

## Political Situation 1989

Politically, 1989 was a watershed year with a general election in September and the replacement of Mr. P.W. Botha as State President and leader of the National Party by Mr. F.W. de Klerk. Addressing Parliament on 2 February 1990, Mr. de Klerk said the September elections had "placed our country irrevocably on the road to drastic change." The National Party was returned with a reduced but comfortable majority. Elected were 93 National Party members (1987: 123), 39 Conservative Party (22), 33 Democratic Party (19 formerly PFP) and 1 undecided. With 12 appointed the total figures are respectively 102, 41, 34 and 1. Mr. de Klerk declared the result had produced a two thirds majority of the electorate in favour of reform, given that the NP received 48% of the votes and the DP 20%. Mr. de Klerk's new Cabinet brought in six new members, notable for the inclusion of two representatives of the English speaking community and one woman, the first for a South African Cabinet. A businessman, Mr. Wim de Villiers, was included as an earnest of the Government's seriousness toward privatization and deregulation. Elections to the other two houses of Parliament, the Coloured House of Representatives and the Asian House of Delegates, were notable chiefly for the low turnout of voters at 20% and 17% respectively. The disenfranchised Black people demonstrated their disapproval of the proceedings by some three million workers refusing to report for work on election day.

During the year, notable pointers to the future were the unconditional release in October of one PAC and seven long term ANC political prisoners and official permission to celebrate their release at the largest rally ever held in South Africa, despite the fact that the ANC, PAC and other political organizations remained banned at that time. The debate on banning intensified. On the Government side, violence and armed struggle by the ANC and others remained stumbling blocks while the ANC continued to demand lifting of the state of emergency, unbanning restricted organizations and individuals, release of political prisoners, removal of troops from Black townships and an end to political trials and executions. Late in the year, President de Klerk announced the complete desegregation of public beaches and his intention to seek repeal of the Separate Amenities Act.

Nelson Mandela remained in custody but was moved, following a stint of hospitalization, to pleasant quarters where he was permitted to receive, besides family members, representatives of the ANC and Mass Democratic Movement. In addition, meetings between Mr. Mandela, Mr. de Klerk and other officials indicated the Government's willingness to deal with the ANC on future reforms.

Efforts to defuse the Inkatha/UDF-COSATU power struggle in Natal failed when Inkatha withdrew in September from the peace initiative launched earlier by the two sides. Fighting between them immediately intensified.

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The consequences of the National Party electoral victory and Mr. de Klerk's accession to the State Presidency last September have been dramatic and, to South Africans of all races, breathtaking. At the opening of Parliament on 2 February 1990, President de Klerk announced the unbanning of 36 organizations and their leaders, including the ANC, PAC and South African Communist Party. Among the freed were those who had been detained when their organizations had been banned, along with some 374 others subject to restriction orders. The President confirmed his intention to repeal the Separate Amenities Act and announced the imminent release of Nelson Mandela, a promise which became a reality on 11 February 1990.

Since then the President has met with Mr. Mandela privately and with an ANC team in an attempt to lay the groundwork for more formal constitutional negotiations. Initial reports have suggested that genuine progress was made toward the diminution of obstacles to the commencement of substantive negotiations. On the Government's side, the ANC's ongoing adherence to armed struggle has remained a stumbling block while the continuing state of emergency and the remaining political exiles and detainees are equally inhibiting to the ANC. The carefully balanced result of these meetings included a promise by the Government to review security legislation and to work toward raising the state of emergency, an undertaking by the ANC to look hard and earnestly at the ending of armed struggle and, finally, agreement to establish a joint working group to look into such contentious issues as the release of political prisoners and the return of exiles. They also agreed to open channels of communication aimed at curbing violence and intimidation from whatever quarter.

The expectations raised by Nelson Mandela's release, the unbanning of individuals and political organizations and the promise of a new South Africa have led to more unrest and violence. Those who have waited patiently, in anger or despair have been given fresh hope and determination and are increasingly frustrated that tangible results are slow in coming. This attitude and the often mindless and vicious response of security forces have led to renewed clashes, more violence and frequent tragedy. In the absence of a meeting and agreement by Mr. Mandela and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the power struggle between the UDF/COSATU and Inkatha has continued and intensified. The Government's Homelands policy is collapsing in the face of demands by their citizens for an end to corruption and for reintegration into South Africa. The growing impatience and radicalism of the non-Whites is mirrored by an equally serious threat from the ultra conservative radical right whose leaders have openly threatened to take the law into their own hands to preserve a White Afrikaner society.

Disunity within the ranks of both the White and non-White communities remains a threat to progress toward reform and a democratic, non-racial society. While the more liberal Democratic Party has had its policies adopted holus bolus by the National Party, the right wing