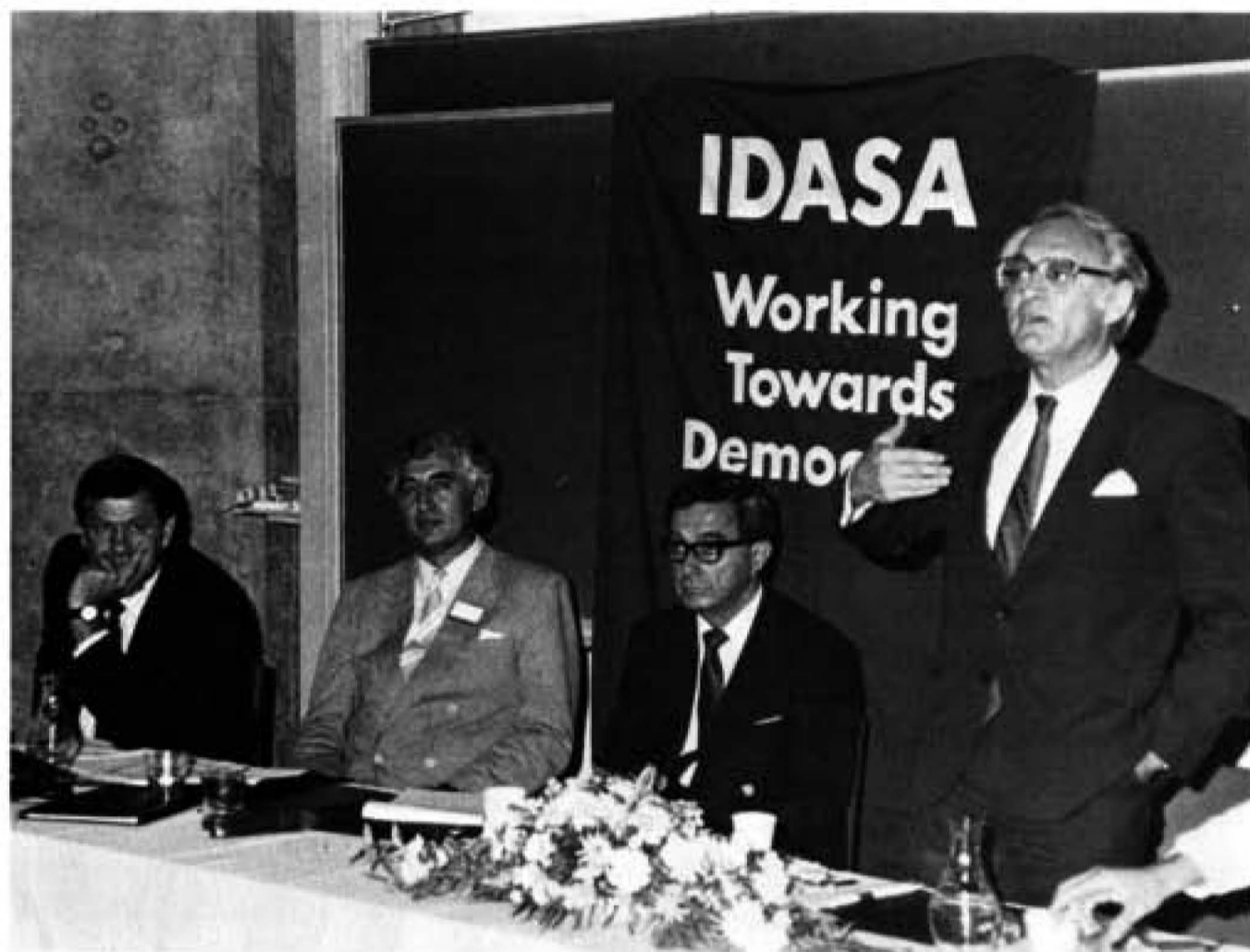


IDASA launches exploration of Strategies for Change

by Shaun Johnson
and Thami Mkhwanazi
of the *Weekly Mail*



Dr F. van Zyl Slabbert, Mr Wynand Malan (Leader of the NDM), Dr Zach de Beer (Leader of the PFP) and Dr Dennis Worrall (Leader of the IP) discuss their positions and strategies.

