

## CAN WE WAIT FOR MIRACLES?

by Piet Opperman President of the CSSA



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**WE ARE** living in interesting, exciting and dangerous times. Standing, as we are, at the crossroads of history, about to enter a New South Africa, it is a special privilege to have the opportunity to address so many young people in an academic setting. It is you, above all, who will reap the benefit and continue to build on the fundamental changes happening in our country - and throughout the world.

Yes, I said dangerous. I refer not to the endemic violence that is tearing apart our social fabric - although I feel strongly about it, I am totally unqualified to speak on the subject, other than to add my pleas, prayers and persuasions to the multitude of others who are more qualified and more influential than I.

The real danger in our current situation lies in the apathetic euphoria

which is preventing us from taking the strategic decisions and acting now in the long term interests of our country and community. In delightful anticipation of the 'happy day' we wait and do nothing. After all, our country and her peoples are soon to be blessed by a new constitution, a democratically elected government, a single voters' roll, a Bill of Rights and many other privileges denied us for so many years.

We will soon see the lifting of sanctions, the renewal of cultural and sporting links, and our re-admittance into the community of nations. We will have the pleasure of watching Springboks play and beat (we hope) the rest of the world. I myself hope to fulfill an adolescent ambition - to watch South Africans march into the Olympic Stadium - if not Barcelona 1992, then certainly Tokyo in 1996.

The reality is that these pleasures will be the thin icing on a bitter, maybe poisonous, certainly unsatisfactory cake.

The fact of the matter is that no country has managed a successful political transition in a declining economy. For ours to do so will require three miracles.

The first is an economic miracle. The very best economic scenario for the next five years, including the speedy lifting of sanctions and an average gold price of \$500 - unlikely as we know this to be - yields a flat

per capita income. For a successful transition we require a rising income. We all know that wealth is inequitably distributed today. Those of us who have had the more fortunate share of that distribution believe that a redistribution of wealth could be achieved through growth. This will require an economic miracle.

The second is a social miracle. A successful transition will require, amongst other things, free and fair elections. For those to take place in a social environment which has endured three or four years of violence at current levels, would be a social miracle. For the necessary civilised goodwill of political leaders to survive this period will be a social miracle.

Third, we would need a political miracle. Political leaders, newly elected in the environment described before, would need to make massive gestures to satisfy the needs and aspirations that would have built up amongst their followers over that period. That massive restitution will be taken from the more fortunate, and from the economy as a whole, by way of nationalisation and other mechanisms. For these leaders not to do this, and get away with it, would require a political miracle.

A gloomy and depressing picture, ladies and gentlemen. The likelihood of these three miracles occurring is zero. And yet, we still believe that everything will be all right on the day. It's business as usual.

For us to enjoy a successful transition into democracy it is necessary for our survival instincts to prevail over the logic of business as usual. We need to start building the New South Africa now, today. It is not enough to implode the edifices of apartheid. The rubble will be used as projectiles in the street war. The ruins will conceal snipers, and the vacant lots will become the battlegrounds of Beirut. We need to bulldoze the rubble away, to mark out the foundations to pour the concrete and lay the bricks.

We know what we have to do. We need to provide housing for hundreds of thousands of families. The very business of building these homes will create a boom economy and the very fact of providing these homes will start satisfying the needs and aspirations for redistribution now. But now the logic of business as usual starts telling us that this will be a poor investment of money, that nobody will guarantee loans under these circumstances, that we will see rent boycotts or their equivalent. Pretty soon the logic prevails, and our survival instinct is banished to an uneasy feeling in the bowels.

We know what we have to do. We must stimulate the black economic sector by massive encouragement of informal trading and entrepreneurs. The lost generation of young people who have known nothing but violence and crime must be educated, trained and assimilated into a work force, perhaps through a Job Corps