

GROWTH

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SA, Nyerere and Pinochet

The death of Tanzania's former President Julius Nyerere and a British lower court's decision to allow the extradition of Chile's General Augusto Pinochet to Spain hold compelling lessons for SA.

Nyerere is widely remembered and honoured for his contribution to freeing various African nations, including his own. For many, SA included, he became a symbol of freedom and independence, of human rights and dignity.

Like President Nelson Mandela, he was one of the few African politicians to voluntarily step down. He had built a politically stable and peaceful Tanzania, which he handed over to his successor.

On the socio-economic front, however, Nyerere had been an unqualified disaster. During his administration, 11m -14m people were forcibly removed and resettled - in the pursuit of socialist ideology. Compare this with the 2.5m - 3.5m people removed in SA in the application of apartheid.

Nyerere's policy, which he tried to portray as a peculiar African socialism, relentlessly impoverished Tanzania, pushed back per capita income by years and transformed a once-promising country into a beggar-bowl nation.

So intense was the decline that, on retiring, Nyerere acknowledged his failure in respect of economic affairs. His admission underpins the fact that independence and human dignity do not constitute a sufficiently satisfactory condition without economic progress.

Pinochet's record in Chile was the reverse. His administration was characterised by political suppression and human rights violations but was accompanied by phenomenal economic progress.

The dictator took a country on its knees, economically speaking, to unparalleled wealth within only a few years. It was turned into a state in which the economic fate of all its citizens, even the poorest, improved. Chile is still forging ahead. Pinochet, however, is "in the dock".

The list of charges levelled against the general reinforces the premise that economic progress without concern for political and human rights is also not enough.

Neither the Nyerere nor the Pinochet models can stand up alone. The best of the two need to be implemented jointly.

SA has accomplished one side of the coin. It has an admirable Constitution, an elected Government and a strong emphasis on human rights. But it does not yet have economic growth, job opportunities and rising income.

The country is certainly doing better economically than at any time since the mid-Seventies but not well enough to satisfy its needs. Unemployment is soaring, poverty remains widespread and racially skewed, and incomes are too low to support the creation of a modern State.

The population is increasing more slowly than before, at a rate of 2% a year. Economic growth of 4% a year would give impetus to per capita income - which has not improved since the mid-Seventies. The average growth rate over the past quarter-century has been below 2% - less than the population growth. Not only is 4% growth attainable, it's also sustainable. With a few years of such growth behind it, SA would be a different country.

The stage is set to achieve this. A suitable economic policy framework is in place, political stability persists and the economy has become increasingly open. Obstacles such as crime and poor policy implementation can be overcome.

All Government needs to do is get going with plans it has put on the table: privatisation, reduced State spending on interest and salaries, phasing out exchange controls, channelling more resources into training, and an improvement in labour market flexibility.

Debate on these matters has ended. What matters now is speed of implementation. Let's take Nyerere's admission to heart.

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