am asking for this".⁵⁴

Opinion surveys taken in the six months after the referendum made it clear that, as the pollster and analyst Lawrence Schlemmer formulated it, "whites were essentially voting yes because they feared the consequences of a no vote on the economy, but their commitment was to negotiations, and very little more". They "were essentially voting to give [De Klerk] a mandate because of the very high trust they have in De Klerk not to sell them out".⁵⁵

In May 1992 the ANC walked out of the negotiations and embarked on three months of extensive mass action. When Mandela met De Klerk during the last week of September 1992, Mandela secured virtually all the ANC's objectives. The two leaders agreed that the final constitution would be drafted by a body elected on universal franchise, which the ANC was sure to dominate.

Apart from the requirement to recognise some basic human rights, there were some other minor checks. One was the need to adhere to some vaguely phrased constitutional principles; the other was substitution of parliamentary sovereignty with constitutional sovereignty.

De Klerk tried to get Mandela to agree to a system of shared decision-making in the proposed government of national unity that would serve for five years, but the issue remained unresolved until 17 November 1993. In a last-ditch effort to reach agreement, De Klerk and Mandela met on the eve of the final session of negotiations for an interim government. Also present were the chief negotiators, Roelf Meyer and Cyril Ramaphosa.

Mandela insisted on simple majority rule, which meant that a majority (50%) would be sufficient to break any logjam. Mac Maharaj alleges that the ANC negotiators were prepared as a fall-back to accept a 60% vote should De Klerk reject this stance, but Mandela insisted that a simple majority was sufficient. He did not know, he said, how he could run a cabinet in any other

⁵⁴ O'Malley Archives, interview, Colin Eglin, 3 August 1992.

⁵⁵ O'Malley Archives, interview, Lawrence Schlemmer, 2 October 1992.

way. De Klerk accepted this and communicated it to the cabinet the next morning as a foregone conclusion.⁵⁶

Jan Heunis, the government's chief legal adviser, recalls his shock when he learnt that the NP had agreed to majority rule. He knew that its leadership had no mandate for this. The mandate, he writes, was for a consensus-seeking model with built-in vetoes.⁵⁷

There was also the matter of the NP's promise to the white voters. In the 1989 election the NP leadership had promised that it would seek the voters' endorsement for any deal that deviated radically from the NP's 1989 election platform. The platform promised to bring about an inclusive democracy in which "groups" would be recognised as the basic components of the system. There would be power-sharing among them with no group dominating another, and self-determination for each group in its own affairs.

De Klerk also promised a particular kind of referendum. In March 1990 he pledged: "After the completion of the negotiations the constitutional proposals would be tested in a constitutional manner among the electorate. And only with their support would a constitutional dispensation be introduced."⁵⁸

Izak de Villiers, *Rapport* editor, writes in his memoirs that it was assumed that a second referendum of white voters would be called to seek their endorsement once agreement about a constitution had been reached. He tells of his dismay when three weeks after the March 1992 referendum "a senior minister" told him: "Izak, we don't want to have a second referendum".⁵⁹

Thus majority rule was introduced without the voters' approval and without the voters knowing the form of the future constitution. In striking contrast, a referendum was held in Northern Ireland in 1998 only after the constitution had been negotiated. Whether Mandela would have agreed if De Klerk had insisted on such a procedure at the very start of the negotiations is difficult to say. It reflects badly on the press that it failed to highlight this aspect of the negotiations.

56 P Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a miracle...*, pp. 231-232.

57 J Heunis, *Die binnekring* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2007), p. 150.

58 *Die Burger*, 31 March 1990.

59 I de Villiers, *Strooidak en toring...*, p. 200.

A right-wing challenge

The security forces were baffled by De Klerk's moves but, steeped in the tradition of military subordination to the authority of an elected government, they did not resist the political leadership. The major unknown factor was an ex-Chief of the Defence Force, General Constand Viljoen, who was convinced that the ANC was still pursuing a revolutionary agenda. He believed that De Klerk had caved in to their demands.

