

A stronger economy and more jobs are within our grasp, but racism is holding us back.

Non-racism begins at home

MY son started his matric exam in the same week Trevor Manuel presented his mini-budget. These two events are related – to each other and to racism.

Manuel's mini-budget was the climax to nine weeks of announcements whose combined impact on the economy should be considerable. First we had the political decisions on Transnet and telecommunication, then the Cabinet announcements regarding investments of R165 bn in electricity and transport and finally Manuel's own announcements.

The same period also saw an improvement in South Africa's investment rating. Cumulatively, it is realistic to start thinking of an economy growing at 4% rather than 3%.

Obviously much may go wrong, particularly internationally. But given Government's announced intentions and population growth of less than 1% per annum, we are entering an era of solidly growing income and declining unemployment.

The positive implications for my school-leaving son are obvious.

I entered the job market in 1981 and spent the bulk of my working life in an economy characterized by a declining average income. My son will start his working life in an era where incomes may improve strongly. This is a turnaround worth noting.

Top on the list of things that may go wrong, is trust. And I don't mean confidence, I mean trust.

During the past year I have been involved in a project, SA 2014, which attempted to develop informed opinions of where our country is likely to be 10 years from now. Several critical factors have been identified, including trust.

Two deadly enemies of trust are racism and its twin, the race card.

For instance, at breakfast in a Stellenbosch hotel I recently overheard a (black) woman at the next table saying to the waitress: "You stupid Coloured, you will clean hotels for the rest of your life!"

Okay, it's easy to point fingers at the racism of others, but I believe it would be more useful to look at ourselves.

So I'll begin by taking a good look at myself. I wish I had been able to understand non-racism as early on as Beyers Naudé and Bram Fischer. I did not. Fortunately I have a family and friends who are non-racist and who are teaching me, and I want to thank them. But it remains a process. To me, one of the most important experiences of the post-1994 era is having to confront the narrowness of my own views.

I am an Afrikaner who likes to identify with fellow Afrikaners. And as such it upsets me when a prominent white, Afrikaans community leader asks the brown chairman of a successful enterprise: "How long will it take before you make a mess of this too?"

Particularly when it is brown, black and Asian politicians and technocrats who are pulling the economy to 4%, from the 1.5% growth where we Afrikaners left it.

Let's first take a good look at ourselves.

It worries me when an Afrikaans commentator writes that Pres Thabo Mbeki won't take a strong stand on Aids because that would confirm white perceptions that blacks are promiscuous. That's playing a double race card: one for whites and another for blacks.

What about China, Russia and India, where Aids is growing exponentially? What about the recent international sex survey showing that sexual behavior in South Africa is much the same as anywhere else? Where does the race card fit in?

Let's take a good look at ourselves.

There are no short-cuts to non-racism. A friend says white South Africans may intuitively be in a state of denial, because we are feeling guilty about apartheid. Denial will get us nowhere.

Sometimes we rationalize the hurt racism causes to people. We call them over-sensitive. Let's rather show empathy.

It took generations before we Afrikaners got over the humiliation of the Anglo-Boer War. A Johannesburg Afrikaner tells me about a very smart function held during the seventies in the city's best hotel, where specific parking instructions were issued: the three parking bays at the hotel's entrance were reserved for Afrikaners who owned Rolls Royces – "for the Englishmen to see"!

It takes time for wounds to heal.

That 4% growth is now within our reach. We can do it and help all matrices to get jobs. But then we have to get rid of racism.

Let's take a good look at ourselves.

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