GAVIN SINCLAIR

LAST week's "Strategies for Change" conference did not — as the wilder sort of speculator might have hoped after scanning the list of participants — yield a new political party. Nor did it produce a new strategic blueprint for anti-apartheid activism.

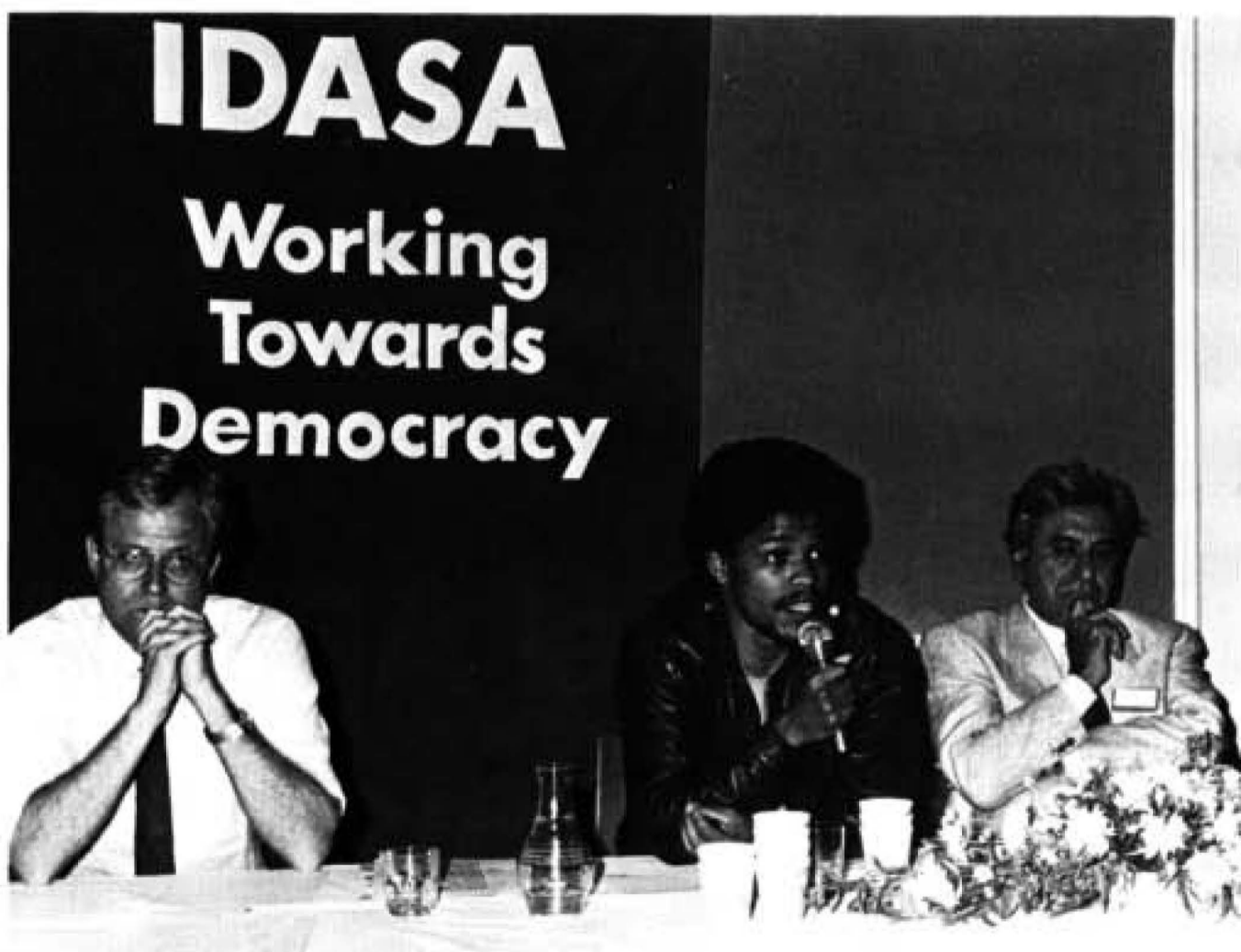
But from IDASA's Johannesburg gathering there did emerge a single, unifying *cri de coeur* — one so impassioned it could have the effect of regaling the myriad forces of opposition.