Viljoen planned to disrupt the elections, have De Klerk removed as leader and restart the negotiations. Some believed that he could raise 50 000 men mainly from the reserve army but also from some Defence Force units. In a briefing, General George Meiring, Chief of the Defence Force, warned the government and the ANC of the ghastly consequences of Viljoen's opposing the election.⁶⁰

To dissuade Viljoen, for whom he said he had "the highest regard", Meiring had several meetings with him. At one of them Viljoen said: "You and I and our men can take this country in an afternoon", to which Meiring replied: "Yes, that is so, but what do we do the morning after the coup?" The white-black demographic balance, the internal and foreign pressures, and all the intractable problems would still be there.⁶¹

Although De Klerk and Viljoen shared a conservative political outlook for most of their respective careers, they strongly opposed each other during the negotiations. De Klerk rejected Viljoen's demand for a "volkstaat" (ethnic state) for the Afrikaners within the boundaries of the state, while Viljoen believed De Klerk had sold out.

It was Mandela who grasped the need to engage Viljoen and to make a symbolic concession to him and his right-wing followers. It would take the form of an article in the constitution granting self-determination to a cultural group. Viljoen formed a party, the Freedom Front, that won close to half a million votes in the first election. When Parliament met for the first time in a free South Africa, Mandela broke ranks in the procession to greet Viljoen and to tell him how glad he was that they had found each other. Recently Viljoen told his biographer that he was sad that Mandela did not serve more than one

60 J van Rooyen, *Hard right: The new white power in South Africa* (London, IB Tauris, 1994); D Welsh, "Rightwing terrorism in South Africa", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 7(1), 1995, pp. 239-264.

61 H Giliomee, interview, G Meiring, 11 November 2002.

term, and that if he had done so, the Afrikaners might have been better off today.⁶²

Power and regime change

History is in many ways an account and interpretation of power – how it is won and lost. Yet a good grasp of the basic qualities of power remains elusive.⁶³ Leo Tolstoy remarked in the final chapter of his novel *War and peace*: “The new history is like a deaf man replying to questions which nobody puts to him.” The “primary question” Tolstoy went on, is: “What is the power that moves the destinies of peoples?” He doubted whether this power, “which different historians understand in different ways”, was in fact “so completely familiar to everyone”.

History should be an antidote to the belief that superior political or military power determines the outcome of conflicts. In an article that appeared in the 21 November 2013 issue of the *New York Review of Books*, Freeman Dyson, a renowned physicist, tells the story of a study in the early 1970s about how to end the war the United States was fighting in Vietnam. The study was commissioned by the RAND Corporation, whose experts considered themselves the brains of the US military establishment.

Working separately, two groups, one consisting of two economists and the other of several historians, reached completely different conclusions. The economists concluded that in a struggle to put down an insurgency what matters is not a sympathetic understanding of their struggle, “but rather a better understanding of what costs and benefits the individual or the group is concerned with and how they are calculated”. To paraphrase: if the costs of an uprising become too high for the insurgents, they will back down. As a result, the oppressive regime will prevail.⁶⁴

The group of historians who worked on the RAND Corporation’s project came up with a completely different answer. They looked at numerous cases of insurgency and asymmetrical wars, particularly the French colonial wars in Algeria and Vietnam, and the British colonial wars in Africa and Malaysia. In

62 D Cruywagen, *Brothers in war and peace: Constand and Braam Viljoen and the birth of a new South Africa* (Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2014), pp. 224-225.

