

REACTION:

“Departure from overt racism ...” “The problem is legitimacy ...” “An insult to the people of South Africa ...” “Buying time for apartheid ...” “The key to a new South Africa ...”

Comment following the National Party's acceptance of the action plan ranged from being hailed as “key” to a new South Africa and damned as “an insult to the people.”

DIE BURGER

The Afrikaans newspaper, Die Burger, said that in many respects the NP's action plan reflected “refreshingly new approaches” on issues which had been the centre of controversy in South African politics. The enthusiasm with which the plan was approved by the federal congress had met all expectations. The NP was trying to meet all the requirements of the constitutional situation. It tried to recognise both the diversity of the SA population and the communality of the inhabitants who had to share the country.

MR OLIVER TAMBO — ANC

The African National Congress rejected the plan as a “shocking insult to the people of South Africa.” ANC president, Mr Oliver Tambo, said “the idea that our people should fold their arms and sit back for half a decade while apartheid is given a change of clothes would be laughable were it not so insufferable.” The plan was “a reformed apartheid” and “apartheid with a face-lift”. Mr de Klerk continued to insist and reaffirm race as the central plank of the constitution. Political rights would continue to be defined on the basis of race. The elevation of group rights above the rights of the individual was the essence of apartheid. “The notion of consensus as the operative principle of government in the South African context, effectively invests the privileged minority with the power of veto over the will of the majority.” Every aspect of the NP's platform was deliberately designed to convey the impression of change, while retaining the hegemony of the racist minority.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Mr Wynand Malan, a co-leader of the Democratic Party, said the five-year plan contained the basic fault which the National Party had been making for years — it was trying to ward off the left but at the same time clinging to certain rightist standpoints. Any move away from apartheid was welcomed. However, the vagueness of the entire plan was lamentable. South Africa was not prepared to risk its future on a plan which offered a step forward without incorporating a movement away from where it stood at the moment. The central problem was black political rights in the midst of white safeguarding. “The plan is so vague, so general, that it is almost no progress on the policy statement of the past two years. Who will be able to vote in five years' time, and for

whom?” The biggest problem in South Africa was uncertainty. The NP programme did not address this. In fact, it worsened the problem by being uncertain itself.

INSTITUTE FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA (IDASA)

Mr Alex Boraine, a director of IDASA, said the “group” concept was totally unacceptable. It was a bundle of contradictions and an attempt to please everyone. The plan made it clear that there was a “departure from the overt racism which has characterised the NP and its policies for more than 40 years.” There was also no doubt that Mr F W de Klerk was a “considerable improvement” on Mr P W Botha. However, Mr de Klerk was essentially the product of apartheid ideology and therefore lacked the vision and the will to work towards a non-racial democracy. The central problem was the Government's lack of legitimacy and the state would have to find another arena where genuine representatives of all South Africa could work towards a new constitution which guaranteed non-racialism and democracy.

BEELD

Beeld newspaper said the National Party's plan had the potential to be instrumental in the creation of a new South Africa. However, a half-hearted implementation of this new line of thinking could delay the attraction of the main objective. No clear constitutional proposals were submitted and the voters would therefore be asked to support the NP during the general election with a new framework of principles. Some people would describe these principles as apartheid in a new form while others would say group rights would be neglected. However, it was clear the “new openness in the approach” contradicted these views. The NP had moved away “from the rigidity of the past” and had a more open-minded approach.

COSATU

Mr Elijah Barayi, President of COSATU, said the State President, P W Botha, or NP leader, F W de Klerk, had six months to begin negotiating with the ANC, failing which the armed struggle would continue. He said a “desperate attempt is being made to convince us de Klerk, a racist to the core, can be trusted with the initiative for change. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was the main advocate of this position, which backed the belief that the British had always been part of the SA problem. COSATU believes that the “democratic movement” could not consider negotiations without a climate of free political activity.