The cry was encapsulated right at the outset of the two-day conference. Institute director Frederik van Zyl Slabbert said of the current South African situation: "Those who govern are poor in vision and rich in strategy, and those who oppose are rich in vision and poor in strategy."

This was clearly identified as the crux of the impasse, and acknowledged by delegate after delegate. More than ever before, it was agreed, the vast majority of South Africans are passionately committed to a democratic and non-racial future. And less than ever is there a cogent, directed and dynamic set of strategies in pursuance of that goal.

The desire — even desperation — for new tactics was palpable on the conference floor throughout the two days of proceedings, and wholly overshadowed the differences among delegates. To the observer it seemed clear that if IDASA was asked for its *raison d'être*, it need only point to the sea of concerned delegates, eschewing political posturing because the hunger for new direction is so acute.

That future tactics did not emerge in blueprint form should not have come as a surprise. More importantly, the meeting may well come to be hailed as the progenitor of an



Mr Andrew Boraine of UCT, Mr Frank Meintjies (Information Officer of COSATU) and Prof Gerry Coovadia (Vice-President of the Natal Indian Congress).

GAVIN SINCLAIR

important new phase of "broad front" anti-apartheid politics.

The conference, which brought together representatives in the spheres of politics, labour, business, religion, education and community development, focused on five key areas in which new strategies for change could be developed.

The composition of the first "political" panel excited much interest, bringing together the leaders of the Progressive Federal Party, the National Democratic Movement and the Independent Party in the immediate wake of a meeting convened by industrialist and rugby administrator Louis Luyt.

