

Flagging the “new” South Africa, 1910–2010

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It has been said that history is something that never happend (sic), written by a man who was not there. The present study is an effort to relate what did happen by one who was there¹

Introduction

Over the past century, distinctive flags have been devised for and adopted by South Africa on three occasions. These were progressive steps and in each instance the flags addressed both a current need in the constitutional development of South Africa, and marked a key milestone in the country’s flag history. The first of these came soon after Union in 1910 and followed a standard pattern applied throughout the British Empire. The second saw the hoisting in 1928 of a distinctive national flag, in recognition of South Africa’s independent status. At this time there were a few independent states in Africa, but within three decades, on a rising tide of African nationalism, this situation began changing. In sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana set the ball rolling in 1957, followed by Guinea a year later.² The floodgates opened in 1960, when an unprecedented eighteen African countries gained independence, each of them under a new national flag. It was also the year in which the British prime minister, Harold McMillan, delivered his “winds of change” address to the South African parliament on 3 February. Three decades later, almost to the day, President F.W. de Klerk announced at the opening of parliament that political detainees would be released, and hitherto banned political organisations would henceforth be free to participate in the search for an equitable dispensation for all South Africans. This set in motion the formal negotiation process in South Africa, which came to fruition four years later. Cornelius Castoriadis, director of studies at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes et Sciences Sociales* in Paris, and a leading figure in contemporary thought, remarks that any new society will obviously wish to create a new institutional symbolism.³ In his book *Nationalism and Modernism*, Anthony Smith points out that new national flags, anthems and other emblems of state which come into being with the rise of nation states, are part and parcel of the traditions that are created during such a process.⁴

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- 1 Anon, “An Introduction to Canada’s Flag”, *The Flag Bulletin*, 17, 3, May/June 1978, p 83 These are the words quoted from the preface to an article entitled “Canada’s Flag” by Judge John Ross Matheson, an active participant in the process whereby the “Maple Leaf” national flag came into being in 1965 See *The Flag Bulletin*, 17, 3, pp 84–92 Like Matheson, I was also “there” when the new South African national flag was in the process of creation in 1993 and 1994, and thus write from personal experience
- 2 K. Shillington, *History of Africa* (Macmillan, Oxford, 1995), p 379 One of the first charts dedicated to the flags of the independent countries of Africa appeared in *The Argus Weekend Magazine* on 9 March 1963 Copies of this chart were distributed with *Arma* (Year 7), 26, June 1964
- 3 C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, tr K. Blamey (MIT Press, Cambridge: Mass., 1987), p 126
- 4 A. D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (Routledge, London and New York, 1998), p 118 This is cited from E

These symbols then become an integral part of a country's national and cultural identity.

It was on 27 April 1994 that the "new" national flag, which has become the primary symbol of identification of South Africa and its people, was taken into use. The simple, but at the same time multi-faceted concept behind its design is that of "convergence and unification". The hope was that this flag would serve as a symbol of the diverse components of the constitutionally created South African nation,⁵ a flag with which the entire nation could associate. Neither a process of public participation, invited by the Commission on National Symbols, nor the involvement of graphic design studios in 1993 produced a design acceptable to the negotiators or to the public at large. Yet, only six weeks before the interim constitution came into force, the Transitional Executive Council approved the design of a new national flag, the level of acceptance of which has exceeded all expectations.⁶ It is against a background of the flags which had served South Africa since 1910, that the creation of the present national flag is addressed.

South Africa's Union Jack based ensigns, 1910–1928

When the Union of South Africa came into being on 31 May 1910 as a dominion within the British Empire, the Union Jack was deemed the correct national flag to be flown throughout the British monarch's realms and territories. At that time the dominions were, in essence, self-governing components of the British Empire, the ultimate control of which rested in London. It was, however, customary for these territories to be granted their own versions of the British Red and/or Blue Ensign, on the understanding that an appropriate device in the fly would identify the territory in question.⁷ Often this device was, or was derived from, the territory's coat of arms. However, when the Union came into being, it had neither a coat of arms, nor any other distinctive symbols. This shortcoming was rectified on 17 September 1910, when a coat of arms was granted by Royal Warrant.⁸ The quartered shield of this coat of arms, which was incorporated into South Africa's distinctive ensigns, bore charges representing the four territories which had been unified.

Although these ensigns were primarily intended for maritime use, they were also flown on land. Distinctive Blue and Red Ensigns were duly instituted for the

Hobsbawm and T Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983), p 7

5 E Hobsbawm, "The Nation as Invented Tradition", in J Hutchinson and A D Smith (eds), *Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994), p 76

6 The adoption of this flag was but the first step in the evolution of a much wider panoply of national symbols. For an indication of the range of a country's national panoply, see W G Crampton, "Flags as Non-verbal Symbols in the Management of National Identity", PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1994, pp 53–57

7 For the origin and development of the Union Jack and of British and British derived ensigns, see M J D Farrow, *The Colours of the Fleet – 1997 Edition* (self-published, Petersfield, 1997) This a comprehensive worldwide list of "all flags and ensigns, past and present which bear the Union Flag in the canton", up to the time of publication

8 A copy of the Royal Warrant, certified by Ambrose Lee, York Herald, is held by the Bureau of Heraldry in Pretoria. The full text was published under Government Notice 969 in *Government Gazette* No 58 of 25 November 1910. See F G Brownell, *National and Provincial Symbols and Flora and Fauna Emblems of the Republic of South Africa* (Chris van Rensburg Publications, Johannesburg, 1993), pp 14–20 and Figure 2 1

Union by Admiralty Warrants on 28 December 1910.⁹ The approval of these ensigns enabled the Union of South Africa to take its place amongst the other dominions, British colonies, dependencies and territories in the *Admiralty Flag Book*.¹⁰

If the birth of the South African Red and Blue Ensigns, in which the shield from the Union's coat of arms was placed directly on the field of the fly, seems straightforward enough, the subsequent vicissitudes of the Red Ensign were not. From the parliamentary debates on the Union Nationality and Flags Bill in 1927, it is clear that the South African Red Ensign was flown at times from government buildings, but its official use was not widespread.¹¹ During the same debates, Dr D.F. Malan also mentioned that the South African Blue Ensign, which was even less commonly seen, was flown over the Union's offices abroad.¹² The popular view, on the other hand, was that the South African Red Ensign was the national flag.¹³

For practical reasons – because the first quarter of the national coat of arms was also red – the little-known original design of the South African Red Ensign¹⁴ was altered soon after its adoption. On 25 March 1912, the Admiralty informed the Colonial Office that in the case of the Red Ensign, the shield should henceforth be displayed on a white roundel in the fly. This was in accordance with a rule laid down in the *Admiralty Flag Book*, for cases where the badge, arms (or part of it, as here), was of the same colour as the field of the ensign.¹⁵ So the South African Red Ensign appeared in flag books from then onwards.¹⁶ Interestingly enough, when the former South African national flag was taken into use on 31 May 1928, it did not do away entirely with the South African Red Ensign. Restored to its original role as the flag of the South African merchant marine, it continued in use until 1951, when the South African national flag also became the flag of the merchant navy.¹⁷

South Africa's national flag, 1928 to 1994

Since 1910, intermittent discussions about the desirability of a distinctive national flag for the Union of South Africa had emerged. When the Unionist Party and South

9 National Archives of South Africa (hereafter NASA): GG 23/149 These warrants, which were transmitted to the governor-general by the secretary of state on 6 January 1911, were published under Government Notices 218 and 219 in *Government Gazette*, No 83 of 7 February 1911 See Brownell, *National and Provincial Symbols*, pp 21–25

