

LESOTHO CONFERENCE ON NON-VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

[May 1988]
1988-05

This conference was set up by the Transformation Resource Centre in Maseru and held at Roma university. It was led by Walter Wink and there was also some input from Richard Deats from the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. About forty people attended from various parts of South Africa and various organisations were represented.

Wink's input was mainly on the rationale and "spirituality" of non-violent direct action. The substance of his studies was from his books "Naming the Powers" and "Unmasking the powers" as well as "Jesus' Third Way" which was written especially in response to the South African situation. His essential thesis is that the world in which the Bible was written did not know the separation of the spiritual and material spheres as our world knows it. This meant that the "powers" spoken of by Paul had both a spiritual and physical component to them. When opposing these powers one has to take this into account and do it both on a spiritual and material ("political") level. The spiritual level implied prayer, fasting, and other spiritual disciplines and the political level implied analysis, organisation and non-violent direct action.

Deat's input focussed around his experience in the Phillipines where he was involved in the training and preparation of the Phillipine church for the Aquino take over. Some useful insights were gleaned from this and we were encouraged to relate what he said to our situation in South Africa.

There was a strong emphasis on community as we shared together and each day began and ended in very meaningful worship. Many of the people there were in the pacifist tradition and those unfamiliar with

this tradition were able to learn from them. One was especially conscious of the need for the spiritual resources required in the struggle that the Church face against the principalities and powers.



One concern about the conference that I personally had was the extent of the accessibility of the ideas expressed there in terms of the church in South Africa. On the one hand I think there are certain difficulties blacks have with Wink's approach partly because of some negative remarks he made in "Jesus' Third Way" about the ANC's non-violent campaign for justice and on the other hand whites may have problems in accepting some of his ideas because of their costliness in terms of the commitment and discipline involved in non-violent direct action. Associated with this is the tendency, in my opinion, sometimes to couch these ideas within the unfamiliar ethos of universal pacifism which would tend to make them inaccessible to people who do not feel they are part of this ethos. There is also the fact that the term "third way" is used in different ways (for example the Kairos document uses it pejoratively) and therefore it has negative connotations with many people.

However, the problems with semantics aside, I feel that it was a stimulating and worth while time.

Tony Balcomb

STANDING FOR THE TRUTH -

THE CALL OF THE CHURCH LEADERS' CONVOCATION

This national gathering of Church leaders was held in Johannesburg on the 30th and 31st of May. The idea for such a meeting was first conceived during an ordinary Church leaders meeting in early February and was called by the SACC. Its express purpose was to look at effective nonviolent strategies for resisting apartheid.

Apart from the opening address by Frank Chikane, general secretary of the SACC, the convocation consisted of group work and plenary discussion which aimed to come up with strategies for action. Groups focussed on areas such as prayer, pastoral care, telling the truth, non-cooperation and non-collaboration, intervention strategies, theological rationale for resisting apartheid, principles of nonviolent action and social analysis.

After much discussion delegates to the convocation decided to launch a "Standing for the truth" campaign which would focus initially on detainees and political prisoners but would ultimately broaden out to include other focusses and actions. To this end a campaign committee was decided on comprising 3 representatives from convocation (Emma Mashanini, Smangaliso Mkatshwa & Lionel Louw) and 3 representatives each from the SACC, SACBC and Church leaders.

The convocation concluded with a

Service of Witness and Solidarity with Church Leaders which was held in Regina Mundi Church, Soweto on the Tuesday afternoon. There the congregation pledged to support the Church leaders in their prophetic witness and to take the issues of convocation into their local Churches.

It was claimed by some that the convocation was an historic event and indeed many people outside the Church were eagerly anticipating what came out of it. However it only met for two days (and one could argue that it could have made better use of time and the tremendous amount of expertise that was assembled there). It is not realistic to expect one event to change the face of South Africa. But one can hope that the concern that was expressed there will be picked up on and channelled into local and regional initiatives as is planned. The overall impact of this convocation is probably yet to be determined and is dependent on what happens from here on.

This places a responsibility on us to carry forward the issues of convocation in the Pietermaritzburg area and to renew our efforts to find ways of ending apartheid. We hope that Christians in Pietermaritzburg will take this seriously.

Megan Walker