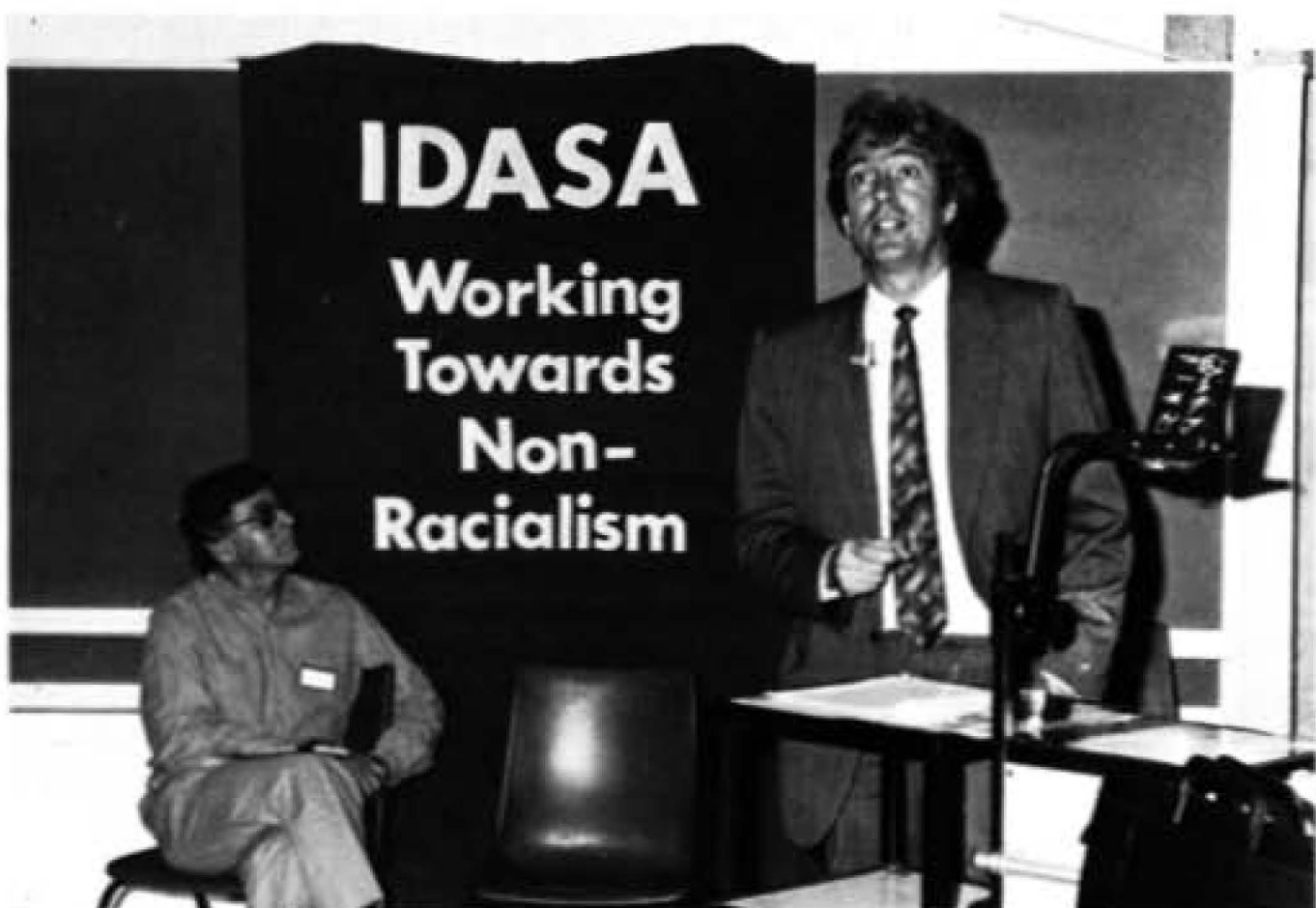
Those who expected a dramatic announcement of unity were disappointed. But there was telling agreement on the need for fresh ideas, and an inkling of openness to them which has long been lacking in white parliamentary politics. Thus the thread, to run unbroken through the conference, was immediately spun by figures from differing backgrounds.

Other areas focused upon were the roles of the church, local government initiatives, the economy, and the international arena — and in each, while there was intensive debate and disagreement, it was tempered by the shared belief in the need for new approaches.

Several leading South Africans participated, including the Congress of South African Trade Unions' Information Officer Frank Meintjies, Natal Indian Congress' Vice-President Professor Gerry Coovadia, Johannesburg Consolidated Investments' Chief Economics Consultant Ronnie Bethlehem, and the Director of Wits University's Centre for Policy Studies, Professor Lawrence Schlemmer.

The closest the conference came to a distillation of areas of accord was the concluding address — "Towards a non-racial democracy" by IDASA Executive Director Alex Borraine. He said "considerable consensus had been achieved", and isolated three broad areas of agreement which served to unify the somewhat heterodox collection of delegates.

There was acceptance, he said, of "the need to distinguish between principle and strategy" in devising new tools for dismantling apartheid. "Strategy," he said, "must not be elevated to the level of principle."



Dr Ronnie Bethlehem, Chief Economics Consultant for JCI, and Prof Pieter le Roux of the Institute for Social Development at UWC.



Some of the 350 delegates attending the conference.



Ms Melody Emmett (convenor), Mrs Paddy Clark, Ms Jane Doherty and Ms Lisa Seftel (IDASA staff who assisted with the conference). Ms Nancy Gasela was unavailable at the time, as was the regional director Mr Steve Fourie, who was responsible for the organisation of the conference.

