

# DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

THE OFFICIAL NEWS BULLETIN OF THE INSTITUTE FOR A DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE FOR SOUTH AFRICA

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**T**HE birth of IDASA was brought to fruition within a year of Drs. Slabbert and Boraine leaving Parliament. It took the shape of a national conference over two days (8 and 9 May 1987) which effectively launched the organisation as a facilitating institute.

Over 400 delegates from all over South Africa met in Port Elizabeth for a programme of lectures, workshops, reportbacks and general discussion.

One of the most striking features of the conference was the large component of delegates from the Black community, at times constituting a definite majority amongst the participants. This gave the conference a concrete sense of *reality* in a society plagued by the illusions of "wit baaskap". Another unusual feature for many participants was the strict democratic basis on which it was run — effectively and fairly!

Structurally the conference devoted

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its time to the issue of *democracy*. It examined the implications of democracy in seven major areas of society: government, labour, business, education, law, media and the church.

A keynote lecture on each area was immediately followed by a formal response. An equal amount of time was devoted to the "workshopping" of each area followed by reportbacks and general discussion in plenary session at the end of each day.

As a communications system this structure worked more than satisfactorily, and at times most rewardingly. Highlights included: Advocate Arthur Chaskalson, national director of the Legal Resources Centre on democracy and the law; Mr Joe Latagoma, editor of *The Sowetan*, on democracy and the media; Mr. Mvuyo Ralawe of NEUSA on democracy and education; Mr. Andrew Boraine of the UDF who read a paper on behalf of the organisation on democracy and government. A good deal of stimulating discussion also followed controversial papers presented by Mr. Leon Louw, director of the Free Market Foundation, on democracy and business, and Dr. Charles Simkins of SALDRU at UCT, on democracy and government.

Amongst respondents who touched off wide-spread responses amongst delegates were Prof. Heribert Adam, the brilliant sociologist, analyst and author (currently at UCT), and Dr.

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*The top table at the IDASA national conference in Port Elizabeth. Note Mr. George Peffer on the extreme right, who is the regional director of the Southern Transvaal — and next to him the regional director for the Eastern Cape, Mr. Max Mamase. On Dr. Boraine's right we have Mr. Wayne Mitchell (national co-ordinator), who also co-ordinated the entire conference.*

## INSTITUTE FOR A DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE FOR S.A.





**T**HIS is the first issue of *Democracy In Action* and serves as a reminder of our infancy and of our growth. Little more than a year ago, we started to dream of the possibility of an Institute which would focus on Democracy. Since then, we have established our head office in Cape Town and have regional offices in Port Elizabeth, East London, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Stellenbosch.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our many sponsors who have assisted us so generously during the last few months. It would have been impossible to have grown and developed as we have done without their support.

The emphasis throughout is on *action* and all our branches are developing, planning and executing projects which are described elsewhere. Essentially, IDASA is trying to promote a culture, or a climate, of democracy in a time when almost every vestige of democracy has disappeared.

## From the Executive Director

Some of the highlights of our activities up till now include our national conference in Port Elizabeth and our Student Leadership conference in Stellenbosch. The widespread representation at both these events was encouraging and will provide scope for the future.

I am writing this message on the eve of our departure for West Africa. I want to stress that our decision to take a group of South Africans to meet with representatives of the ANC falls squarely within the object-

ives of IDASA. We have been meeting a wide cross-section of people . . . but there are South Africans *outside* of our country who are not able to return. We believe it is important to meet with them as well, particularly as these same people have considerable support inside South Africa.

If IDASA can make a contribution towards the resolution of our present conflict, our efforts will have been worthwhile. Negotiation is always preferable to violence and confrontation.

Essentially democracy is not about voting every five years (and I am aware that the majority of South Africans do not enjoy that privilege). Democracy means having control of one's life and participating in the decisions which affect us. IDASA seeks to facilitate this goal. A non-racial democracy is a worthy and difficult objective. We are determined to make the effort and to ensure that the *process* towards that goal is itself democratic.

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André Odendaal, the historian from UWC.

But it was participation from the floor which added unusual zest and sparkle to the discussions, primarily from the Black delegates. Prominent amongst the White delegates were Afrikaners such as Dr. Christo Nel and English-speakers such as the Watson brothers from Port Elizabeth. The latter's theories startled many, but appear to hold more truth than was at first apparent!

There is no doubt that the conference, given the limitations of time and size, was most successful. What made it unique was the degree of consensus amongst the vast majority of delegates. This became evident on issues such as the irreversible commitment to democracy in full, the unquestioned acceptance of non-racialism as integral to that process, and the reward of increasing solidarity amongst the many who embraced these principles in their search for a lasting peace with justice in South Africa!

These fine achievements were largely brought about by the confident guidance of both Drs. Slabbert

and Boraine as they took turns in chairing the sessions.

Needless to say, the birth of IDASA and the consequent visit to Dakar provide a clear signal to the Nationalist government that these two men

are committed to strategies which are innovative, relevant and supported by a much wider cross-section of South Africans than *they* could ever muster! No wonder the conference ended with cries of "Viva IDASA".



Dr. Nthato Motlana debates the issues with local New Brighton comrades during the national launch of IDASA.