10 His Majesty's Stationary Office, *Flags, Badges and Arms of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Part I, Flags and Badges* (HMSO, London, 1910), pp v–vii and plates 4 and 5; HMSO, *Flags, Badges and Arms, Part II, Arms* (HMSO, London, 1917), in which the arms of the Union of South Africa appear on an additional plate following Plate 43

11 *House of Assembly Debates* (hereafter *Hansard*) no 9, cols 4043 and 4055, 23 May 1927

12 *Hansard*, no 9, cols 4471 and 4472, 2 June 1927 The Canadians flew their Red Ensign over their offices abroad

13 Brownell: *National and Provincial Symbols*, p 25

14 This first version of the South African Red Ensign is illustrated on a flag poster reproduced in W Smith, *Flags, through the Ages and Across the World* (McGraw-Hill, Maidenhead, 1975), p 187

15 NASA: GG 23/240, Minute NL 11049/12, W Graham Green to the under-secretary of state, Colonial Office, transmitted to the governor-general by the secretary of state for the colonies, 30 March 1912

16 The Union Jack and South African ensigns are illustrated in Brownell, *National and Provincial Symbols*, Figures 3 1–3 4 on a colour plate between pp 24 and 25 There were also in circulation unofficial versions of the South African Red Ensign in which the full coat of arms appeared on a white roundel in the fly

17 Brownell, *National and Provincial Symbols*, p 25

African Party decided to amalgamate in 1921, the conference that discussed the proposed alliance also debated the question of a national flag. However, it was only after a new government, under General J.B.M. Hertzog, took office in South Africa in 1924 that the question of a distinctive national flag was revived at the highest level.¹⁸ Great advances had been made towards effective national sovereignty within the British Empire during and after the First World War (1914–1918). Both the South African government and the opposition were anxious that the surviving constitutional anomalies should be abolished. Canada and the Irish Free State had recently defined the nationals of their respective states, and the Irish had also adopted a national flag from which all reference to the imperial connection was excluded.¹⁹

The South African government, a pact ministry between the National and Labour Parties, resolved to fulfil the long-cherished wishes of most of its supporters by following the example of Canada and the Irish Free State. In 1925, the Minister of the Interior, D.F. Malan, tabled a bill to define South African nationality and to provide for a national flag.²⁰ This bill authorised the governor-general to call publicly for designs, and appointed an all-party committee of eight, including Malan, to consider them and select the most promising. The *Sunday Times* then sponsored an unofficial flag competition which brought in more than 2 000 entries.²¹ The winning design was later submitted to the Flag Committee, but no more was heard of it.

Surprisingly, the most important element of the bill, the issue of nationality, was at first almost overlooked. The flag was, in turn, to be the graphic expression of national loyalty and unanimity. It soon became evident that this aim would not be achieved by an all-party committee, or even a referendum. Clearly, a more compromising attitude was needed than most die-hards in the opposing camps were willing to concede. At the suggestion of General J.C. Smuts, the leader of the opposition, the whole question was then postponed until the following year when the bill was tabled a second time, but there was still no resolution to the flag issue. On 17 September 1926, Hertzog left for the Imperial Conference in London.²²

As Malan had earlier explained to the house of assembly,²³ the bill comprised two parts. The first dealt with the definition of South African nationality, in other words “a legal recognition by ourselves and for the legal information of other nations, that we exist as a South African nation”. While on the subject of a distinctive flag, Malan continued:

The second part, which is based on the first, has to do with the establishment of an outward and visible symbol of our independent nationhood, and our national status. It has to do with the binding together of all sections of the people in one common sentiment. It provides, in other words, for a South African national flag

18 Brownell, *National and Provincial Symbols*, pp 26–32 gives a synopsis of the national flag adopted in 1928

19 The Irish national flag is a green, white and orange vertical tricolour

20 H Saker, *The South African Flag Controversy, 1925–1928* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980), pp 9–16

21 These flag designs are all held by NASA, as part of the Private Secretary, Minister of the Interior (PSI) group of documents

22 Saker, *The South African Flag Controversy*, p 62

23. *Hansard* no 2, col 4027, 25 May 1926

The minister's argument was sound and the sentiments he expressed were admirable, but many of the views and opinions expressed at that time were immature. In the South African political arena at that time there were, in essence, two opposing factions. On the one side were those, mainly English-speaking South Africans – with Natal to the fore – who wished to retain the Union Jack in one form or another; while ranged against them were others, mostly Afrikaners, who saw the Union Jack as a symbol of British domination, to be excluded at all costs.²⁴ By then there was also a growing assertion of a black identity in South Africa and although various attempts were made to have this voice heard during the flag controversy, these attempts were of little avail.²⁵ As Peter Limb points out, John Dube one of the early leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) conceded that while the African “was wholly loyal to the British idea of Justice as symbolised in the Union Jack”, the debate about a new national flag was in the last analysis an issue between whites.²⁶

From a constitutional point of view, the Imperial Conference provided a welcome boost for those in favour of a national flag for South Africa. The Balfour Declaration adopted at the conference had defined in general terms the mutual constitutional relationship of the self-governing members of the Commonwealth. If, in the words of the declaration, Great Britain and the dominions were “equal in status, and in no way subordinate to one another”,²⁷ it followed that the Union of South Africa, as an independent state, was entitled to a flag of its own. It followed too that South Africa and the other dominions, which had hitherto relied on Britain to manage their external affairs, would henceforth have to accept greater responsibility in this field.²⁸ The decisions taken at this conference also led to a change in the position and functions of the various governors-general.

With the Imperial Conference having clearly opened the way for the adoption of a South African national flag, and moves for the introduction of such a flag already being under way, the government decided to press ahead with both the flag question and that of South African nationality. It experienced little difficulty over the nationality clauses in its Union Nationality and Flags Bill, once Malan had explained that “Union nationals” would also be “British subjects, a smaller circle within a larger one”.²⁹ It failed, however, to secure the adoption of a flag by agreement.

The flag controversy that raged through most of 1926 and 1927 was essentially political and little purpose was served in dealing with the detail of the various views expressed or with the many designs submitted, all of which fell by the wayside. In the 1960s writers such as Pama, who filled an important gap by addressing a wide range of symbols of sovereignty in South Africa, and Partridge, who was essentially writing for a popular readership and school children, touched on the flag issue, but neither of

24 Saker, *The South African Flag Controversy*, pp 269–273

25 Saker, *The South African Flag Controversy*, pp 263–265

26 P Limb, “Early ANC Leaders and the British World: Ambiguities and Identities”, *Historia*, 47, 1, May 2002, p 65

27 Cited in Brownell, *National and Provincial Symbols*, p 34

28 R de Villiers, “Afrikaner Nationalism”, in M Wilson and L Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume 2, South Africa, 1870–1966* (Oxford University Press, London, 1975), pp 391; E A Walker: *A History of Southern Africa* (Longman, London, 1959), pp 613, 614

29 Walker, *A History of Southern Africa*, p 613

them did so in any great detail.³⁰ It was only in the following decade that Harry Saker most ably and comprehensively documented and dealt with the story of this national flag from a political perspective. The controversy was also of vexillological interest, but Saker barely addresses the technical dimension.³¹ In the colour illustration of the national flag facing the title page, the small Union Jack is incorrectly oriented; he also makes no mention of the 1910–1912 version of the South African Red Ensign, or of the South African Blue Ensign.³² Suffice it to say that in the political arena, feelings ran high, with proposals and counter-proposals being put and rejected by the various proponents.³³ It was an open secret that the premier, fresh from his encouraging experiences at the Imperial Conference, was prepared to wait for a more opportune time to pursue the matter, but Malan was determined to press on regardless.

