

How we whites have had you for suckers

Cecil John

I AM starting to believe that blacks are suckers. There, I said it. Well, in the past I would never have said such a thing — in fact, I used to be a liberal. But after what I've seen in the past year or two, I have to say that you blacks must be suckers. I can't find any other explanation for your having fallen head over heels for such a transparent scam as the whites have set up. You blacks could have it all — it was right there in your grasp — yet daily, you gave it away for glittering trash. So you must be suckers.

Okay, I'll speak to you freely on condition of anonymity, but even if you publish it, it won't make any difference. The New SA is a paradise for whites. The new black elite have such a stake in it that nothing will persuade them that the plastic headdresses which the whites have presented are not the crown jewels. And they spend their

time persuading the rest of the blacks that plastic jewellery is really gold and diamonds, or alternatively that plastic is actually better than gold and diamonds. What am I talking about? There was a trade-off here. SA was isolated internationally and the economy was stagnant. The major corporations and the government decided in the late 80s to stimulate the economy by releasing Mandela, unbanning the ANC and shorting the process that led to elections in 1994. The principle was, and remains: give the blacks the government, and the whites can keep the economy. Hell, let them be ministers, premiers, MPs — we fall a black president would do wonders for international reinvestment in the economy. Let them govern and dish out thousands of fancy titles, ride in fancy cars, make speeches, set up a constitutional court, pass lovely laws, host the queen at garden parties, bury black

politicians in state funerals — in the West anyone in the West knows how irrelevant government is to business. The White House has no power compared with Wall Street.

OK — the president can send soldiers to Kuwait or threaten to bomb Bosnia, but everyone knows that General Motors packs far more punch than Gen Powell. Bill Gates is the richest man in America, and he'll be around longer than Bill Clinton.

So, the trade-off in SA was simple — let's move to elections, and then the blacks will take themselves up in political knots forever, virtually. The economy will stay in safe white hands, and boy, are we prospering.

The growth rate is positive again, GDP will increase 3% this year, the JSE is flourishing, shareholders' dividends are trading internationally, the former Frontline states like Zimbabwe and Zambia are suddenly open to our goods — we can dump old machinery and medicine products on a sitting-duck market. Thank you Madiba, for making SA legitimate again.

And the government is so nice to the economy, to business — they never interfere. Well, they sometimes strut and posture, but that is just make believe, so they can look legit to their voters. Believe me, they are pussycats.

When that woman, the deputy minister, got stropy, they handled that themselves. Even the former firebrands are pussycats — Joe Modise, formerly a most feared MK commander, is now the commander of the pussycats. He rolls over on his back and the whites generally murmur "corveltes RDP", "corveltes RDP" as they stroke his lummy.

Best of all is Madiba. How business loves that man! We asked him to stop that silly talk about nationalisation. Gone. We invite him to fancy black tie dinners — he is so obliging — whether at a wine farm in the Cape, or at a dinner for a splawit insurance giant, or at those award ceremonies we keep sponsoring. He is full of love and reconciliation. He never interferes in our business, he never asks why we don't have black executives, or why we have shifted our corporate

control offshore. He's a perfect gentleman. We contribute to his charitable funds, to be sure, and build a school here and there. Small change for us, but super PR.

Let's talk more about the economy. It isn't as simple as I've made out. We whites have had to make some nifty moves which I'll describe to you now. I didn't believe they would work, they seemed too transparent and too flimsy, but they are all winners. Let me start with the affirmative action scam. That's a beaut.

We in business, those of us who control the economy talk endlessly about affirmative action, we hold conferences, publish mission statements, set targets, and make the most pitifully token appointments, and they fall for it. We are now in a process of ensuring that every major company on the JSE has a black human resources manager, RDP manager, affirmative action executive, public affairs director or things like that.

I know it's ridiculous. In transparent, and we all know that these front-office black managers are hired for their compliance and for their smiling black faces in our corporate brochures. But nobody criticises us, and black candidates line up for these jobs.

We make a point of not ruining such a charming setup by appointing any blacks with hard skills to real executive posts, just to Mickey Mouse ones where they can do no damage. Oh yes, how could I forget the corporate social responsibility managers who fish out small change to the underprivileged — they build schools in shipping containers and suchlike. So we win both ways: we have blacks on board, and they don't ever have to get involved in our core business issues. It's a win-win situation.

I suppose that you've heard of our ultimate perfection of this process — the business development manager.

Oh, boy. We phased this in tentatively 18 months ago, and it's spreading like wildfire. It works like this: Every major company gets a black to serve as business development manager or new markets executive or something like that. When we bid for business contracts

which involve the government, provinces or parastatals, we front with our BDM.

If, say, a construction company wants to do a public body, or with a corporation that is black-sensitive, we get our BDM to give the presentation. The requirements for being a BDM are simple: black, able to drive a fancy car which is compulsory, willing to receive a high salary, must be able to name-drop names like Cyril Tshepo, Thabo, Dali, etc. and willing — and this is crucial — to keep his nose out of the actual contract. He's the go-pher: get the business in a smile, shake hands, and then leave it to us to get on with the job. No significant company today can afford not to have a BDM.

I can go on and on but we better leave something for next time. In fact, remind me to tell you next time about black empowerment companies and joint ventures. That really hits the nail on the head.

The authors are three consultants using a non de plume for their satirical efforts.

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