

# South Africa: Bleak Predictions, Prophetic Prescriptions

Nelson Mandela

*How will South Africa fare when the evil of legally-sanctioned apartheid is abolished, forcing that country out of the headlines and into the ranks of nations struggling with the banality of economic inequality and racial strife?*

*Will South Africa's majority succeed in guaranteeing equal access to quality education, economic opportunity and political influence? If racism still persists in America 30 years after the Civil Rights Act, how long will it take for racial justice to come to the land of apartheid?*

*ANC Deputy President Nelson Mandela addresses questions about South Africa's future.*

## A Slow Walk to a New South Africa

Nelson Mandela South Africa is at a crossroads. After repealing the Group Areas Act and the Land Acts, Parliament recently repealed the last legal pillar of apartheid: The Population Registration Act, which classified each person by race and formed the foundation of discriminatory South African policy. After 43 years of white rule, laws designating where blacks, Indians and "coloreds" could live, what land they could own and whether they could vote were dissolving in a wave of "new thinking," what has been called Pretoriastroika by optimistic South Africa watchers.

But in Crossroads, South Africa, a squatter camp a few miles outside the beautiful port city of Cape Town where Parliament sits during the winter, the fact that legal apartheid has been abolished has done little to change the circumstances of the 50,000 black residents who live without access to housing, running water, sewage, electricity or employment.

On the day President FW de Klerk introduced his proposal to repeal the Population Registration Act, a Conservative Party member furiously accused him of selling out South Africa and of negotiating whites out of power. Yet, moments later, a Democratic Party member accused the same man of doing nothing, of merely "modernizing white domination."

Nelson Mandela, who became an international symbol of resistance and reconciliation while enduring

nearly 28 years on Robben Island, inherited along with his freedom the challenge of healing this deeply divided nation. Mandela, who emerged from prison with a saintly absence of bitterness, is now working with his one-time warders to negotiate a new democratic constitution. And he is determined—at this historic juncture—to lead the country down a path that will guarantee not just the permanent abolition of legally-sanctioned apartheid but the assimilation of blacks into the educational, economic and political mainstream of South African society.

As East and West look cynically on, this Southern leader appears determined to resuscitate a humanistic form of socialism—a "theoretically humane ideology," as Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka describes the term in this NPQ, which "has been soiled by the opportunism of power." For South Africa's 27 million blacks—the vast majority in that country—the abolition of apartheid laws without radical affirmative action policies, which would promote access to quality education and economic opportunity, is simply not an option.

On the eve of the 15th anniversary of the Soweto student uprising and just three days after the South African Parliament proposed to dismantle the Population Registration Act, Deputy President of the African National Congress Nelson Mandela spoke with NPQ Senior Editor Marilyn Berlin Snell in Johannesburg.

**NPQ** | Convinced that apartheid is crumbling, the European Community no longer wants sanctions against South Africa. Even the Organization of African Unity is considering such an action. Now that the South African government has repealed the apartheid laws, what is the African National Congress' stand on trade and investment sanctions?

**Nelson Mandela** | Our stand is very clear and constant. The first and most crucial objective of sanctions is to insure that every South African, black and white, has the right to determine his own destiny. All South Africans must be able to enjoy the vote and to send whomever he or she wants into Parliament.

The second objective of sanctions is the total eradication of apartheid.

Neither of these objectives has been achieved. Therefore, our position is that sanctions should be maintained.

**NPQ** | So, until the legal pillars of apartheid come down and there is universal franchise, you advocate the continuation of all trade and investment sanctions?