By the middle of 1927, the various flag commissions and committees had still failed to come up with an acceptable design for a national flag. A special session of parliament was called for October 1927, specifically to discuss, and hopefully resolve the flag issue. More lobbying took place behind the scenes and it was clear that a compromise was necessary if the country was not to be split by further dissent. In an effort to broker a solution, Tielman Roos, then Minister of Justice, suggested to the governor-general, the Earl of Athlone, that he prevail on the prime minister, General Hertzog and the leader of the opposition, General Smuts to come to an agreement. It was clear that such an agreement would revolve around the inclusion of the Union Jack and the two republican flags on an orange, white and blue flag, but the problem was how this should be done. There is an unsubstantiated account that it was the governor-general who drew a sketch of how the impasse might be resolved.³⁴

The Earl of Athlone had a sound grasp of heraldic principles and furthermore enjoyed the trust of both sides. As governor-general, he could obviously not involve himself directly in political matters, but when consulted by both the prime minister and the leader of the opposition on a matter of national importance, he advised them to the best of his ability. The Earl of Athlone's biography records that it was at this critical point in the process, "and by the exercise of considerable tact and persuasion", that he caused Hertzog and Smuts to come to an agreement, with the result that the "amended Bill, and a design for the new flag agreeable to both parties was put to the House and passed with 'flying colours'".³⁵

30 C Pama, *Lions and Virgins: Heraldic State Symbols: Coats-of-arms, Flags, Seals and Other Symbols of Authority in South Africa 1487–1962* (Human and Rousseau, Cape Town and Pretoria, 1965), is a useful and adequately annotated publication. In contrast, the book by A C Partridge, *The Story of Our South African Flag* (Purnell, Cape Town, 1966), is superficial and contains a number of technical errors.

31 See Pama's review of Saker's book in *Arma*, 23, December 1980, p 1139

32 Saker, *The South African Flag Controversy*. On two colour plates following p 4, Saker illustrates the Flag Commission, Flag Committee, senate and "shield flag" designs that were considered at that time. Also illustrated is the 1912 version of the South African Red Ensign – even though the caption states "South African flag – 1910"

33 See also Pama: *Lions and Virgins*, pp 88–97; D F Malan: "Die Vlagstryd", series of articles in *Die Burger*, 29 January to 5 February 1957

34 When I joined the Bureau of Heraldry as assistant state herald in August 1977, I shared an office for a year with a colleague John Bodel. His mother, who was from a well-connected Pretoria family, had told him that it was the Earl of Athlone who had prepared such a sketch.

35 M E Sara, *The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Athlone* (Paul, London, 1941), pp 202–204. See also J Lambert, "'A United South African Nation and not Merely a South Africa Peopled by

Although concrete evidence to support this belief is lacking, it was widely assumed that Jan van Riebeeck had raised an orange, white and blue horizontal tricolour on his arrival at the Cape on 6 April 1652. Indeed, the orange, white and blue Prinsevlag of the Netherlands is often referred to in the South African context as the Van Riebeeck Flag. In this historical context it was ultimately used as the basis for the design of the South African national flag which was taken into use on 31 May 1928. Orange tends to be a deceptive colour which can, from a distance, be confused with faded red. When the estates-general of the Netherlands later came into opposition with the Prince of Orange, the Dutch flag had reverted to the red, white and blue of the Statenvlag, which survived the fall of the Dutch Republic in 1795 and was, in any event, to be incorporated into the flags of both the Orange Free State and Transvaal Republics. Both versions of the Netherlands flag current in the seventeenth century thus featured in the South African national flag which was introduced in 1928.³⁶

Had only two flaglets been at issue on the central stripe of the flag, no amount of heraldic ingenuity would have succeeded in according each of them equal precedence. This is because the position nearest to the hoist is favoured more than that remote from it, and the upper portion of the flag is preferred above the lower. Whereas one would have expected three flags to compound the problem which had hitherto confounded the politicians, the solution was really quite simple. In essence, the group of three historic flags placed in the centre of the white stripe of the national flag adopted in 1928 must be seen as a unit. That of the Orange Free State Republic, since it hangs vertically, is higher than the other two, which is a plus factor. However, in order to ensure that the Netherland's flag in the canton is placed nearest to the upper hoist of the main flag, the Free State flag must be reversed. The Union Jack, which is nearest to the hoist and is thus in a more favoured position, is however spread horizontally from the Free State flag towards the hoist, and is thus also reversed. Although placed horizontally furthest from the hoist, to balance the Union Jack in the group of flags, the Vierkleur is the only one of these flaglets which is spread in the same direction as the main flag. This compensates for its otherwise less favourable placing. In this way, the three flaglets which together form the group in the centre of the main flag, each enjoyed equal precedence. Their arrangement in this manner was described as "an heraldic 'tour de force' probably unique in the history of [national] flags".³⁷ In the space of a week, between the adjournment of the parliamentary debate on 19 October and its resumption on 26 October 1927, the problem had been resolved, thanks to the discreet assistance of the governor-general.³⁸

Once this compromise had been reached, the question of nationality was embodied in chapter I of the Union Nationality and Flags Act, No. 40 of 1927,³⁹ while the flag question was dealt with in sections 7 and 8, of chapter II. In addition to the national flag, the Union Jack continued in use as one of the "flags of the Union" to

Afrianders and English': The Earl of Athlone and the Attempt to Forge a Dominion South Africanism in the 1920s", *Kleio*, 34, 1, 2002, pp 136, 142–145

36 The use of "chilli red" in the South African national flag of 1994 bridged this historic divide between orange and red

37 See the review by Pama of Saker's book, in *Arma*, 23, 1980, p 1139

38 The final phase of the process by which the present national flag came into being, was also resolved in a matter of days in early 1994 by means of a conventional heraldic design

39 *Statutes of the Union of South Africa, Volume 2, 1927*, pp 182–186

denote South Africa's association with the Commonwealth.⁴⁰ This act came into operation on 31 May 1928, on which day both the new national flag of the Union of South Africa and the Union Jack were hoisted together for the first time, in simultaneous ceremonies at the houses of parliament in Cape Town and in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria. The dual flag arrangement provided for in the Union Nationality and Flags Act, 1927, continued until 6 April 1957 when the government brought it to an end by means of the Flags Amendment Act, No. 18 of 1957,⁴¹ in terms of which the national flag would henceforth be flown alone at all times.

On 31 May 1960, the Union of South Africa commemorated its Golden Jubilee. This was a year of major political transition in Africa as a whole, with no fewer than eighteen African countries gaining independence, each under a new national flag. With South Africa experiencing growing internal unrest and increasing external hostility, the visiting British prime minister, Harold Macmillan, focused worldwide attention on the country's problems and policies in an address to a joint sitting of parliament on 3 February 1960.⁴² "The wind of change", he said, "is blowing through this continent, and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact ... our national policies must take account of it".⁴³ There can be little doubt that Macmillan's message was a contributing factor to South Africa's decision to leave the Commonwealth a year later.

South Africa became a republic on 31 May 1961 and the national flag which had been adopted 33 years earlier continued in use. Its description was embodied in section 5 of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act, No. 32 of 1961.⁴⁴ References to the "Union of South Africa" in the 1927 legislation were obviously amended to "Republic of South Africa".⁴⁵ A similar provision was incorporated into the constitution when it was amended in 1983 to provide for an executive state president and for coloured and Indian chambers of parliament. Although the flag itself remained unchanged, only minor changes were made to the description which was incorporated into section 4 of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act, No. 11 of 1983. This flag remained in use until 26 April 1994 and was replaced by the present national flag at one minute past midnight on the morning of 27 April 1994.

