

F W De Klerk: Interview by email regarding Nelson Mandela's Presidential Years. Responses received 15 March 2015

There are many interviews of yourself by other people that are already available, and much written about your relationship with Nelson Mandela, including your own memoirs. Hopefully the questions below don't repeat questions that have been already answered. Some are questions of detail suggested by a reading of *The Last Trek*. Others are an invitation to reflect with hindsight.

- *The Last Trek* narrates the process of formation of the GNU—some aspects are referred to broadly and further information would be of historical interest. How did the outcomes of the 1994 elections—in particular the National Party and ANC results—compare with the National Party's expectations?

Politicians always hope for more than they achieve. We hoped that we would receive 25 -30% of the vote – but were satisfied with what we achieved.

- What discussions/negotiations were there between yourself and Nelson Mandela about which portfolios would be assigned to the National Party?

Not sufficient. On 6 May 1994 President Mandela announced a number of key portfolios that the ANC would hold and the ministers who would be appointed to them without first consulting me as Deputy-President, as he was required to do in terms of the Constitution. I had wanted NP ministers in each of the main sectors of government – but it soon became clear that the ANC was determined to keep all the security ministries for itself.

- How was the matter handled of assignment and filling of deputy ministerial posts?

Once again, there was insufficient consultation. President Mandela did consult me regarding which NP politicians should be appointed as Deputy Ministers – and there was some consultation with regard to the portfolios that would be assigned to them - but only after the ANC had decided which key deputy ministerial portfolios it wanted to give to its own members.

- What discussion was there with Nelson Mandela about portfolios would be assigned to the IFP? (*The Last Trek* says you suggested to Nelson Mandela that Home Affairs should go to Mangosuthu Buthelezi: can you say more about that and at what stage it happened?)

I did suggest to President Mandela that Mangosuthu Buthelezi should be appointed to the Home Affairs portfolio - but this was primarily a matter for discussion between the President and the IFP.

- *The Last Trek* refers—without detail—to some prior agreement (David Welsh in an 1998 publication on the GNU, refers to it as 'a private deal') that the National Party would be allocated a security portfolio: can you say more about that.

We had wanted to be given a security portfolio – but this was refused. I was, however, appointed chairman of the cabinet committee that dealt with security and intelligence affairs.

- How, and at what stage was the agreement reached that Derek Keys would be appointed Finance, independent of any party?

As I recall it was agreed at a fairly early stage that Derek Keys would continue as Minister of Finance. The ANC respected him and was also aware of the importance of continuity in the management of the country's finances. Because it was such a key post, it was also agreed that it would not be identified with any specific party - although it was, in fact, one of the six portfolios to which the NP was entitled.

- How personally did you manage the change of status and authority – from being ultimate political authority to Deputy? Did this issue ever arise in your discussions with Mandela, and did your relationship help to navigate this change?

I was in the very unusual position during my Presidency that the central thrust of my policy would inevitably lead to my having to step down as President. I was happy to do this on 10 May 1994 because I felt that I had achieved nearly all the goals that I had set when I started the transformation process. It is, however, never easy to lose power. I did not discuss this with President Mandela. Our relationship within the Government of National Unity was often very tense - possibly because, under any circumstances, it is difficult for the previous chairman of a board to continue to serve on the board of his successor.

- In retrospect, would you today revise your assessment (as set out in your memoirs) of the outcome of negotiations; and the impact of the Government of National Unity?

No. I was, on the whole, satisfied with the outcome of the negotiations – which by definition required compromises on all sides. The exceptions were the failure to include a long-term power-sharing arrangement (along the lines of the modest and non-veto wielding proposals that the NP made) and the lack of a clearer agreement on amnesty and on how we would deal with the vexatious issues of the past. The lack of an inclusive system of government and our failure to deal with the past are among the main problems that still confront our society.

The GNU worked well to start with – but it soon became clear that it was a sham as far as any real power-sharing was concerned. The ANC refused to conclude a coalition agreement with us – and preferred to keep us in a gilded cage – where NP ministers had all the trappings of power – but none of the substance.

- Would you revise your assessment of the processes that led to the NP's withdrawal from the GNU, your resignation as leader of the party and the long-term impact this had on South African politics?

No. As I have mentioned in my memoirs I was convinced that withdrawal from the GNU was the right decision. It had become a farce because the NP ministers had no real power within the portfolios that had been assigned to them – and the NP was expected to go along with ANC policies that were unacceptable to its supporters. All of this was creating serious confusion within our support base - and divisions within our caucus.

- How might things have gone differently if Mandela had not been the ANC leader? How would you characterise his leadership?

Mandela was the right leader from the point of view of national reconciliation. He did a superb job in reassuring minorities and in making everyone feel part of the Rainbow Nation. However, he was not a hands-on leader and left the day to day running of government in the hands of Thabo Mbeki.

- What was the most critical moment in which Mandela's distinctive values and character impacted on the direction of the country?

The main thrust of President Mandela's presidency was his deep commitment to the promotion of reconciliation and to building national unity. A defining moment of his presidency was his donning of the Springbok jersey during the final of the Rugby World Cup – and perhaps also his gesture of having tea with Mrs Betsie Verwoerd.

- In *The Last Trek* you express a hope that “in our retirement we will be able to work together in some way or other to nurture and protect the young democracy which both of us had the privilege of helping to create”—your thoughts today?

After our retirement we became friends. There continues to be a great need for our surviving elder statesmen to come together to support the values on which our new constitution has been based.