

# DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

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## Business, unions lock horns

Big business came under heavy fire from unionists and other Mass Democratic Movement delegates at Idasa's "Securing the Future" conference for its perceived reluctance to put pressure on the government to dismantle apartheid.

Some Anglo American executives had the unusual task of publicly defending company policies not only against attacks made by union leaders, but also against strong criticism coming from Democratic Party quarters in the person of DP economic advisor Prof Sampie Terreblanche.

The progressive organisations also accused big business corporations in general, and Anglo American specifically, of silently supporting the government in times of political stability. MDM delegates, in turn, had a difficult time fielding probing questions on their sanctions policy and plans to nationalise "monopoly industry" in a post-apartheid South Africa.

More than 200 people attended the conference which was held in August in Johannesburg and aimed at the "younger generation" of business and professional people in South Africa.

Discussion on the role of big business in a changing society and the nature of the democracy in a post-apartheid South Africa led to some sharp exchanges between participants at the conference.

Murphy Morobe, former publicity secretary of the UDF, set the ball rolling with a provocative speech on the political options facing South Africa after the abolition of apartheid. He reiterated the view of the MDM that fundamental human rights will be guaranteed for all people in post-apartheid South Africa and that everyone will have the right to protect his or her language and culture — without being afforded any special privileges because of language or culture. "But the post-apartheid state will have to take steps to undo the effects of apartheid," Morobe said. "The state will have to participate in the economy in order to correct the skewness of the present economic order. And as far as monopoly industry is



Aggrey Klaaste ... black empowerment.



Sampie Terreblanche ... neutrality fetish.



Murphy Morobe ... no compensation.

the importance of profitability," Spicer said. He said that too much of the economic debate were conducted on a very crude level and asked that it should not be portrayed as a simple choice between capitalism and socialism. Spicer also rejected the "highly emotional" pleas for redistribution. "Almost without exception redistribution favours the elites and not the people it should

help. Even higher taxes would be unsuccessful as a tool for redistribution because it would further undermine the profitability of business."

Spicer warned that there were no quick fixes for South Africa. "We are a very average developing country and if we get rid of apartheid it won't mean that the highly competitive world economy owes us a living. But I still think that South Africa could become world class if it could destroy apartheid without destroying the economy," he said.

Spicer — and Anglo American — were not let off the hook by delegates as the debate moved on to the question of what big business could do to get rid of apartheid. Panelist Adrian du Plessis, public affairs manager of Anglo American, told the conference that big business existed to generate wealth and should be judged a success if they did this successfully. He added that the entrepreneurial spirit was a major operator for change in the country. "The influence of business may be neither sinful nor virtuous but at the end of the day sinful or virtuous people will shape our destiny," he said.

Wayne Munro, director of personnel and public affairs of Johnson and Johnson, envisaged a more active role for big business in the political arena and argued that they should lobby government and apply pressure behind the scenes. Trade unionists were not satisfied with this approach, however, and a representative, Mike Roussos, accused the business community of not responding to the government actions unless their interests were fundamentally threatened. Another unionist added: "The

### Big business urged to end unholy marriage with Pretoria

By Pierre de Vos

concerned, one doesn't rule out some form of nationalisation."

Morobe ruled out the possibility of compensation after nationalisation and said workers will have to participate fully in the day to day running of the industry. Several delegates expressed serious concern with Morobe's economic proposals for a post-apartheid state. One delegate asked how the MDM planned to win over the private sector with talk about nationalisation and wanted to know if the establishment of small businesses would be encouraged under a new government.

However, a delegate from East London deplored the defensive questions some of the white delegates asked about the future economic system and wanted to know what sacrifices they were prepared to make for a new South Africa. "Remember," he said, "there can be no gain without pain."

Mr Michael Spicer, personal assistant to the chairman of Anglo American Corporation, differed sharply with Morobe. "The unhappy history of nationalisation have demonstrated

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businessmen are playing tricks with our lives. In crisis situations they always agree to do something, but when the crisis passes they forget all their promises."

Prof Sampie Terreblanche of the University of Stellenbosch agreed. "In the early 80s an unholy marriage took place between the Pretoria bureaucracy and the Johannesburg business community. A large section of the business community gave legitimacy to the NP government that they did not deserve," Terreblanche said. He added that no normal business could take place in an abnormal society. "This fetish of business with neutrality is a propaganda trick. The political and economic game is taking place in a power framework in which black people have been on the losing end for a very long time. Business cannot ignore this problem that will have to be addressed by a post-apartheid government." He suggested that big business call its own Carlton conference to devise strategies to put pressure on the government.

Dr Nthatho Motlana, civic leader and board member of Southern Life, agreed that black people could not rely on predominantly white big business to address their grievances but he felt that the only way to remedy this was for black people to become part of the business community. "Big business has always been white. I am pleading that big business should become non-racial," he said.

"Blacks should become part of big business in order to acquire economic power," he said.

