

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

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THERE probably had not been so much talk and exchange of ideas on the Freedom Charter since the Congress of the People at Kliptown 33 years ago.

On July 15 and 16, the 2A Lecture Theatre at the University of Cape Town's Robert Leslie Building was transformed with brown and gold banners proclaiming the ideals of IDASA — "Working Towards Democracy" and "Working Towards Non-Racialism".

The event — IDASA's national conference on the Freedom Charter. More than 400 delegates arrived on Friday morning at the start of the two-day conference; by late Saturday afternoon well over 500 were attentively listening to Dr. Van Zyl Slabbert's closing speech.

The overriding impression of that conference was the enthusiastic and optimistic spirit that prevailed throughout, and the deep desire to comprehend what lay ahead.

But there were smaller details

Historic IDASA Conference - Freedom Charter Emerges as Alive and Relevant As Ever

BY MARC DOBSON

which gave it a distinctive character; the freedom song sung before Rev. Xundu's speech; Dr. Motlana's leaping from the speakers' table to assist the elderly woman who had fainted; and the delegate who demanded to know from the religious

panel: "How ARE we going to solve all these problems?" (Perhaps he thought they had access to an omniscient source.)

Then there was the sharp criticism levelled by Moulana Faried Essack that no woman had been selected as either a panelist or a chairperson (a sexist oversight which Dr. Boraine later apologised for on behalf of IDASA), and the criticism privately expressed by several delegates during tea breaks that someone representing big business should have been invited onto a panel.

But what exactly was this Freedom Charter that had drawn a cross-section of South African society intent on hearing its clauses interpreted by prominent individuals from the worlds of law, politics, academia and the trade union movement?

The conference heard that the Charter was not a constitutional

Continued overleaf

Mr. Wynand Malan MP, Dr. Nthato Motlana and Prof. Hermann Giliomee at the first panel discussion.



blueprint but a guide for policy formulation. It was a potent symbol which, as Prof. Hermann Giliomee of UCT's Department of Political Studies put it, "reflected the existential anguish of blacks under apartheid".

Prof. Giliomee said the Freedom Charter had become a pivotal document in South Africa's political debate but the greatest danger would be if the Charter's adherents elevated it to the status of the sole authentic statement of all the peoples and classes.

"We are too diverse a nation to be bound by one Charter," he said, adding that the Freedom Charter should be put on the negotiating table along with others.

"If any national group in South Africa today could understand the language of the Freedom Charter, it should be the Afrikaner"

Misinformation about the Charter abounded, said Rev. Xundu, and those who considered it a Marxist document should bear in mind that it had been drafted by people operating from a Christian standpoint, many of whom had gone through mission schools and colleges.

Wynand Malan said he hoped the day would dawn when the Charter would be discussed in the medium of Afrikaans in the same positive way it was being done at the conference. The Afrikaner history offered a parallel of what was happening at present in liberation politics.

"If any national group in South Africa today could understand the language of the Freedom Charter, it should be the Afrikaner," said Mr. Malan.

Dr. Farouk Meer, secretary of the Natal Indian Congress, said South Africa's people — black and white — could use the Freedom Charter as a beacon to create a safe future for all their children.

Soweto community leader Dr. Nthato Motlana told the conference the African National Congress had begun an exhaustive re-examination of the Charter and was engaged in drafting a constitution for a post-apartheid South Africa.

Wits political scientist Mr Mark

Swilling said whites were constantly bombarded by State propaganda which sought to demonise the black opposition movements and therefore, by implication, the Freedom Charter.

He warned that this demonisation of all alternatives except the Government's would have tragic consequences — as white Zimbabweans could well relate.

"During the war, the entire white minority was mobilised for war behind a myth," said Mr. Swilling. "Proof that it was a myth came when President Robert Mugabe came into power and did exactly the opposite to what Ian Smith said he would do."

One of the most intensely discussed issues at the conference was the controversial clause in the Char-

ter reading, "All national groups shall have equal rights".

The term "national groups" could be misleading when read in the light of present history, said Rev. Canon Mcebisi Xundu, director of the Justice and Reconciliation Programme of the Diocese of Port Elizabeth.

The term referred to the people of the then protectorates of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, he said, and bore no relation to the present divisive concept propagated by the government.

"We must move away from ethnicity. If the world is becoming a global village, how much more for us to become a global household," he said.

However, Professor Lourens du Plessis, from the Department of Public Law at the University of Stel-



Prof. Colin Bundy and Dr. Neil McGurk on "Equality in Education".



Ms. Cathy Cook (centre) from the Cook Foundation in California who made a special visit to Cape Town to attend the conference . . . in conversation with delegates.

lenbosch, felt the clause recognised the political relevance of ethnic and tribal affiliations "to emphasise the need for the equal protection of the rights of . . . every member of the nation as a unity".

National Democratic Movement leader Mr. Wynand Malan said the clause was a reference to a "sub-nationalism" which existed in the country and which would continue to exist in a post-apartheid South Africa.

The possible nature of land redistribution and compensation, and the future form of the economy, were perhaps the two issues which sustained the most interest during the conference. Land would certainly be redistributed, said Dr. Motlana, but the proposed land reform would benefit non-Africans

as well. Those who worked the land would not be dispossessed without adequate compensation. A Port Elizabeth delegate, referring to the abject poverty of the rural areas, argued that there should be no compensation and no compromise.