63 CJ Friedrich, *Man and his government* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1963) , pp.159-179.

64 M Gladwell, *David and Goliath: Underdogs, misfits and the art of battling giants* (London, Allen Lane, 2013), pp. 197-213.

a six-volume study they concluded that most of the wars lasted five to seven years and ended when one side lost the willpower to keep on fighting. This was a major insight, but it was lost to the world. To this day, the US Army has suppressed the historians' report.⁶⁵

By the end of the 1980s the South African government was not desperate to start negotiations. It was rather the Fall of the Berlin Wall that provided the incentive for De Klerk's attempting to get an agreement with the ANC while its main source of financial support, the Soviet Union, was in retreat. The business elite was concerned, but its call for regime change was faint. Soldiers and policemen remained loyal and willing to continue to defend the state, but among army conscripts considerable unease about defending an unjust system had developed by the late 1980s. Nevertheless, in a poll conducted in the late 1980s less than a third of English-speaking students and fewer than a tenth of Afrikaner students declared themselves prepared to accept a prospective ANC government.⁶⁶

Chris Heunis, Botha's Minister for Constitutional Affairs until 1989, offered this sober assessment: Sanctions had made it necessary for the government to negotiate, but "there was no need to negotiate only about the hand-over of power".⁶⁷ Niel Barnard, the only person that saw both Botha and Mandela on a regular basis in the late eighties, believes that Botha would not have accepted majority rule, but would have said to Mandela: "Let's govern together for ten years and let's see how it goes". He thinks there was a good chance that Mandela would have accepted it.⁶⁸

There was no sign, however, that the electorate favoured a radical change.

Until the final years of the 1980s De Klerk supported retaining the pillars of apartheid. After his election as NP leader early in 1989, he singled out morality as his main motivation for ending apartheid and for seeking a settlement. In an interview I had with him two months after his momentous speech on 2 February, he said that hanging on to power would be immoral.⁶⁹ In a television programme, broadcast in 2002, he agreed with Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, ex-leader of the liberal opposition, that he could have been in

65 F Dyson, "How to be an underdog, and win", *New York Review of Books*, 21 November 2013, pp. 22-23.

66 J Gagiano, "Ruling group cohesion", H Giliomee & J Gagiano, *The elusive search for peace: South Africa, Northern Ireland and Israel* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 197.

67 H Giliomee, interview, C Heunis, 15 December 2002.

68 H Giliomee, interview, N Barnard, 25 February 2015.

69 H Giliomee, interview, FW de Klerk, 2 May 1990.

power for at least ten more years. His main problem with that was that it would have been “devoid of morality”.⁷⁰

PW Botha did not share this view of morality, and it is extremely doubtful that a clear majority of the white electorate would have given De Klerk and his party a yes vote in the referendum of March 1992 if it had known that majority rule would be the outcome of the negotiations.

Why did the Afrikaner community nonetheless go along with the deal struck between the ANC and the government in September 1992? One answer would be that after the white referendum the tie between the government and its traditional electorate was cut. There was nothing any white group of voters could do to stop the process.

But there may also be a deeper reason. In his doctoral dissertation, completed in 1999, the political analyst and pollster Lawrence Schlemmer looked at the polls of the preceding thirty years. He concluded that Afrikaners, much more than white English-speakers, had begun to stress their religious identification in preference to a class or ethnic identification. To be living an upright moral life had come to be seen as more important than serving the Afrikaner community.⁷¹

The Western world’s moral sanctions, much more than economic sanctions, had sapped the Afrikaners’ will to cling to power. Sooner or later, Toynbee argued, ruling minorities had no choice but to accept the status of “an unprivileged minority” among a majority they once considered culturally inferior.

The Communist Party, which fought both apartheid and capitalism, has been one of the greatest beneficiaries of the regime change. The SACP currently enjoys more influence in cabinet than they did under President Mbeki, but the quality of leadership is far inferior to what it was under Joe Slovo. In addition, it has become financially dependent on the trade union federation Cosatu. RW Johnson calls the SACP leadership “a predatory elite which rules and despoils South Africa”.⁷²

70 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people* (Charlottesville, Virginia University Press, 2003), p. 635.

71 L Schlemmer, “Factors in the persistence or decline of ethnic group mobilisation: A conceptual review and case study of cultural group responses among Afrikaners in post-apartheid South Africa”, doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1999.

