



SOUTH AFRICA: POLITICAL UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2010

The World Cup has come and gone and what a World Cup it was! Expectations reached fever pitch around the nation as the opening ceremony approached (June 11th) and the world and the country held its breath wondering if South Africa had the ability to deliver. The rest, as they say, is now history. The tournament could not have gone better. All matches started on time, transportation excelled and crime diminished. Special 'world cup criminal courts' for those daring enough to offend were set up and those caught were swiftly dealt with. This was a moment of 'grace' for South Africa in particular and Africa in general. The psychic of the nation changed where the country found a new found pride in being South African and delivering the goods. The tourist spinoff in the years to come from the near half a million spectators who flocked to the country is a win fall for South Africa and the neighboring countries.

Almost as soon as the 'vuvuzelas' had stopped blasting and the dust had settled on the euphoria of the World Cup, real-politics hit the country with a vengeance. 1.3 million Public servants went on strike, crippling as they did the educational, health and judicial system. Three weeks later the strike was suspended, not called off, and negotiations continue with the Unions asking for an 8.5% rise and a housing allowance of close on \$150 while the State are offering 7.5% and about \$100 house allowance. Compromise is not an option used much in South Africa and negotiations continue. And where was the President in all this? In China – a situation deeply resented by the strikers! In 36 days he visited 20 countries, a figure that has not gone unnoticed by an angry population.

Indeed, the President has come under unprecedented attack in recent weeks. In his rise to the presidency many believed that Jacob Zuma-with his emotional charisma and improvisatory charm-had a different script for a battled underclass. He clearly positioned himself as 'the President of and for the Poor'. His party had indeed successfully peddled him as the leader of its new age revolutionary enlightenment after the darkness of Thabo Mbeki. Since the Zuma administration was sworn in last year, the Party (African National Congress) has worked hard to keep public sentiment on their side. But try as they may, in recent weeks they have not been able to bear the crumbling wall of their President's own power.

There is a perception that the party is rotting slowly from within, and there is a belief among some South Africans that while corruption and fraud charges against Zuma were dropped, he is himself symbolic of that. His own family's involvement in several apparently inappropriate mining deals recently, simply adds to the debate. So it seems for now that it is authentic political discontent which is likely to unseat Zuma-not just yet, as that would be a disaster, but inevitably. One must remember that he made it clear at the start of his tenure that he would not be seeking a second term and it seems many of his former friends believe he has let them down. The ANC Youth League the strongest supporter of Zuma in the past and the ones who projected him to the presidency are now openly defiant of his administration. As the President nears the half way stage of his presidency (April 2011), he is a lonelier and more isolated political figure. Has he the personality to rise above this in the years to come remains to be seen. If nothing else time at least is on his side.

While dissention marks the ruling party, the opposite is true in opposition politics. The scourge of the opposition is that it is far to fragment to lead any worthwhile challenge to the government of the day. A small step forward took place recently when the minute Independent Party, with a very charismatic leader in Patricia Delille, joined the biggest of the opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance to team up with an equally dynamic leader in Helen Zille. Were this trend to continue over the coming years and the fragmented parties willing to work together as a single party, or in a loose coalition, then perhaps they could give the African National Congress a run for their money in 2013.

As World Cup memories fade in the minds of the people the challenge to bring the wonderful atmosphere of a caring nation captured during the World Cup period into the future, remains a daunting task for all people of goodwill.

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