GAVIN SINCLAIR

NOEL DE VRIES

KEITH WATTRUS

Thus debates about the desirability of "participation", be it in national, local or regional structures, should be conducted within the framework of tactical advances, not absolute goals. In addition, he said this should allow the latitude for "genuine strategic differences between different groups engaged in the struggle for a democratic future."

The parliamentary/extra-parliamentary conundrum, he added, could best be broached by turning the traditional dichotomy on its head: "The real question is not whether parliamentary parties can accommodate the extra-parliamentary democratic movement, but the other way around — and by remembering that what happens in the wider democratic movement is more representative of the majority of South Africans than that in the hallowed halls of parliament."

"There are different conditions in the townships and the suburbs — for some, strategies are for very survival, not just change."

Boraine also highlighted a "general commitment" among delegates to the principle of non-racial democracy, but said people understood the term in different ways — another gathering was needed to "re-discover the content of the goal itself".

Expanding on Slabbert's opening caveat that "we are going to work much harder and longer (for the realisation of non-racial democracy) than we had imagined." Boraine said the time had come "for all of us to be a little more modest about our claims, more realistic". This meant "actually inventing new strategies, new ways, if we are not going to continue following slavishly those which got us nowhere in the past. We must abandon those that do not work."

There was no question, however, that the government could be induced to change by "nice, intellectual and academic" imprecations. "It is futile to think a willingness of the other side to change will occur without pressure being brought to bear on them," said Boraine. This would be one of the tasks of any new "coalition of democrats" which could be brought into being.

The viability of such a coalition could best be explored by the calling of "a smaller meeting of representatives of those involved in the anti-apartheid struggle," he said.



Mr Mark Orkin, Director of the Community Agency for Social Enquiry.

KEITH WATTRUS

Irrespective of this, however, Boraine held up "one key factor with the potential to break the (state/resistance) deadlock."

"Is there one catalyst to break the cycle of despair and violence," he asked, "and not just another strike, or school boycott, or united political party of the white left?" His answer, ringingly affirmative, was that the release of African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela was potentially just such a political accelerator.

"All the other developments might have to take place," he said, "but we have within our grasp one thing capable of breaking the deadlock . . . and on which we can unite while still in our disparate movements and groups."

"I am not saying Mandela will be the catalyst if released on compassionate grounds, or into a larger prison like Govan Mbeki. I am saying that if he is able to be released as a major statesman we can begin to edge towards the pre-negotiation period which we are not in yet."

"If it just means meetings, marches and outbursts of emotional fervour, the state will just clamp down again. I argue that we must combine all our pressures (to make the most of) someone who enjoys the support and admiration of the vast majority of South Africans . . . The government must be convinced that in Nelson Mandela they have someone who can be the catalyst for negotiation."

IDASA research consultant Lisa Seftel also isolated new strategic opportunities created by changed conditions. There seemed to be a general acceptance, she said, "that parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forces for change need to recognise each other. There is an urgent need for greater co-ordination between the two, and better organisation within the extra-parliamentary sphere."

"The need for the education of whites is more critical than ever, as is the urgency of bringing whites and blacks together, especially the youth." Seftel further stressed the challenge of focusing on "bread and butter issues — the Group Areas Act for example" as a constituent part of anti-apartheid activity.

The conference was lengthy, intensive and draining. It took a rather special intervention to ensure that it ended on a note as high as was necessary to provide the impetus for the initiatives which must of needs follow.

The words were provided by Patrick "Terror" Lekota, now convicted of High Treason and awaiting his sentence. Boraine called on the delegates to heed the United Democratic Front leader's message. Lekota wrote: "It is my genuine desire that when freedom comes, it should not find reconciliation too far to attain . . . Non-racialism as a method embodies the process of pulling blacks and whites together so that they jointly dismantle apartheid. In the process artificial suspicions, nurtured by years of apartheid myths and propaganda, are demolished."

"And when freedom comes, it will not be the victory of blacks over whites but that of the people of South Africa over an evil system that has for so long set them against one another. The non-violent path is the one that creates the greatest possibility of bringing black and white South Africans together."