The "new" South African national flag, 1994–2010

South Africa's previous national flag, which had been born in controversy, was later perceived by a large section of the population as a symbol of apartheid and thus politically unacceptable. Particularly after President F.W. de Klerk's announcement in parliament on 2 February 1990 that Nelson Mandela and other political detainees would be released, there was a growing awareness that the days of the former national flag, with its Eurocentric origin, were numbered. Taking into account both political

40 Each of the flags incorporated into this flag are illustrated in Brownell, *National and Provincial Symbols*, as Figures 4 1–4 6, on a colour plate between pp 24 and 25

41 *Statutes of the Union of South Africa, Volume 1*, 1957, p 252

42 *The Times*, 4 February 1960

43 H Giliomee and B Mbenga, *New History of South Africa* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2007), p 333

44 *Statutes of the Union of South Africa, Volume 1*, 1961, pp 346–427

45 Although the possibility of adopting a new national flag was mooted from time to time in the next two decades, none of these ideas came to fruition

imperatives and the demographics of the South African population, it would be necessary to seek a design which the population at large, in all its complexity, would readily accept.

As state herald, during February and March 1990, I had been involved in the creation of Namibia's national symbols. This provided me with invaluable experience in both the technical side of national flag design and also some insight into political factors and social dynamics.⁴⁶ It had also set me thinking about the design of a new national flag for South Africa. For more than three years I wrestled with one idea after another, but none of these ideas seemed to offer even a possible solution to the problem. At that time, there were some 160 national flags in existence worldwide.⁴⁷ Of these, more than half were composed of colours arranged in a horizontal configuration. In this category, 25 per cent also contained a panel, a triangle or a trapezium at the hoist. A further almost 20 per cent of national flags had their colours in a vertical configuration, while some 10 per cent were composed of crosses and/or saltires. Another 10 per cent were single-colour flags, most of which bore some device, usually in the centre. Of the remaining 10 per cent, less than half had diagonal stripes, while the remainder were composed of triangles, had borders, or were plain flags with some device on a canton. Combining diagonal stripes with a sun in the upper hoist ensured that there was no other national flag that could be confused with the Namibian flag.

The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the subsequent fragmentation of the Soviet Union, which led to the independence of its satellite states, resulted in a flood of new nations and national flags in the early 1990s. Between the date of Namibia's independence and the adoption of a new national flag for South Africa, some 30 new or amended national flags had come into being.⁴⁸ These developments also had to be borne in mind in South Africa, since any new national flag had to be unique.

The relative popularity of flag colours used in South Africa over the past three and a half centuries was also researched and tabulated.⁴⁹ In descending order of popularity, the principal colours found were: white (25); green (22); red (20); blue (20); black (16); gold/yellow (15); and orange (6). If the count for red and orange

46 F G Brownell, "Symbols for Namibia", *The Flag Bulletin*, 31(1/2), 145, January/April 1992, pp 40-54

47 The colour plates in W Crampton's book, *Eyewitness Guide: Flag* (Dorling Kindersney, London, 1989), pp 60-63, depict 160 national flags. There is, however, always a lead time between preparation of a manuscript and its actual publication. A failing in many popular flag books is that they neglect to indicate the date on which a particular flag was taken into use.

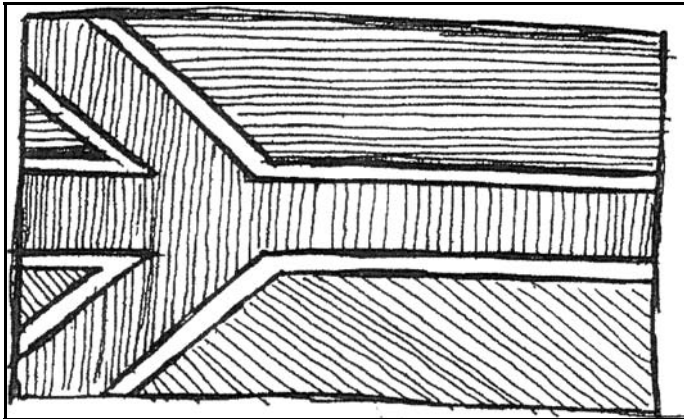
48 Flag journals and newsletters such as *The Flag Bulletin*, published by the Flag Research Center, Winchester, Mass; *Flagmaster*, published by the British Flag Institute; and *Sava Newsletter*, published by the Southern African Vexillological Association since March 1991, have tried to keep their readers up to date on the adoption of, or changes to national flags. The dates of the changes between 1990 and 1994 are taken from A Znamierowski, *Flags of the World: An Illustrated Guide to Contemporary Flags* (Southwater, London, 2000), which carefully records the date of adoption or change.

49 For colour illustrations of virtually all the flags which have flown over South Africa, see the plates in A P Burgers, *The South African Flag Book: The History of South African Flags from Dias to Mandela* (Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2008)

were combined and represented by chilli red, they together occupied first place.⁵⁰ In contrast to the generally conservative European approach to national flag designs and colours, the colours used in African culture, indigenous art and design tend to be much bolder. This was another factor that could not be overlooked. Yet by mid-1993 no ready answer to the flag conundrum presented itself.

In August 1993, I attended the 15th International Congress of Vexillology in Zurich, Switzerland. On the evening of 25 August, during a seemingly interminable meeting of the International Federation of Vexillological Associations, my mind began to drift away from the matters which were then under discussion, gravitating again to the issue of a national flag design. With the congress providing an atmosphere conducive to flag-related thought, I asked myself: "Aren't we looking for something depicting convergence and unification?" At that point, I turned over the lecture programme lying in front of me and sketched on the reverse the design which was then in my mind's eye (see Figure 1). Unlike my previous sketches, which had all been consigned to the wastepaper basket, the more I looked at this design, the more I felt that it might offer the basis for a possible solution.⁵¹

Figure 1



The final stage in the negotiation process aimed at preparing a new political dispensation for South Africa was concurrently still under way at the World Trade Centre at Kempton Park. This had been set in motion by the Multi-Party Planning Conference attended by 26 political parties, which had commenced on Friday 5 March 1993.⁵² The actual negotiations were held from 1 April until 17 November 1993. Since the national flag was provided for in the temporary constitution which was then in force, it was inevitable that it and other primary national symbols, such as the coat

50 These details were provided to the Commission on National Symbols in September 1993

51 This sketch is depicted in D Beckett, *Flying with Pride: The Story of the South African Flag* (Wildnet Africa, Pretoria, 2002), p 75

52 *Pretoria News*, 5 March 1993, p 1

of arms and anthem, would also come up for discussion in the deliberations. On 10 August 1993 the Negotiating Council passed a resolution calling for a commission of between ten and fifteen people to be set up before 17 August, to co-ordinate a process of public participation and to recommend at least four flags and coats of arms, a seal and an anthem for the transition period.⁵³

The names of persons nominated to serve on this commission were received from various sources, but it was only on 7 September 1993 that the Negotiating Council passed a resolution appointing such a commission. This resolution stated that it was necessary to address the question of national symbols as part of the constitutional deliberations; that “ ... this is an extremely emotional issue that will have to be dealt with the utmost sensitivity; [and] ... cultural, artistic and technical aspects are also to be taken into account”. The Negotiating Council appointed the following as members of the Commission on National Symbols to make recommendations before the end of October: Prof Elize Botha (chairperson); Mrs P.G.P. Maluleka (vice chairperson), Mr F.G. Brownell; Prof Lynda Gilfillan; Mr Bill Jardine; Prof P.H.M Kapp; Ms Barbara Masekela; Dr C. Pama; Prof C.J. Reineke; Prof Themba Sirayi; Dr Musa Xulu; Prof Fatima Meer; and Ms Rosette Nothemba Mlonzi.⁵⁴