**Mandela** | That is correct.

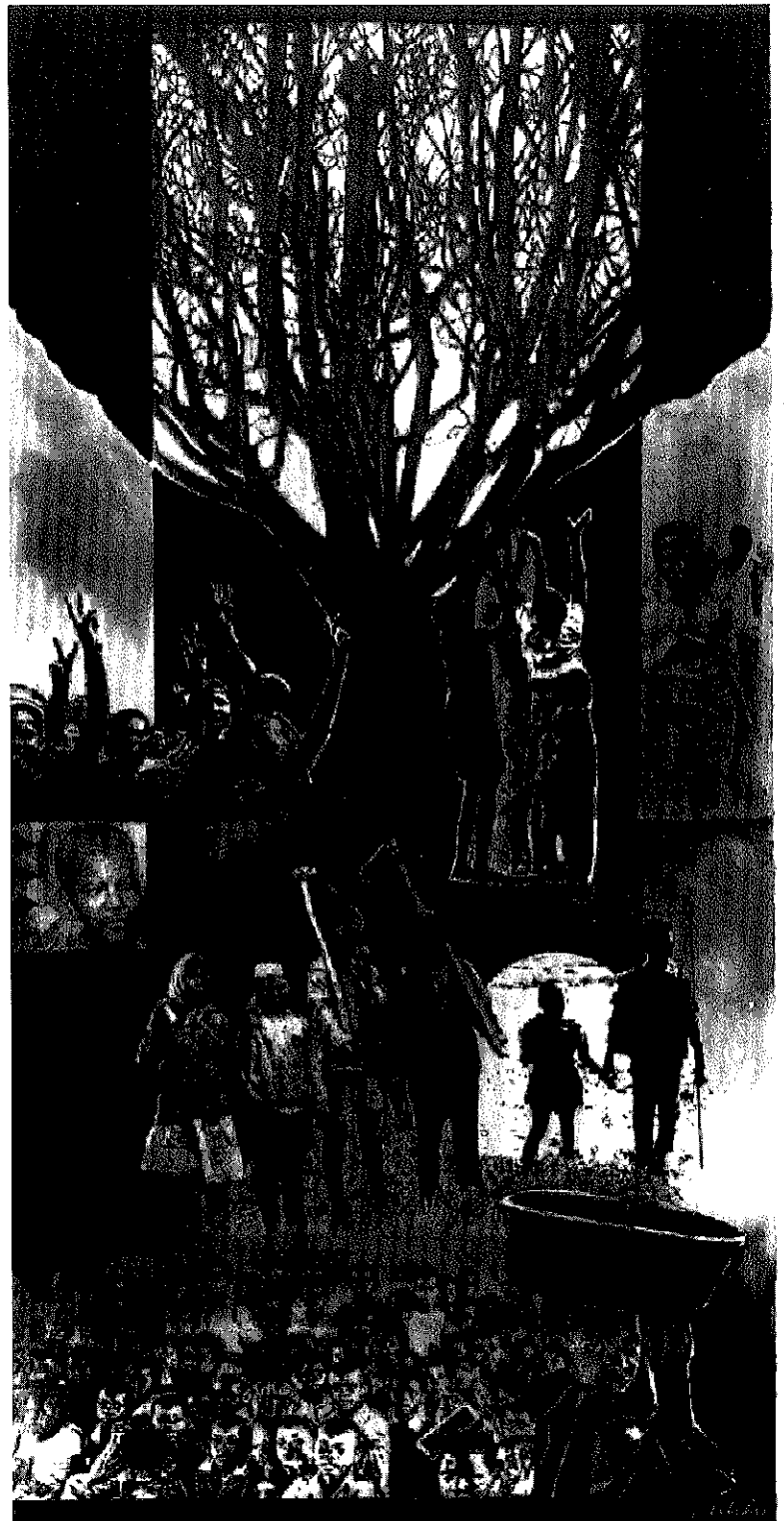
There is, of course, a qualification. Sanctions should be removed only when a new democratic constitution for South Africa has been accepted. However, we understand that it is not easy to work out a constitution acceptable to all South Africans and it may not be fair to wait until that moment to call for the repeal of sanctions. It may be necessary for us to act in good faith on a declaration by the government committing itself to a democratic constitution for South Africa.

