

## **BRACKENFELL: THE AFTERMATH**

*By Dave Steward, Chairman of the FW de Klerk Foundation*

On Friday, 20 November the EFF carried out its threat to hold a second protest at Brackenfell High School in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. Its purpose was ostensibly to protest at 'racism' at the high school, exemplified by a private matric party on 17 October that was attended only by whites. It also wanted to push back against white "terrorists" with whom its members had clashed violently at a protest that it had held at the school on 9 November.

The EFF obtained a permit for a demonstration by 100 people. In the event, an estimated 2 000 of its supporters descended on the suburb. Hardly any of the protesters wore masks and far exceeded the 500 permitted at outdoor meetings under COVID19 regulations. According to the SAHRC some protesters were carrying golf clubs, axes and stones. They caused serious damage to the Brackenfell Post Office, to traffic lights and roads and to a car dealership. They burned a fire engine and set fire to grass. According to some reports, a number of local shops were looted.

The EFF protesters pelted police with stones when they were prevented from approaching closer to the school. The police responded with tear gas, stun grenades, water cannons and rubber bullets and arrested eight protesters for public violence. Clearly annoyed at the police's action, Julius Malema said on 22 November that the EFF would treat the police "the same way we treated them in the 80s. We will not only fight them at the picket lines, we will go to their homes and fight them in their own houses with their own families."

EFF speakers said that they would continue their protest campaign at other schools in the Western Cape that they accused of 'racism' - including Rhodes High School, and Jan van Riebeeck High School and Primary School. Their purpose would be to "humble" white racists who thought that they were still ruling South Africa. They threatened that if the red beret of one of their "fighters" that went missing during the clash on 9 November was not returned they would "conduct a door-to-door campaign in Brackenfell to retrieve our symbolic mark of resistance ourselves." "When we are done with these racist thugs, colonial settlers and terrorists they will salute every time they see our beret."

The SAHRC announced on Tuesday that it was investigating complaints that EFF members had referred to coloureds as the "pets of white racists". It was also following up on complaints that the EFF had sung the "Kill the Boer" song at the demonstration of 9 November and that PAC members had shouted the "one settler, one bullet" slogan at the demonstration of 18 November. Both the song and the slogan had been declared hate speech by the Commission.

Despite all this, the overwhelming focus of media, institutional and government attention has not been on the EFF's clear, provocative and threatening racist behaviour - but on the guest list of a private matric party and on the as yet unsubstantiated allegations of racism at the school.

Chris Nissen, a SAHRC commissioner, placed the blame for the incident - not on the EFF - but on the Western Cape Education Department. He claimed that allegations of racism were not unique to Brackenfell High School - but were widespread in the Western Cape.

In a ten-minute interview, ECNA news presenter Shahan Ramkisoorn peppered Gillaume Smit, Chairman of Brackenfell High School's School Governing Body, with allegations of racism at the school. With remarkable patience and dignity Smit provided a clear explanation of the steps the

school had taken to deal with complaints of racism. However, there was not a single word during the interview about the much greater racist threat posed by the EFF.

Anglican Archbishop, Thabo Makgoba, roundly criticised the school - and not the EFF - for the incident which he said should be “a wake-up call to every parent and governing body in South Africa”. There has similarly been no unambiguous condemnation of the EFF’s behaviour by the national government - although Police Minister and POPCRU did, quite rightly, take Malema to task for his outrageous threat to members of the police and their families.

It is, of course, essential that any indication of racist or non-inclusive behaviour at our schools should be dealt with firmly and effectively. The School’s Governing Body and the Western Cape Education Department seem to have reacted quickly to these allegations and appear to have taken appropriate steps to promote a non-racial and inclusive environment.

However, this process is inevitably made more complex by the application of critical race theory where unconscious acts may be viewed as unacceptable as conscious discrimination - and where white males are regarded as axiomatically suspect. Behind this lurks the possibility that for woke critics the very notion of predominantly non-black schools is fundamentally unacceptable.

In a society such as ours with so a wide spectrum of cultures, social circumstances and bitter historic memories there are inevitably going to be racial incidents. Such incidents should be dealt with quickly, firmly and with sensitivity. Everything possible should be done to promote understanding and respect for one another’s cultures, social circumstances and perceptions of history.

There is, however, no equivalence between the unsubstantiated allegations of racism at Brackenfell High School centring on a private matric party and the violence, the hate speech and the provocative racial mobilisation that we observed last week in Brackenfell.

Those who incandesce with outrage at the former - while ignoring or condoning the latter - are themselves guilty of a dangerous and insidious form of racism.

When considering racial incidents and hate speech we should take into account the criteria that have been laid down by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. These include

- the content and form of the speech: whether the speech is provocative - and the form and style with which it is delivered;
- the economic, political and social climate at the time of the speech;
- the position and status of the speaker;
- the reach of the speech in terms of its audience and transmission; and
- the objectives of the speech.

By all these criteria it is clear that the real, present and extremely dangerous threat of racism comes - not from Brackenfell High School - but from the EFF’s undisguised intention to provoke racial confrontation at every opportunity.

We need voluble and unambiguous condemnation by the government, by the SAHRC, by the churches and civil society of the dangerous and racially provocative course upon which the EFF has embarked. The EFF must obey the law and must abide by agreements governing peaceful protests. It must be forced to pay for the damage its causes. It must be punished for using hate speech with the same vigour that was directed toward Penny Sparrow. If this does not happen the EFF will

inevitably provoke more incidents similar to those we have recently witnessed in Brackenfell. Each such incident holds the possibility of igniting racial conflict that might cause irreparable harm to our fragile multiracial society.