In this resolution the Commission on National Symbols was requested to:

invite proposals from all interest persons or parties and to allow at least one month for submissions to be made; take into account the diversity of the South African population but concentrate on the unifying function that national symbols must serve; and in its recommendations submit at least four alternative flags and coats of arms⁵⁵

As a member of the commission, I received a letter of appointment dated 8 September 1993 from Dr Theuns Eloff, head of administration at the Multi-Party Negotiating Process. The letter stressed that “The Negotiating Council believes that the question of national symbols for the transitional period is an essential and crucial step for a peaceful and negotiated settlement”.⁵⁶

At the commission’s first meeting, which was held on 15 September 1993, three sub-committees were established. One was to consider proposals for a national flag; another to consider those for a national coat of arms; and the third to look into the question of a national anthem. The only two members of the commission with any substantial heraldic and vexillological experience were the late Cor Pama, the chairperson of the Heraldry Society and a long-time member of the Heraldry Council, and myself. We were thus appointed to serve on both the national flag and coat of

53 *Beeld and Business Day*, 11 August 1993

54 This resolution was appended to the “Report from the Commission on National Symbols”, 19 October 1993, as Addendum K. Because of other commitments, Jardine, Masekela and Mlonzi played no part in the work of the commission

55 In my capacity as a member of the Commission on National Symbols, I have in my personal collection all documentation which was made available to, or generated by the commission. This is referred to hereafter as F G Brownell Collection; see also *The Citizen*, 8 September 1993. The Archives of the Multi-Party Negotiating Process are housed in NASA as the NEG archival group of documents, for which there is a comprehensive file index

56 The original letter, in which my surname was reflected as Brownell, is in the F G Brownell Collection

arms sub-committees, while I was also appointed as convener of the latter sub-committee. The closing date for submissions to the Commission on National Symbols was set for 13 October 1993, which was only four weeks hence. The commission's report had to be ready for submission to the Negotiation Council on 20 October 1993.⁵⁷

In view of the tight timeframes set for the commission, the intention was that the call for submissions should be issued without delay, but this was not done until after the commission's next meeting, namely on Wednesday 29 September 1993.⁵⁸ Although the delay was not explained to the commission, the secretariat was faced with a logistical task of nightmare proportions to bring the process to the notice of approximately 24 000 schools. Before this could be done, permission had first to be obtained from the respective education authorities. There was an Education Department for each of the three houses in the tri-cameral parliament, while the ten "independent" homelands (Bantustans) each had an Education Department.⁵⁹ Participants were thus effectively left with only a fortnight in which to submit their proposals, and not a month as envisaged by the Negotiating Council.⁶⁰ The decision to send out letters to schools and in that way reach out to grassroots level, although well-intended, was counter-productive to the process as a whole. Such is the "law of unintended consequences".

For the guidance of members of the Commission on National Symbols and other participants, I drew up some simple guidelines which were made available on 16 September to the commission's co-ordinator, Sylvia Briggs.⁶¹ Paragraph 1.2 of the introduction to these guidelines reads as follows: "In the interests of the widest possible public participation, members of the Commission expressed the wish that certain basic principles of flag and coat of arms design should be made available". The section dealing with flag design made the following points:

2 FLAGS

2 1 Although the designing of flags is a specialised discipline, it is hoped that the following basic guidelines will be of value to those ... wishing to prepare a design ...

2 2 [One] ... should bear in mind that such a flag should be unique, aesthetically pleasing and practical

2 3 A flag is primarily intended to be flown out of doors ... is seldom static and the design should be such that it is easy to identify, even when it is not fully spread

2 4 The design ... should thus be as simple as possible ... Simplicity also

57 F G Brownell Collection, Minutes of the meeting of the commission held on 15 September 1993

58. *Beeld*, 29 September 1993, p 13; *Business Day*, 30 September 1993, p 4 and the full invitation calling for submissions which appeared in the *Pretoria News* on 30 September 1993, p 14

59 The Bophuthatswana Minister of Education, in a letter to Theuns Eloff, dated 7 October 1993, referring to the request from the Multi-Party Negotiating Process, dated 24 September 1993, replied: "I regret to inform you that circumstances do not permit for our schools to participate" (Copy in the F G Brownell Collection) The letter did not spell out the nature of the "circumstances"

60 It is not surprising that *Die Burger* of 29 September 1993 carried an article under the heading "Simbole Skeel Suid-Afrikaners min, sê Kommissie", which commented that South Africans appeared to be rather unconcerned about the country's symbols for the following five years

61 These guidelines, signed by Elize Botha who chaired the commission, were appended to the "Report from the Commission on National Symbols", 19 October 1993, as Addendum B

facilitates manufacture

2 5 The ... designs should preferably be submitted in A4 size [and] ... a convenient working size would be 18 cm x 12 cm

2 6 Strong primary colours should preferably be used, with the darker colours being separated from one another by means of a light colour, such as white or yellow

2 7 Strong colours should preferably be positioned on the outer edges of a flag to ensure that it stands out against a pale sky or in unfavourable weather conditions

2 8 Words, letters and numerals should be avoided

2 9 When a graphic symbol is depicted, this should contrast clearly with the background on which it is placed. It should furthermore be of a size which is clearly visible ...

Paragraph 4.1 of the conclusion to these guidelines stressed that:

While it is in no way the intention to inhibit the free expression of those wishing to submit proposals for a new national flag or coat of arms for the transitional period, it is nevertheless hoped that the basic principles set out above will contribute to the standard of designs submitted to the Commission on National Symbols⁶²

In the interim, technical assessors had also been appointed to assist in the evaluation of proposals from the public.⁶³ By the time this commission began evaluating submissions and drawing up its report on 14 October 1993, some 7 000 proposals for a new national flag had been received from the public. Designs were still being received days later. The time available for evaluation was far too short. The national flag sub-committee and its assessors were expected to undertake this process between 11h00 and 16h00. Those submitting designs had been requested to do so on A4 size paper if possible. If one can imagine designs of this size being displayed alongside one another, with a small gap between each design, this represented about 3km of designs that had to be studied, absorbed, and then reported on.⁶⁴ When Namibia's national flag was designed, a full day was set aside by the technical advisors to the Constituent Assembly for the evaluation of less than 850 designs. Namibia's national flag bears testimony to the importance of careful technical evaluation.