But that depends on mutual confidence between black and white in this country—and in particular between the ANC and the government—which does not exist at the present time.

**NPQ** | What effect will the repeal of the legal pillars of apartheid—the Group Areas Act, the Land Acts, the Population Registration Act—have on those who have been economically and politically disenfranchised under apartheid?

**Mandela** | Since we demanded the removal of this legislation, its repeal is a victory for the liberation movement. And a move for which the government must be congratulated.

But the mere repeal of these laws does not give the disenfranchised the capacity to take advantage of the repeal. We must also be given the means, which include the resources to enable



blacks who have been disadvantaged, to purchase land.

As it stands, blacks haven't got the capacity to take advantage of the repeal because the government has not provided them with capital.

Furthermore, there are also those who have been driven from their land and we feel the government must allow these people to return without paying any consideration.

Also, there is the fundamental question of fair land distribution. At present, 87 percent of the land is owned by a minority while the overwhelming majority is only entitled to 13 percent.

Our view is that in addition to the repeal of all apartheid legislation, the government must attend to the question of an equitable distribution of the land overall. The mere repeal of these laws does not put blacks in a better economic position than before the repeal.

**NPQ** | How would the ANC promote equity in the new South Africa? The government's stand at this point is "let bygones be bygones. From this day forward there will be no more discrimination based on race." But it also says that it doesn't have the financial resources to redistribute the wealth.

**Mandela** | We agree with the principle "let bygones be bygones," because that is the only basis on which we can move forward and settle our problems.

But, of course, "let bygones be bygones" is a mere slogan; and although all parties will repeat it many times, there are certain practical problems which must be attended to. We cannot ignore the fact that blacks today constitute the overwhelming majority of the population; that they are disadvantaged; that they haven't got the capital and that, therefore, they must be provided with the means whereby they can actually translate the principle "let bygones be bygones" into practice and apply it equitably.

We cannot avoid taking into account the fact that blacks in this country do not have land by virtue of previous government policies. We must rectify that injustice. And the only way of doing so, in my view, is to insure that land is fairly distributed and that people are given the resources to buy land where it is available.

**NPQ** | So land should be fairly distributed — above and beyond giving the land back to those it was taken from, those who at one time possessed deeds of ownership . . .

**Mandela** | Yes. Quite apart from the fact that people were driven away from certain areas and should be able to return to those areas, there must also be consideration of the fact that blacks in this country only occupy 13 percent of the land area. We want a *fair* distribution — and this must be done without people paying anything. It is the only way in which we can insure equitable distribution.

**NPQ** | Critics charge that this kind of redistribution approach hasn't worked in the rest of Africa, or in Eastern Europe, for that matter. How do you respond?

**Mandela** | What we are calling for here is not the common ownership of land. We are calling for individual title to land.

I don't see why it wouldn't work if I were to be given a piece of land which I would be able, if I had the resources, to make profitable so that I could earn my livelihood.

I see no problems with that.

I think the error is created because people think that when we call for a fair distribution, we are asking for the common ownership of the land, as has happened in socialist countries. We are not demanding that. We are merely saying that each individual should be given a piece of land which he can regard as his own.

**NPQ** | You may not be calling for common ownership of land but I think you are calling for sacrifice on the part of whites because the land, at this time, is in the hands of that minority.

**Mandela** | In a general way, yes. But in actual practice, no. Because you have vast tracts of land in this country that are not occupied; that are not being beneficially developed. And you have people owning land which they can *never* properly develop.

But, in any case, where you try to rectify the evils of the past, some people must suffer.

This said, we are not calling for anything that would completely deprive people of what they own. However, we do say that redistribution must be undertaken if there is going to be justice as far as the ownership of land is concerned.

**NPQ** | You have said the best legal system is in the US, with its Bill of Rights. But today the US is having a great deal of difficulty living up to that Bill of Rights; currently we are having trouble getting a new civil rights bill through Congress. We have a Bill of Rights on the books but we also have a Supreme Court that many feel has made it virtually impossible to rectify or prove discrimination where it exists.