But Dr. Motlana disagreed. "If we are genuine in our offer to our non-African citizens, we must admit that there are those who will be entitled to a fair and square deal. There must be justice," he said.

Prof. Giliomee then dryly commented that the State was already so impoverished there would not be much money left over for compensation.

Thought-provoking facts emerged during the debate on how the Freedom Charter envisaged a post-apartheid economy.

- The conference heard:
- * At present about six per cent of the population owned about 80 per cent of the country's wealth.
 - * It would cost about R75-billion to nationalise the four major conglomerates (Anglo American Corporation, SA Mutual, Sanlam and the Rembrandt Group) or R106 000 billion to purchase these organisations. (The entire South African Government budget expenditure for 1987 was R46 318 million.)
 - * The South African economy was massively concentrated, with four corporations controlling 83% of all JSE listed companies.

Mr. Rory Riordan, director of the Human Rights Trust, who presented a paper concentrating on the issue of the nationalisation of in-

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dustrial, said the International Monetary Fund was unlikely to rush to the aid of a socialist country which had nationalised industry.

"Both emotional and economic issues will probably make land-redistribution inevitable, and in fact desirable," he said. "It may not be the same for the nationalisation of industry."

Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, said workers understood that the productivity of their labour would have to rise tremendously if enough economic surplus was to be generated. This understanding was crucial for the future of South Africa because many prophets of doom predicted a bleak future where people would want to share but there would be nothing to share. Whites visualised a future where expropriation would be the order of the day but, "nothing could be further from the truth". However, in a South Africa based on the Freedom Charter there would be no room for the idle, added Mr. Ramaphosa.

Mr. Bheki Sibiyi of the Black Management Forum said South Africa did not need either capitalism or socialism but a "happy marriage" of both systems. "From the look of things, the probable econo-



Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, Rory Riordan and Mark Swilling speaking on the economy.



Mr. Moulana Faried Essack (right), National Co-ordinator of the Call of Islam in conversation with delegates.

mic framework in a post-apartheid South Africa will be heavily socialistic," he said.

The issue of what would be the official language in a new South Africa drew the conclusion that English would probably be the official language with the second official language varying from region to region.

Punctuating the various debates and discussions over the two days were unsolicited testimonies from delegates — testimonies that shed light on the suffering and bitterness spawned by apartheid. One delegate told the conference that whites were living in a prison but did not realise it because the cell was so beautifully padded. Another insisted that whites' standard of living would have to drop, "otherwise you must continue living in fear with burglar-bars on your windows and guns in your hands".

Dr. Boraine acknowledged the "pathos and anger" of some delegates and told the conference: "It would be foolish to ignore that just because it makes us feel uncomfortable."

During the debate on equality before the law, the contrast between the present state of the legal system and the kind of system the Charter foresaw was vividly highlighted.

The legal system had failed completely in South Africa, advocate Mr. Zack Yacoob, Counsel for the Defence in the Delmas Treason Trial, told the conference. There could never be equality before the law in South Africa as long as there was economic inequality.

Professor Dennis Davis of UCT's Faculty of Law said the basis upon which the country's lawyers were trained needed to be "completely overhauled".

"Law faculties in this country fall appallingly short of the kind of legal education that should be provided to train lawyers for a future South Africa," he said.

Amongst the reforms suggested were:

- * A revision of the racial and sexual composition of the Bench, particularly at the Supreme Court.
- * The reintroduction of the jury system.
- * A revision of the vagrancy and squatting laws, which "criminalised poverty".
- * A broadened legal aid system that would be independent of the Government.

In a sober note during the education debate, Dr. Neil McGurk, headmaster of the Sacred Heart College, said South Africa did not have the resources to provide a quality provision of education to all based on the present provision to whites.

"White education is presently in serious demise," he said. Prof. Colin Bundy of UCT's Department of History later offered some consolation by remarking that white schooling was "education for orthodoxy".

Mr. Fanyana Mazibuko, director of the University Preparation Programme in Johannesburg, said the Freedom Charter clause which promised work and security for all would prove meaningless unless people had been trained and educated so as to take up those jobs.

Earlier on, Dr. Motlana had expressed the wish that the Freedom Charter had stressed the importance of acquiring skills and education, come what may. "Our children must be ready to run with the ball," he said.

In the final debate, Moulana Faried Essack, national co-ordinator of the Call of Islam, said there was freedom of worship in South Africa but not of religion.

His confidence in the leadership of the African National Congress led him to believe the situation would be redressed in a post-apartheid South Africa.

In his closing address the IDASA co-director, Dr. Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, spoke of the role whites could play in the democratic struggle.

The fear of the future being experienced by whites was being fuelled by their isolation from the democratic struggle in an increasingly authoritarian society, he said.

However, it was important for whites to realise that they could become part of the struggle for a just, non-racial South Africa. Their role would be to work through the bodies and organisations outside Parliament and to take discussion and debate on the Freedom Charter into their communities.



Mr. Bheki Sibuya.



Adr. Zack Yacoob speaking on Equality before the Law.