

## Time for a carrot

**"T**HERE is a window of opportunity open in South Africa now. Our focus has to be on what we can do to help them." — U.S. Republican Senator Nancy Kassenbaum

The winds of change are blowing over South Africa, giving cause for cautious optimism that the country is progressing toward serious reform. Sen. Kassenbaum makes a valid point: efforts should be made to ensure the momentum of this progress is maintained.

The ruling National Party has a new leader, Willem de Klerk, who is likely to be elected president in the September general elections. More reform-minded than his predecessor, P.W. "Old Crocodile" Botha, De Klerk has admitted that "white domination as it exists" must end, and has promised constitutional talks within five years.

The prospects for serious negotiations between the government and black leaders have never been better. De Klerk has invited black leaders to discuss the future of the country with him, and the ANC has responded by tabling a detailed program of negotiations.

Not to be upstaged by his successor, Botha stunned the world by inviting jailed ANC leader Nelson Mandela to tea last month. Whatever Botha's motives, the meeting was historic — something that never would have happened five years ago. Mandela now abides in "house arrest," and there is speculation he will be released soon.

There are other encouraging signs. Though there are still some wrinkles to be ironed out, Namibia is solidly on the path to independence. A new generation of black entrepreneurs and property owners is slowly collecting economic power in South Africa — a process that would be difficult to reverse. Also on a positive note, anti-apartheid activists recently held a successful, and very peaceful, campaign of defiance — nonwhite patients walked into white-only hospitals for treatment, and the government let them.

We can't forget these favorable scenes have been staged against a backdrop of severe press censorship, a continued state of emergency, a denial of voting rights for blacks, and obscene group areas legislation. The South African government has yet to commit itself to ending apartheid, or to giving the black majority meaningful powers. Yet it seems to have accepted the fact that the country must change, and that compromise is the only solution.

No doubt the existing package of various international sanctions has had an effect on the South African economy — severely limiting foreign capital, pushing up interest rates and constricting growth. The country is finding it more and more difficult to pay off its US\$21 billion foreign debt. But thoughtful, reasonable-minded people must now ask themselves whether these economic effects have in turn hastened or retarded the process of reform. This is tremendously difficult to answer.

Commonwealth foreign ministers, who just met in Canberra, have continued their campaign against South Africa by calling for increased financial sanctions. The ministers agreed to urge international banks to increase the pressure on South Africa as it struggles to meet a June 1990 repayment deadline. The focus on financial pressure replaces any proposed extension of existing trade sanctions.

But perhaps the Commonwealth should now offer a little carrot instead of a big stick. As Canada has shown tolerance around the world for leaders like Mikhail Gorbachev who are attempting to achieve reform in their countries, it should lead the Commonwealth in giving De Klerk a chance to show what he's made of, before slapping down further sanctions. When Commonwealth leaders meet in October, they should come up with a realistic timetable against which to judge South Africa's progress. Then they should consider ways to encourage that progress, as well as planning punitive measures if De Klerk fails to make the grade.

**Give De Klerk  
a chance to  
prove himself**

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