72 RW Johnson, *How long will South Africa survive?...*, pp. 72-73.

The Institute of Race Relations, the oldest liberal think tank in South Africa, published its finding that 40 per cent of the cabinet are members of the SACP. No cabinet member questioned the report. Recently the executive director of the institute published a column under the title “So word SA tree vir tree na sosialisme gelei” (“How South Africa is being led step by step to socialism”).⁷³

The support for socialism in ANC ranks is not strange. Black South Africans were the last substantial community in the world to receive their freedom, the Soviet Union was long the only ANC backer, and communists were the only ANC allies in South Africa when the struggle against white supremacy entered a new phase in the early 1960s.

At present the ANC government is in a serious bind. An influential economist sums up the situation well: “The government is in a cleft between trying to pursue market-friendly policies on the one hand and appeasing socialist and left-wing elements on the other, who see the private sector as the enemy”.⁷⁴

Conclusion

For more than fifty years, from his speeches in the dock in the Treason Trial (1956-1961), through his letters to Hendrik Verwoerd (1961) to his presidency (1994 to 1999), Mandela cast a huge shadow over white politics. He never wavered in his conviction that the majority had the right to rule and would insist on it if his adversary wavered. Yet he also knew that white fears of black majority rule were great. To break the logjam, Mandela toyed with the idea of using the homeland structures to fight the Bantustan policy. This certainly would have met with strong opposition from elements of the ANC in exile. With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that the Afrikaner leaders were foolish to waste these opportunities, partly because they believed he was still a communist. During the all-party negotiations (1991-1993) Mandela compromised by dropping the ANC demand for nationalisation, but he remained firm on majority rule.

The NP under De Klerk started the negotiations well, but abandoned most of their political demands in September 1992 in the hope of securing a stable coalition with the ANC. Some observers argue that the negotiated settlement boils down to blacks winning political power and whites retaining

⁷³ *Rapport*, 29 March 2015.

⁷⁴ A Jammine, quoted in “Business Times”, *Sunday Times*, 10 May 2015.

their property, but, as recent developments show, retaining property in the absence of political power will be no easy task. Mandela served only one term as president. It is possible that in a second term he could have helped to consolidate a liberal democracy by curbing both the communist elements and the ultra-nationalists. But he came too late and went too soon.

Samevatting

Na die 1948-verkiesing het NP-leiers verwag dat die party vir 'n lang tyd die politieke toekoms van Suid-Afrika sou dikteer. Hulle het nooit behoorlik besef hoe snelle swart bevolkingsgroeï wit heerskappy ondermyn het nie en dat daar geen doeltreffende instellings was wat die stadswartes, die mees ontwikkelde deel van die swart bevolking, in die stelsel kon inkorporeer nie. So vroeg as 1959 het die historikus Arnold Toynbee daarop gewys dat, anders as in die geval van die Spanjaarde en Portugese, die Britte en Nederlanders in hul onderskeie kolonies nie in staat was om toegang tot die politieke stelsel vir ondernemende swart of gekleurde mense te bied nie. Dit het hulle verhinder om vroegtydig 'n kreatiewe politieke respons tot die griewe van die onderworpenes te vind voordat dit te laat was. Vroeër in sy loopbaan was Nelson Mandela bereid om groot kompromieë aan te gaan ten einde vir swartes 'n mate van seggenskap te verkry. In die loop van die jare tagtig het hy egter begin om onverbiddelik op meerderheidsregering aan te dring. Alhoewel die NP in die referendum van 1992 beloof het om so 'n stelsel teen te staan, het FW de Klerk meerderheidsregering aanvaar nadat Mandela kategoriees geweier het om daarvan af te sien. Hy het hierdie deurslaggewende besluit op 17 November 1993 aan die kabinet meegedeel. So 'n magsoordrag is nie uniek nie en kenmerk inderdaad ook die einde van koloniale regimes wat deur Brittanje en Nederland tot stand gebring is. Soos in die geval van dekolonisasie het die beëindiging van wit heerskappy gespruit uit die oortuiging van bepaalde politieke leiers dat hul politieke stelsel moreel onverdedigbaar was.