If racism still persists in America 30 years after the first Civil Rights Act was passed, how will South Africa succeed in carrying out the promise of its democratic constitution?

**Mandela** | What we admire in the American system of democracy is the *principle*, the idea. The practical problems that American legislators and

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reformers are encountering are problems which we understand. In our case, I will only say that we will follow the same idea, the same principle, and whatever practical problems arise we will try and address them.

And if one has to be guided by what has happened since our first meeting with the government in May last year, we *have* made progress in our dealings with very sensitive and delicate questions regarding sacrifice by whites and we hope that we will be able to make that progress even when we now try to put into practice the principles contained in our Bill of Rights.

**NPQ** | In what particular areas has the ANC made progress, and where does it stand in terms of its preliminary talks with the government on a new constitution?

**Mandela** | Let me start off by saying: We succeeded in isolating the government over these last 30 years, and we have succeeded in getting the support of the international community in our anti-apartheid struggle.

The second important victory for the ANC was that we compelled the government to abandon its basic policy and accept ours. In 1948, when this government came into power, it announced a policy of apartheid that would have enabled whites to rule the country forever.

In our basic policy document of 1955, we called for a democratic South Africa where no distinction would be made between various national groups. The government has now been forced to repudiate apartheid and to accept our call for a non-racial democracy.

Thirdly, the government in all the recent elections put forward the view that it would never sit down and talk to the ANC. It demonized us. It regarded us as murderers, rapists and people who were concerned only with creating chaos. We insisted that the way to resolve our problems was for the major parties to sit down and talk. And we have succeeded in coercing the government to sit down and talk to us.

In the first meeting we had in May of last year the issue we debated was what the definition of a political prisoner would be. The government's definition was any person who was convicted of leaving the country without proper documentation, or of being a member of a banned organization, or of promoting the objects of a banned organization. We challenged that. We said a political prisoner is any person whose crime was

politically motivated. In our context, a person who has been convicted for committing an offense in the course of his anti-apartheid activities is a political prisoner.

The government eventually accepted that definition. The people who are being allowed to return from exile are those who comply with this definition.

**NPQ** | What about the nearly 1,000 prisoners who seem to be in the grey area of definition about what constitutes a political prisoner?

**Mandela** | Yes, there is a grey area in the sense that some people are clearly identifiable in terms of this definition while others are not. Some people were convicted of public violence, throwing stones and so on but there is no evidence on record that they were politically motivated. It is for us to prove on a case by case basis whether their offenses were politically motivated.

**NPQ** | What is the major impediment to renewed talks with the government?

**Mandela** | At the present moment, of course, it is the question of violence. We have now lost close to 10,000 people since September 1984. Since July, last year, we have lost 2,000 people, in the Transvaal alone, to this violence.

First of all, you must understand that this violence has been misrepresented by the government and the mass media as strictly black on black. This is not entirely true. It is partially correct, because there is that element. But there are also a number of trained professional death squads who are rummaging around the strife-torn areas committing murder.

**NPQ** | Does the ANC have proof of this?

**Mandela** | Yes. Of course, it is a very difficult thing to prove the existence of death squads. We do, however, have Captain Derk Coetzee, who confessed he was in charge of one of the units whose sole mission was to kill freedom fighters.

If it was only his word, there would have been occasion to doubt it. But there is a gentleman called Nofomele now on death row who has confessed to taking part in the activities of a police unit whose task was to kill freedom fighters. He admits responsibility for the assassination of a prominent human rights lawyer in this country, Griffiths Mxenge.

Thirdly, a prominent chief was assassinated two months ago in Pietermaritzburg: Chief Mhlabunzima Maphumulo. A man has come forward to claim that he killed him as part of



the activities of a police unit. There is evidence of the existence of these death squads.

Additionally, there is evidence of the existence of the infamous Battalion 32, known to have specialized in killing SWAPO members and SWAPO supporters in Namibia.

