

Desmond Tutu: The turning point (excerpt from the memoir *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 2000)

27 April 1994 was the day for which we had waited many long years, the day for which the struggle against apartheid had been waged, for which so many of our people had been tear-gassed, bitten by police dogs, struck with quirts and batons, tortured, banned, imprisoned, sentenced to death and driven into exile. The day had finally dawned when we would vote, when we could vote for the first time in a democratic election in the land of our birth. I had had to wait until I was sixty-two years old before I could vote, Nelson Mandela until he was seventy-six.

The air was electric with excitement, anticipation and anxiety, and with fear that those on the right wing who had promised to disrupt this day of days might succeed in their nefarious¹ schemes. Bombs had been going off right, left and centre. There had been explosions at the International Airport in Johannesburg. Anything could happen.

[...]

After voting, I went outside and the people cheered and sang and danced. It was like a festival. The atmosphere was wonderful and such a vindication² for all those who had borne³ the burden of repression, the little people whom apartheid had turned into the anonymous ones – faceless, voiceless, counting for nothing in their motherland – whose noses had been rubbed daily in the dust. They had been created in the image of God but their dignity had been callously⁴ trodden underfoot every day by apartheid's minions⁵, and by those others who perhaps said they were opposed to apartheid but had nonetheless gone on enjoying the privileges and huge benefits that apartheid brought them – just because of an accident of birth, a biological irrelevance: the colour of their skin.

I decided to drive around a bit to see what was happening. I was appalled by what I saw. The people who had come out in droves⁶, standing in those long lines which have now become world-famous, were so vulnerable. The police and the security forces were probably stretched, but they were hardly a conspicuous presence. It would have taken just a few crazy extremists with AK-47 rifles to create havoc. It did not happen. And virtually everywhere there was a hitch⁷ of one sort or the other. Here there were insufficient ballot papers, there not enough ink pads, elsewhere the officials had not yet turned up hours after the polls were due to have opened. And the people were quite amazing in their patience. It was a comprehensive disaster waiting to happen. And it did not happen.

It was also an amazing spectacle. People of all races were standing in the same queues, perhaps for the very first time in their lives. Professionals, domestic workers, cleaners and their madams – all were standing in those lines that were snaking their way slowly to the polling booth. And what should have been a disaster turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Those lines produced a new and peculiarly South African status symbol. Afterwards people boasted, 'I stood for two hours to vote' – 'No, I waited for four hours!'

Those long hours helped us South Africans to find one another. People shared newspapers, sandwiches, umbrellas, and the scales began to fall from their eyes⁸. South Africans found fellow South Africans – they realised what we had been at such pains to tell them, that they shared a common humanity; that race, ethnicity, skin colour were really irrelevancies. They discovered not a Coloured, a

black, an Indian, a white. No, they found a fellow human being. What a profound scientific discovery for the whites, that blacks, Coloureds (usually people of mixed race), and Indians were in fact human beings, who had the same concerns and anxieties and aspirations as they did. They wanted a decent home, a good job, a safe environment for their families, good schools for their children. Hardly any of them wanted to drive the whites into the sea. They just wanted their place in the sun.

(664 Wörter)

Desmond Tutu: No Future Without Forgiveness, London 2000, S. 1–4.

1 nefarious – schändlich, verachtenswert

2 vindication – die Rechtfertigung, die Verteidigung

3 borne – past participle of „to bear“; hier: ertragen

4 callously – herzlos, gefühllos

5 minion – der Lakai, der Günstling, der Speichellecker

6 drove – die Herden

7 hitch – a problem or difficulty that causes a short delay

8 scales fall from sb.'s eyes – etwas fällt jdm. wie Schuppen von den Augen