From the flag designs received from the South African public and schools by 13 October 1993, the sub-committee and its assessors first drew up a short list of about 130, which was then reduced to ten, after which six proposals were recommended to the commission for incorporation into its report to the Negotiating Council. The report of the assessors to the national flag sub-committee, which was incorporated into paragraphs 3.5.1 to 3.5.6 of the commission's report, addressed each of these six designs which, a week later, received wide publicity in the media.⁶⁵

From a practical point of view, my duties as convenor of the national coat of arms sub-committee had prevented me from being directly involved in the activities of the national flag sub-committee. Indeed, both Pama and I were unable to make any

62 "Report from the Commission on National Symbols", pp 35–37

63 The names of the assessors are given in paragraphs 1 9 1 to 2 9 3 of the commission's reports

64 All the designs that were received are now preserved in the NASA. A photograph of Sylvia Briggs, co-ordinator of the Commission on National Symbols, surrounded by designs and with others mounted on the wall behind her, appeared in the *Sunday Times* on 3 October 1993

65 "Report from the Commission on National Symbols", pp 6–7

meaningful contribution there. The work of the arms and anthem sub-committees is not of direct relevance to this article, yet suffice it to say that social dynamics and other tensions played a role throughout the process and all did not run smoothly in the Commission on National Symbols. This is self-evident from the fact that two separate reports were produced on the same day.⁶⁶

The first of these, namely the “Report from the Commission on National Symbols”, which was made available to members of the commission on the morning of 19 October 1993, ran to 32 pages, followed by twelve addenda running to a further 64 pages. However, there were members of the commission who took exception to the inclusion of some of the addenda and members of the secretariat had to be called in to resolve the differences. In a largely symbolic and essentially cosmetic exercise, this Report was stripped of its addenda, and this emasculated version, still dated 19 October 1993, but now entitled “Final Report Commission on National Symbols”, was released.⁶⁷ Although the “debate” on the report began with platitudes, it rapidly degenerated into a politically-charged fiasco centred largely on the emotive anthem issue. The flag and coat of arms proposals were barely mentioned. As no consensus was reached, the negotiators indicated that they expected the Commission on National Symbols to “return to the drawing board” and come up with further proposals.⁶⁸

However, Professor Elize Botha, who had chaired the commission with great patience, politely but firmly stated that the commission had produced a report and had thus fulfilled its mandate. It was now up to the Negotiating Council to make such further arrangements as it saw fit. The debate was adjourned and soon afterwards the members of the Commission on National Symbols were informed that their presence was no longer required. The commission having been reminded at its first meeting on 15 September 1993, that this was an “extremely emotional issue that will have to be dealt with, with the utmost sensitivity”,⁶⁹ the Negotiating Council itself failed dismally in applying the same criteria to its own debate.⁷⁰ This was reminiscent of the “flag controversy” in 1926 and 1927.

Quite simply, the six flag designs put forward by the commission failed to elicit any enthusiastic support, either from within the Negotiating Council or from the public at large. As a result of this lukewarm response, the matter was referred to the Planning Committee of the Negotiating Council for further action. On Thursday 28 October 1993, Colin Eglin, who chaired the Planning Committee, reported to the Negotiating Council that three (as yet unnamed) companies “which designed flags on a professional basis”, would each be requested to submit three or four proposals

66 “Report from the Commission on National Symbols”, and “Final Report, Commission on National Symbols”, both dated 19 October 1993

67 When commission members received their copies of this report they were told it would be tabled the following day and debated by the Negotiating Council on 21 October 1993

68 Together with other members of the commission, I was present when the report was debated

69 See paragraph 2 of the “Resolution on the Commission on National Symbols” adopted by the Negotiating Council on 7 September 1993

70 *Pretoria News*, 22 October 1993, p 1; *The Star*, 22 October 1993, p 1, both of which illustrated the commission’s six designs See also (all on 22 October, 1993): *Argus; Beeld; Business Day; Cape Times; Citizen; Daily Dispatch; Die Burger; Eastern Province Herald; Natal Mercury; Natal Witness; Pretoria News; Sowetan; The Star; and Volksblad*. The Sunday newspapers of 24 October 1993 also carried the news, see *Rapport; Sunday Times; and Sunday Star*

within “a short space of time”.⁷¹ These three advertising agencies/graphic design studios were briefed on Friday 29 October 1993, while representatives of a fourth studio were briefed on Monday 1 November 1993.⁷²

The Negotiating Council also indicated that proposals from other design agencies and individual artists would be considered if their names were put forward immediately. This opportunity was welcomed by a further group of three designers who were contacted by the negotiators on Wednesday 3 November 1993. They delivered their flag designs the following day.⁷³ The design agencies had initially been given until 17h00 on 3 November to present their first efforts to the Negotiating Council,⁷⁴ but this deadline was extended to noon the following day.⁷⁵

On 3 and 4 November 1993 more than 35 designs, many of which were variations on basic themes, were delivered to the Negotiating Council. Roundels and various other symbols, such as peace doves, protea flowers and geometric patterns were the most frequently used elements, and there was a plethora of narrow rays – representing the rays of the sun. In other designs, hands which had been drawn to look like doves; and zebra skin or multi-coloured asymmetrical stripes also featured. The most popular colours used in these proposals were blue, green and yellow, while red and white were also frequently used.⁷⁶

The earnest intentions of the Planning Committee in seeking the help of graphic studios had produced a crop of designs largely unsuitable for serious consideration as a national flag. While on an overseas study tour in 1979, Olof Eriksson, one of Finland’s finest heraldic designers had advised: “Learn to think on the size of a postage stamp. If you cannot successfully reduce a heraldic [or flag] design without losing detail, you have a bad design. Then start from scratch.”⁷⁷ A simple practical test is thus whether or not a flag design can be successfully reduced in size to fit onto an enamelled lapel badge, bearing in mind that each colour on such a lapel badge must be surrounded by a fine metal “retaining wall” to keep it in place when the enamel is baked.

The Heraldry Council, having offered to assist in the evaluation of the designs, convened a special meeting in Pretoria at 19h30 on Wednesday 3 November 1993 to consider and comment on the designs which had been lodged with the Negotiating Council by 17h00 that afternoon. These designs were delivered to the Bureau of Heraldry at 19h15 that evening. I delivered the Heraldry Council’s report to Kempton Park the following day. The Heraldry Council convened again to consider and comment on the last of the proposals which had been submitted shortly before the

71. *Beeld, Die Burger, The Citizen and Volksblad*, 29 October 1993 One should bear in mind that logo-based advertising banners by design studios have little in common with national flags

72. B Wilkinson, “Ad Agencies Rush to Meet Flag Deadline”, *The Star*, 3 November 1993

73. *Sunday Times*, 7 November 1993

74. *Business Day and The Citizen*, 2 November 1993

75. *The Citizen and The Star*, 4 November 1993

76. *Beeld, Cape Times and The Star*, 5 November 1993; *Rapport and Sunday Times*, 7 November 1993

77. On Saturday 26 May 1979 Olof Eriksson had taken me to view a special exhibition of Finnish heraldic design in the town museum of Lahti, some 100km from Helsinki This advice was given to me while he was discussing the pros and cons of each of the designs on display (state herald’s office diary, 26 May 1979)

final deadline of 12 noon on 4 November. This report was delivered on Friday 5 November 1993.⁷⁸

An article in *The Star* entitled “More flags, but few find favour”, illustrated a selection of these designs, and remarked that negotiators who viewed the designs were not impressed with what they saw. “Is this the best that advertising agencies can do?” one negotiator is said to have commented in the corridors.⁷⁹ None of the graphic design studio flag proposals having elicited any enthusiasm, the flag issue was left in abeyance while other constitutional matters were addressed. With regard to the national flag, the draft constitution which was then being compiled merely provided that: “The national flag of the Republic shall be the flag the design of which is determined by the President by proclamation in the Gazette.”⁸⁰ From 7 December 1993, when the Transitional Executive Council (TEC) started functioning, until the “interim” constitution came into force on 27 April 1994, South Africa was governed by the state president, on the advice of a multi-party TEC.⁸¹ Among the unresolved constitutional matters was the contentious anthem question and, of course, that of the national flag.

