

# A route out of deadlock

**THE BELLAGIO** conference sounded warnings on a range of fronts. Among the important conclusions of the delegates were:

- There is an urgent need for bold and imaginative action to take South Africa beyond the present political and economic deadlock.

- The consequences of no significant growth and the further impoverishment of millions of people in the urban and rural areas will make the country ungovernable within five years.

- A social charter or compact is needed in South African society. The political and economic crisis in the country left little time for prolonged struggle, common ground had to be found immediately. A compact should not be fascist or Stalinist in style — nor should it be an airy-fairy liberal idea of consensus, nor should it attempt to co-opt people. The broad goals of agreement would include the suspension of the armed struggle for power; a commitment to a negotiated democratic system; the need for political agreement to deal with the economic crisis; a commitment to uprooting poverty and job creation programmes to combat unemployment.

- It is totally unacceptable that a police force should not be able to prevent the killing of thousands of its citizens. The perception remains of a police force out of sympathy with the reform programme of the State President.

- A regular flow of reliable information to the public is vital for negotiations. The board of control of the SABC should be changed immediately so as to reflect representatives of the wider South Africa.

- There is a need for specific anti-poverty programmes, but also for all parties and groups to start renewed efforts against mindless violence. Whether or not poverty programmes are effective in resolving the crisis will in large measure depend on whether they affect the life of an 18-year-old living in a township. Will they give him or her greater security, a sense of political participation and emancipation, a job, a sense of hope? This is the litmus test!

- A two-pronged approach to the country's economic problems was recommended: a "kickstart" in the form of housing and electrification programmes, and a major drive to increase the ability of the economy to export competitively.

- Little reliance can be placed upon the availability of foreign capital. The drive to increase and diversify South Africa's export capacity should be tackled immediately and vigorously.

- To address the economic crisis, a change was also needed in the culture, philosophy and attitude of the government.

# Inequalities will plunge SA into chaos

*'In a society with too great a degree of inequality, human society is impossible' — Raymond Aron, French philosopher*

**IRRESPECTIVE OF** political or constitutional settlements, the huge inequalities in South African society might make the country ungovernable by 1995.

This was part of the sobering message delivered to delegates at Bellagio by Francis Wilson, co-author of "Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge" and economics professor at the University of Cape Town.

In an attempt to draw a picture of poverty in South Africa, Wilson said numerous components needed to be considered.

One was the gender issues: women were among the poorest group. Most of the poor were black — a racial dimension and the geography of poverty in South Africa showed that most of the poor lived in the rural areas.

Vast anomalies also existed. A picture of poverty in South Africa showed a rural black woman carrying a bundle of firewood (weighing on average 30 kg) on her head, while above her stretched vast lengths of Eskom power lines.

A further irony was that while a white household might spend R25 a month on electricity, a black household in a similar area, but without access to electricity, could spend R65 a month on paraffin, candles or other means of light and heat.

"The message is that poverty is expensive," said Wilson.

Besides the human cost, the macro implications of short-sighted energy policies included the degradation of homeland areas — not due only to over-grazing, but as a result of the search for fuel by people living in those regions.

The infant mortality rate for white South Africans was 12 per 1 000 births. For blacks it was between 94 and 124. Here again there were substantial differences between black urban and rural areas. In an urban area such as Soweto, the infant mortality rate was 35 per 1 000, however in Tzaneen it was 70 and in the Transkei it was one of the worst in Africa — 130 per 1 000.

"The question is, how to mobilise resources to deal with these issues," Wilson reminded delegates.

Touching on the widespread violence in the country, Wilson said most whites did not know that the violence had started as family violence; it had broadened into the community in the form of rapes and violent attacks, had then developed into gang violence and most recently into political violence.

"We need to see this as a social pathology: individuals and communities living in impos-

sible physical and political conditions...violence has a deeper root, it is linked to poverty, powerlessness and frustration," said Wilson.

He cautioned against the prevailing attitude among many white South Africans who said let bygones be bygones. While it was important to move away from past practices and attitudes, one could not do so by attempting to wipe away history because it was fundamental to the situation which now confronted South Africans.

Despite talk of removing the "pillars" of apartheid, all that had happened was that the scaffolding had been dismantled.

Looking at what needed to be done in the re-shaping of South African society, (a vitally important, but supremely difficult task) Wilson said policies that promoted maximum growth had to be pursued.

He suggested that, given the differences in South Africa's population (privileged economically active insiders and unemployed impoverished outsiders), two programmes could be followed simultaneously.

**'The decision-makers are far removed from the majority of people. Ordinary people need to have a sense that their voices are being heard'**

One policy would be aimed at the "insiders". It would promote growth and create jobs. The other would form more than a social safety net — it should be a coherent policy that would address the needs of the "outsiders", people who had been left out because of historical reasons.

Such policies could include an afforestation scheme whereby the desperate need for more trees to be grown throughout South Africa could be tackled at state level. This, said Wilson, was something that was possible now by setting aside five or 10 percent of the budget to finance such a project.

All plans and debates needed also to be informed by a democratic process. At present the decision-makers were far removed from the majority of people. Ordinary people needed to have a sense that their voices were being heard and their needs addressed.

Wilson stressed that "what counts today is the need for a re-distribution of wealth. Humanity must reply to this question, or be shaken to pieces by it". □