**NPQ** | In addition to charges of death squad activity on the part of the government, the ANC has also charged that the government is not doing enough to staunch the flow of blood in the townships between blacks. What more should the government be doing?

**Mandela** | It should be ensuring that there are enough policemen to patrol the strife-torn areas.

We know the source of this violence. It comes from the hostels, which accommodate migrants including men who have had to leave their families at home. They have been brutalized and dehumanized by this system, where they are forced to live without their families. Therefore, they are easy victims for people who have their own agenda, who do not want the peace process to succeed, or who want it to succeed but want to negotiate with a weakened ANC.

If the government wants to put an end to the violence, all it has to do is cordon off the violence emanating from the hostels and not allow anyone to leave the hostels armed, and not to allow residents to enter the hostels to attack.

What has been happening is that hostel dwellers come out and attack innocent residents. We think that by cordoning off the hostels the government could stop most of these attacks.

Of course, they have now agreed that they are going to do this but we want them to deliver the goods.

**NPQ** | And if they deliver the goods, the

ANC is willing to restart the negotiations on a new constitution?

**Mandela** | Well, we also have other demands. We want the total banning of all dangerous weapons throughout the country. What the government has done thus far is to ban them only in the strife-torn areas. The result is that these elements just go to the other areas where they are not banned and start the violence there.

We have also asked for the police to use civilized methods of crowd control. This they have not yet done. We have asked for the arrest and conviction of all people who are found guilty of having committed a crime. We have asked for the appointment of an impartial commission of inquiry. We have asked for the dismissal of Defense Minister Magnus Malan and Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok. None of this has been done.

**NPQ** | Much has been made in the international press of Mrs. Mandela's conviction on kidnapping and assault charges. How will her conviction affect your negotiations with the government?

**Mandela** | I would like to refrain from making any comments on this matter. It is not that I do not want to discuss the implications of the case as far as negotiations with the government is concerned but that we have noted an appeal and the matter is therefore still open. Any remarks I might make might unfortunately be regarded as expressing an opinion on a matter that still has to go to the courts.

**NPQ** | I respect your reticence. However, I would like to ask another question about your wife. Because she was exposed to the daily realities of apartheid in the black community while you were in prison, I wonder if, in some ways, she

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isn't more in tune with the hearts and minds of the "young lions," many of whom are impatient with your slow progress and your continued willingness to talk with the government.

**Mandela** | That is quite correct. My wife has strong support among the youth in this country. And she herself, of course, would like to see faster progress than we are making. But at the same time, she is a person who is very understanding. She realizes how important it is for us to conduct and to continue with negotiations.

**NPQ** | Where does your willingness to compromise with the government for the sake of conflict resolution end?

**Mandela** | We, the ANC, are the architects of negotiations and we want to succeed.

We are also worried about the effect of sanctions on our economy. We would like to save our economy and we know sanctions are threatening it. We do not want to inherit an economy that is in tatters. That is why we are so keen that the process of negotiations be speeded up.

Unfortunately, the government, in spite of all that it says, does not seem to share our concern for saving our economy. They are moving rather very slowly.

But because I want negotiations with the government to succeed, I continue to insist that all obstacles be removed. All prisoners should be released. Exiles should be indemnified. Political trials should end—the government is still continuing with political trials in spite of the fact that we have an agreement that people whose offenses have been politically motivated should be regarded as political prisoners.

Now that, of course, creates difficulties. But I am optimistic enough to appreciate that we will be able to resolve and remove these obstacles by negotiations.

**NPQ** | When do you envision a popularly-elected government taking power in the new South Africa?

**Mandela** | That is a very difficult question. All that I can say is that we are clear that it should take place as soon as possible.

**NPQ** | Do you hope to be South Africa's first democratically-elected president?

**Mandela** | That would be very presumptuous for me to say. It is for our people to decide. We leave the matter entirely in their hands.