Because of the politically charged atmosphere of the negotiating process, which also permeated into the various technical committees, I decided early in the proceedings not to submit any proposals of my own to the Commission on National Symbols, lest there be allegations of a conflict of interests. As a mental exercise I had, however, continued working on the idea which had come to me in Zurich, adjusting the design, and trying various colour combinations. What I had envisaged in the original “Zurich sketch”, was a green upper panel and blue below, with the central device in red, fimbriated (edged) in white. However, since an adverse symbolism could well be attached to the idea of red paths converging, the red and green were soon swapped. The next step was to insert yellow triangles at the hoist, in place of the red and white, and blue and white triangles. This was because of the popularity enjoyed by green and gold both in a South African sporting context, and also in the flags of the South African liberation movements. Black triangles were then superimposed on the yellow, but this was not a success. Red and orange were tried as alternative colours for the top band.

Since I was working on these ideas at home, this progression of designs was seen by my family. On the advice of my youngest daughter, Claire, the continuation of the central green stripe from the “V” to the hoist was deleted. Her argument was that there were people who would “stand the flag design on its head” and see the “ban the bomb peace sign”. The removal of the extension of the green central stripe resulted in the creation of a classic “Y”-shaped heraldic pall, and a design which stood out clearly from other national flags. This variation, with a chilli red upper band, seemed to present a logical solution, from both a historical and aesthetic point of view. By

78 State herald’s office diary, 5 November 1993 As state herald, I was *ex officio* a member of the Heraldry Council, and compiled the council’s comments on the flag designs for signature by the chairperson

79 *The Star*, 5 November 1993

80 Section 2 (1), Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993 (Act No 200 of 1993)

81 The aims, membership and general powers of the TEC are set out in a bilingual leaflet: *Transitional Executive Council / Uitvoerende Oorgangsradaad*, of which 15million were soon published for general information See “TEC in brief”, *Pretoria News*, 16 February 1994

means of a triangular black overlay, it also seemed that if black had to be added, this could successfully be superimposed on the yellow triangle. It is this final development of the “Zurich sketch” which was to become the national flag.⁸²

With the December/January holiday period having intervened, the TEC only seems to have woken up to the fact that the national flag issue still needed to be addressed on 8 February 1994. The following week, on Tuesday 15 February 1994, the TEC appointed a Sub-committee on National Symbols, comprising Roelf Meyer, Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning, and Cyril Ramaphosa, secretary-general of the ANC. These two seasoned negotiators, who had been called upon to resolve many a thorny issue, comprised what had become known as “the channel” between the government and the ANC,⁸³ were given the task of resolving the problem. A sub-committee, appointed by “the channel,” met in the office of P.G. Marais, Minister of National Education, in Cape Town on Monday 28 February 1994. In view of the urgency of addressing the national flag issue, it was decided at this meeting that:

a joint technical working committee, convened by Mr F Brownell, be appointed This shall comprise Ms B Kgositsile, Dr W Serote and Ms L Gilfillan of the ANC, and Dr J C Pauw as a further representative of the South African Government This Committee, which shall have powers of co-option, is required to report by Tuesday 8 March 1994

Once the membership of this Joint Technical Working Committee had been determined, the minister remarked that since I was the state herald, I was supposed to know about flags. He wanted this problem – for which no solution had presented itself in the previous six months – resolved within a week.⁸⁴ This was a daunting challenge. After the initial meeting in the minister’s office, the working committee met to discuss the course of action to be taken. Not only was time of the essence, but Wally Serote, head of the ANC Department of Arts and Culture and a fellow member of the working committee, was on the point of leaving for Portugal. It was important to secure his input before his departure. The members of the committee were unanimous in the view that the idea of “interlinking” or “coming together” should, in the interests of national unity, be a central theme to any draft design proposed. At last, the idea which had come to me in Switzerland, and which had since been refined, seemed to offer a possible solution. In fact, it provided the basis of two of the four designs put forward by the working committee after its second meeting on 2 March 1994.

As convener of the Joint Technical Working Committee, and with the artists and other facilities of the Bureau of Heraldry at my disposal, it fell on my shoulders to try to interpret the committee’s views and convert them into final designs for consideration by “the channel”. This was done as follows:

The first of these designs, which was in gold and green, had a vertical dovetailed partition line. This design, conveying the idea of interlocking, was suggested by Dr J.C. Pauw, a member of the Joint Technical Working Committee.

82 This progression of designs is in the F G Brownell Collection

83 P Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle* (Penguin, London, 1997), p 208

84 Minutes of this meeting and copies of the working committee’s documentation are in the F G Brownell Collection

The second design, to which blue was added at the hoist, followed by a gold-red-gold vertical zigzag band and then green in the fly, was based on a design – adapted from a proposal by the Commission on National Symbols – which the ANC members had tabled at the first meeting of the working committee in Cape Town.

The third design, which was my personal preference, was one of the refinements of my “Zurich sketch”. The choice of chilli red (red/orange), for the upper band circumvented certain political objections to the use of both orange and red. The pall was green and the lower band blue. These three dark colours were separated from one another by white. The triangle at the hoist was gold. This design linked the past with the present.

When the possible incorporation of white had been discussed in the Joint Technical Working Committee, I had gained the impression that if white was to be included, there would also have to be black, because of a perception held by some people that these two colours are representative of white and black South Africans respectively. The only place on the (third) design where black could, to my mind, successfully be added, was in the form of a triangle superimposed on the gold in the hoist. This possibility had already been investigated and found to be feasible. This is how the fourth design came about.⁸⁵ It is this final adaptation of the “Zurich sketch”, which was adopted by the TEC as South Africa’s new national flag on 15 March 1994.⁸⁶ On the same day the South Africa Bureau of Standards was requested to prepare appropriate manufacturing specifications with all speed. These specifications were available three days later.⁸⁷ By then the Bureau of Heraldry had already prepared a technical line-drawing of the flag⁸⁸ (see Figure 2)

The new national flag was promulgated under Government Notice No. 70, 1993, in *Government Gazette* No. 15663 of 20 April 1994. The Schedule to this proclamation reads as follows:

DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL FLAG

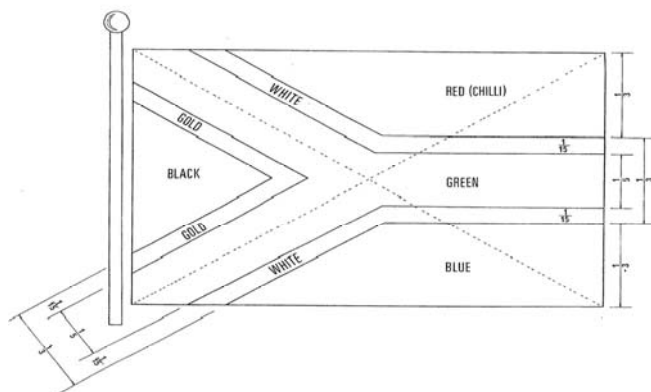
The National Flag shall be rectangular in the proportion of two in the width to three in the length: per pall from the hoist, the upper band chilli red and the lower band blue, with a black triangle at the hoist; over the partition lines a green pall one fifth of the width of the flag, fimbriated white against the chilli red and blue, and gold against the black triangle at the hoist; the width of the pall and its fimbriations is one third of the width of the flag

The formal promulgation of the new national flag took place only seven days before it was taken into use. This created massive logistical problems. Local flag

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- 85 The final artwork of these four designs, my original painted drafts of which are in the FG Brownell Collection, are held by the Bureau of Heraldry. They are illustrated on Plate 53 in Burgers, *The South African Flag Book*
- 86 Photographs of Cyril Ramaphosa and Roelf Meyer holding the new national flag at a press conference after its adoption by the TEC, appeared in many newspapers, among them *Beeld*, *Business Day*, *Die Burger*, *Evening Post* and *Volksblad* on 16 March 1994
- 87 E E Aldis, “The New South African Flag and the SABS”, *SABS Bulletin*, 13, 3, May/June 1994, p 4
- 88 *SAVA Newsletter*, 21 March 1994, p 1. There is a clear correlation between this final product and the “Zurich sketch,” illustrated in Figure 1

factories were working around the clock and manufacturers in Europe were also printing flags and air-freighting them to South Africa.⁸⁹ Instructions setting out the correct use of the national flag were published on the day before it was formally taken into use.⁹⁰