The editor of *The Sowetan*, Aggrey Klaaste, explained his concept of nation building to the conference and said that he and his newspaper also

believed in "black empowerment". He identified a more basic problem than Mr Motlana, however, and stressed the need for black people to be made aware of their ability to take leadership positions. "The government had been able to take care of the cycle of unrest born out of black anger with their repressive machinery. We blacks must therefore try to out-think the state."

Echoing these sentiments Dr Alex Boraine, executive director of Idasa, regretted the inability of many white liberals to refrain from patronising attitude that real change can only come through white initiative. "Tragically," Boraine said, "many white liberals find it difficult when blacks demand to do things on their own."

The concluding panel discussion centred around the question if South Africa could become a true democracy through the younger generation. It generated a heated debate on the methods that might be used to achieve a post-apartheid democratic South Africa and the form this democracy should take.

Mr Tony Leon, the Democratic Party candidate for Houghton, presented a classical liberal

## Economic power: blacks must take part in big business

view. He said that democracy was not just about giving the majority the vote, it was about the protection of individuals. "This is only going to happen if we can establish a democratic culture: Liberty lies in the heart of men and women. When it dies there it cannot be saved by the courts or the constitution," he said.

Peter Mokhaba, president of the South African Youth congress (Sayco), argued that the democracy of a post-apartheid South Africa should serve all the people of the country by looking at the specific situation at hand. "If we talk about democracy in the context of the national liberation movement, we say that

democracy must first and foremost satisfy the aspirations of the African community. South Africa today is divided into two sides — one fighting for a democratic future and the other side fighting to retain apartheid and the undemocratic system," Mokhaba said.

He encouraged whites to take up the struggle for democracy because they too were denied the democratic right to associate with whom they want.

A delegate reiterated Mr Leon's notion that the democratic spirit must be part of the people's culture and questioned the democratic nature of the MDM. André Zaaïman, Idasa's regional director in Pretoria, reminded the conference that a struggle is at

present taking place in South Africa. "The state is sitting there and they are just waiting to sow division in the ranks of the opposition. How democratic the struggle can be is therefore not determined by the opposition but by the state."

Another delegate condemned the MDM for being just as "evil and undemocratic as the NP" and questioned the necessity to put aside one's democratic ideals in the struggle for liberation. Zaaïman responded by saying that it was sometimes necessary to have a democracy in a different form. "The township organisations have their own form of democracy and leaders are always kept accountable to the community."

Idasa's national co-ordinator, Wayne Mitchell, ended the conference on a hopeful note arguing that young white South Africans could play a major role in winning other whites over to a commitment for a non-racial democratic state. "Actions led by young leaders within the white community will be less easy to ignore than black protest, because they will come from within the community and therefore from a common moral and religious perspective," Mitchell said.



At the conference . . . Idasa regional co-ordinators Monde Mtanga (Port Elizabeth, left), and Patrick Banda (Johannesburg, right) with former Transvaal regional director Steve Fourie.

# Security n dream' if

By Ronel Scheffer

"You are looking at a black future," Fatima Meer calmly told her largely white audience. She was, of course, not being pessimistic. By the year 2000 South Africa's urban population is expected to number around 40 million — 34 million of those people will be black. "What we now have to ensure is that that black future is a happy one," said Prof Meer.

The challenge contained in that observation was also heard in most of the other papers delivered at Idasa's "Peace and Security" conference which took place in Durban at the end of July. Speaker after speaker emphasised that the road to peace and security runs through the successful accommodation of black aspirations; that whites have no hope of finding security in isolation and that they should start defining themselves as part of a majority — not a minority; that an understanding of "corrective equality" would be a vital ingredient of a peaceful future.

There was a recurring appeal to the black community as well: several speakers and members of the audience asked that whites' attempts to bring about change be taken seriously; that their strategies, although differing from those of the broad democratic movement, be accorded respect too; that blacks should shed some of their mistrust and acknowledge the existence and efforts of whites who truly are "transformists".

The 300 delegates to the conference had the opportunity to examine peace and security from a wide range of perspectives which were offered in the course of an intensive programme of two plenary sessions and six concurrent seminars.

In her summary of the conference, Prof Meer, who heads the Institute of Black Research in Durban, dwelled on one of the key debates of the day: negotiation. Consensus at the conference seemed to be that although formal negotiations were still a long way off, the government had at least acknowledged its inevitability. Prof Meer said the tea party at Tuynhuys in July had brought Afrikanerdom to the point of no return. "The two leaders met. Having gone that far, how are they (Afrikanerdom) going to retract. They have aroused expectations inside and outside the country. It is part and parcel of their survival to negotiate."

Opening the conference the previous evening, Dr Van Zyl Slabbert, Idasa's director of policy and planning, also dealt with the issue of negotiation. He said the international community had given the government a period of grace until after the September 6 election. At that point the National Party will have to face up to the fact that "security is not something which you can provide for yourself on your own".

Slabbert said the government had now reached the stage where it wanted to negotiate one constitution for all in the country. However,