Figure 2



For weeks after the flag's promulgation, it felt as if the whole world wanted details about the design, colour codes and symbolism. South Africa has a diverse population, and in addition to positive attributes, symbolism also has the potential of erecting barriers and creating divisions. For this reason I have, personally, confined any allusion to possible symbolic meaning to only one aspect of the design, namely the central element, which begins as a "V" at the hoist, comes together in the centre of the flag and extends as a single horizontal band to the outer edge of the fly. This *can* be seen as representing the convergence of cultures and other diverse elements in South African society, which then take the road ahead in unison. This idea of convergence and unification linked up with the motto of the then national coat of arms, "Ex Unitate Vires", which means "Unity is Strength". It is equally compatible with the motto of the new South African national coat of arms, which is in the /Xam language of the San people, namely: !KE E: /XARRA //KE, a literal translation of which is "Diverse People Unite".⁹¹

As regards the choice of colours, the chilli red, white and blue are derived from the earlier stages of our flag history, while green, black and gold first came into use in South African national flags during the nineteenth century. Since chilli red falls between red and orange it can, together with white and blue, be seen as representing

89 Beckett, *Flying with Pride*, pp 98–105

90 Government Notice No 865, in *Government Gazette*, No 15694 of 26 April 1994

91 These arms were promulgated under Government Notice No 425 in *Government Gazette* 21331 of 28 April 2000 The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) soon published leaflets, which included an extensive exposition of symbolism, for general information

both the Dutch and British colonial flag traditions in South Africa. Green was first taken into use in the Transvaal Vierkleur in 1857; while the national flag of the early Boer republic of Goshen (1882) had a black stripe. Looking to Africa, the colours red, yellow/gold and green, derived from Ethiopia's flag, are customarily referred to as the Pan-African colours.⁹² Likewise the colours red, black and green which were associated with Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and his followers in the Back to Africa movement in the USA and the Caribbean, have a long symbolic link with African nationalism.⁹³ Since at least 1925, the colours black, green and gold have been associated notably with the flags of the ANC and later the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC).⁹⁴ Colours are a natural phenomenon and can have no intrinsic meaning. No universal symbolism can thus be attached to any of the colours incorporated into the national flag, although it does bring together a diversity of colours that have featured in South African flags and further afield. However, human nature being what it is, people can and do attribute to individual colours, or combinations of colours, widely differing meanings. Those who wish to see in the flag colours which they might in some other way hold dear, often do so. The decision on my part to stay clear of colour symbolism was deliberate. In the light of our multicultural divided society with a chequered history, it is apparent that this has contributed to the flag's acceptance across the political and cultural spectrum.

Conclusion

Initial reaction to the national flag design was mixed and somewhat hesitant, but by the time of President Nelson Mandela's inauguration on 10 May 1994, this was changing. With the historical perspective that comes with the passage of time, I believe that the measure of acceptance achieved by the South African national flag speaks for itself.⁹⁵ This flag has found its way into the hearts and minds of the population at large. It is *their* flag – a living symbol of a living nation.⁹⁶ This has never been more evident than during the flag euphoria of the recent 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup Tournament, which was hosted by South Africa. The enthusiastic use of the national flag and flag-related products brought together our people as never before – there was, in essence, a “convergence and unification”. Although the South African soccer team, Bafana Bafana, dropped out after the first round of the tournament, the way in which the country united in support for our team is clearly expressed, against a backdrop of the national flag, by a full-page ABSA advertisement which reads: “THERE IS NO GREATER VICTORY THAN UNITING A NATION”.⁹⁷ Similarly, after conclusion of the tournament, a full-page First National Bank advert declared: “THIS

63 W Crampton, *The World of Flags: A Pictorial History* (Studio Editions, London, 1992), pp 136–137

93 A Boime, *The Unveiling of the National Icons: A Plea for Patriotic Iconoclasm in a Nationalist Era* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1998), pp 63, 65; Shillington, *History of Africa*, pp 359–360, 375

94 T Stylianides, “Flags of Political Organisations in South Africa”, *SAVA Newsletter*, 2, 15 November 1991, pp 6–11

95 Many superb photographs and other illustrations of the widespread use of the national flag and its adaptations appear in Beckett, *Flying with Pride*.

96 S M Guenter, *The American Flag, 1777–1924: Cultural Shifts from Creation to Codification* (Associated University Presses, Cranbury: NJ, 1990), p 177

97 *Sunday Times*, 27 June 2010, p 5 ABSA was a premier sponsor of Bafana Bafana.

IS MY FLAG. This is my country. Today and every day.”⁹⁸ Whereas the national flag is not always correctly displayed or used, what might have been lost in correct usage since its adoption, has often been made up for in enthusiasm. This flag has achieved its primary function of providing a unifying national symbol for South Africa’s diverse population.

Abstract

Over the past century, distinctive flags have been devised for and adopted by South Africa on three occasions. The first of these came soon after Union in 1910 and followed a standard pattern applied throughout the British Empire. The second saw the hoisting in 1928 of a national flag in recognition of South Africa’s independence. This flag served South Africa for two generations, but was progressively rejected by sections of the population as a symbol of apartheid. The momentous announcement by President F.W. de Klerk at the opening of parliament on 2 February 1993 set in motion the formal negotiation process within South Africa, which came to fruition on 27 April 1994. As part of this process, the present national flag came into being. This article sets out the steps taken and how the process initially floundered. It also considers how the final design of the new national flag, which has become the primary symbol of identification of South Africa and its people, finally came into being.

Keywords: Blue Ensign; Red Ensign; national flag; national symbol; “new” South Africa; Multi-Party Negotiating Council; Vexillology

Opsomming

Vlag-skepping vir die “nuwe” Suid-Afrika, 1910-2010

Oor die afgelope eeu is onderskeidende vlage by drie geleenthede vir Suid-Afrika ontwerp en in gebruik geneem. Eerstens, kort na Uniewording in 1910, is ’n standarde patroon wat dwarsdeur die Britse Ryk toegepas is, nagevolg. Tweedens, is ’n nasionale vlag, ter erkenning van Suid-Afrikaanse onafhanklikheid, in 1928 gehys. Hierdie vlag, wat die land twee geslagte lank gedien het, is egter toenemend deur dele van die bevolking met apartheid vereenselwig en stelselmatig verwerp. Tydens die parlamentsopening op 2 Februarie 1990, het Staatspresident F.W. de Klerk se opspraakwekkende aankondiging die formele onderhandelingsproses binne Suid-Afrika aan die gang gesit. As deel van hierdie proses wat op 27 April 1994 vrug gedra het, is die huidige nasionale vlag ingewy. Hierdie artikel skets die stappe wat gevolg is en hoe die proses aanvanklik skipbreuk gely het. Dit skenk ook aandag aan hoe die finale ontwerp van die nasionale vlag, wat as die vernaamste identifikasiesimbool van Suid-Afrika en sy mense beskou word, uiteindelik ontstaan het.

Slutelwoorde: Blou Vlootvlag; Rooi Vlootvlag; nasionale vlag; nasionale simbool; Veelparty Onderhandelingsraad; Vlagkunde

98 *Pretoria News*, 16 July 2010, p 5 FNB was extensively involved in the marketing by FIFA of tickets for the tournament