

Involving whites in the demolition of apartheid

By Tony Karon

In recent years the MDM's approach to working among whites has moved from a narrow focus on the small group of whites prepared to align themselves directly with the MDM, to seeking to influence mainstream white politics.



A contingent from the Afrikaanse Demokratiese Party

ANC PRISONER Ahmed Kathrada's first public address in more than 25 years was a passionate and deeply moving account of his movement's commitment to a non-racial future. "We have to persuade our white compatriots that the greatest dangers facing them, their children and their future, are not the black people, are not the ANC or the South African Communist Party, not Archbishop Tutu or Dr Allan Boesak," said Kathrada. "Their greatest enemy is apartheid, the National Party, the Conservative Party and all those who still propagate under different names the policy of white separateness and white supremacy."

Kathrada's speech also captured a key strategic dilemma faced by the MDM in its attempts to reach whites: "After we exclude the active but relatively small white groupings such as Jodac, the Cape Democrats, Nusas, the End Conscription Campaign and the Black Sash, not a single one of the white political parties comes anywhere near to accepting the type of society that we envisage in a free and non-racial democratic South Africa."

The MDM's ideological lodestar is the Freedom Charter, which proclaims that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white". Non-racialism has therefore long been a non-negotiable principle for its adherents. Over the decades, hundreds of whites have joined the active ranks of the MDM and its predecessors. Names like Bram Fischer, Helen Joseph, Ruth First and Joe Slovo figure prominently in the iconography of the liberation struggle. Indeed, the UDF had to sacrifice the potential support of Black Consciousness organisations for its insistence on including organisations based in the white community. Familiar anti-apartheid veterans like Helen Joseph and Beyers Naude

were prominent on UDF platforms, at meetings held in both black and white areas. The "white democrats" who filled these structures were those who were prepared to accept the programme and discipline of the MDM. Besides structuring the participation of whites in broader MDM campaigns, "white democrat" structures of the MDM were traditionally charged with the responsibility of projecting the movement's objectives in their own community, in order to bolster support.

While always a part of its programme, work among whites has never been the priority of the MDM. The MDM sees the political and economic power of collective action by the majority as the motive force of change in South Africa. Its priority has therefore always been organising that power in the townships.

In recent years the MDM's approach to working among whites has moved from a narrow focus on the small group of whites prepared to align themselves directly with the MDM, to seeking to influence mainstream white politics. UDF-affiliated organisations of white democrats are a small presence in the white community - nationally their combined membership is under 2 000, mostly ex-students, professionals and intellectuals.

The white UDF affiliates are more of a work-team for the MDM, than representatives of a substantial white constituency. Nonetheless, their energy facilitates an impact disproportionate to their numbers. Their rallies, pickets, pamphleteering drives, house meetings and cultural events created a presence for the MDM within the broader community of anti-apartheid whites.

Of course the UDF affiliates are not the only game in town. The Black Sash and the End Conscription Campaign have reached wider constituencies, at the same time as

winning the respect of the MDM for their contributions. Until fairly recently, however, most white opponents of apartheid maintained a narrow parliamentary view of opposition. With a few notable exceptions, the "official opposition" remained disdainful of the MDM until 1986. The UDF, on the other hand, called on whites to abandon parliament and join the extra-parliamentary movement.

The Front viewed parliament as an "institution of minority rule". Its opposition to co-optation through the tricameral parliament made the idea of parliamentary participation anathema to the UDF. Hence, between the parliamentary perceptions of most anti-apartheid whites, and the MDM's demand that whites quit parliament, there was very little meeting point during the early 1980s.

THE burgeoning strength of the MDM, and the consequent crisis in white politics, changed the situation. The nation-wide township revolt of 1985-6 marked a crisis-point for white politics. The government's reform programme lay in tatters, and the townships were aflame. White politics floundered in turmoil. PFP and business delegates took the (then) unprecedented step of meeting with the ANC. Opposition leaders Van Zyl Slabbert and Alex Boraine resigned from parliament to pursue extra-parliamentary alternatives. By 1986, large sections of the white political establishment had realised that the major political contest in South Africa would not be fought in parliament, but between the NP and its extra-parliamentary opponents. The Rubicon speech of 1985 made it clear that Botha offered no political solution.

While the MDM's politics was not exactly palatable in establishment opposition circles, they began to view it as an alterna-



er City meeting in October.

AFRPIX

Finding the formula . . . for a change

By Paul Graham

THE State President's actions and rhetoric have unleashed a dynamic of change which must be managed and encouraged, according to participants in a recent Idasa workshop on change in the white community.

Referring to the "slippery slope" in which change is gathering momentum of which few people are able to determine the outcome, the workshop sat down to devise strategies for change which would take account of the fluid and open moment in the country's history.

Participants at the workshop came from organisations and institutions working as change agents in the white community. The 36 people did not represent particular organisations but were drawn from human resource consultancies, church organisations and political organisations based in Natal, the Transvaal and the Eastern Cape.

At the workshop time was given to each person to describe strategies they had used and to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Amongst the many described, two strategies provoked a great deal of interest.

Tots Against Apartheid (TAA) is a campaign to encourage parents not to register their children at birth. Registration is linked directly to one of the pillars of apartheid, the Population Registration Act which categorises people by race. TAA provides parents with a rationale for their action and a support base from which they can express their disagreement with racial divisions.

The second strategy, whereby it is attempted to involve people in working for a non-racial democracy, involves the Black Sash of Port Elizabeth who keeps lists of all people who write letters to the newspaper expressing their disapproval of aspects of apartheid. The Black Sash then invite these people to an introductory meeting. The strategy includes providing transport as they have discovered how many women are isolated and unable to travel.

Many other ideas were shared and discussed and this activity in itself provided a major affirmation that change agents are working successfully in the white community. There was also a realisation that the most successful long term strategies for bringing about change often took a great deal of time and resources and seemed to be irrelevant to the major issues of the day.

The difficulties of doing this became apparent as people working with the business constituency came to terms with the reality that they were often in competition with one another out in the market place.

The workshop process enabled people to overcome this difficulty and produced a number of creative responses to the present context. In doing this they were guided by a working model of change that had been generated early in the conference by the novel method of reflecting on the personal experiences of the people present.

Agreeing with Roger Roman, a business consultant and part of the Five Freedoms Forum business group, that "we cannot change people, people change" the group attempted to define the environment within which people found it most easy to change.

This should include first hand exposure to other realities, a community of support and challenge in which the changes happening can be interpreted and re-inforced, and redefining individual self-interest as linked to the interests of other people. In this process values played a crucial role in either retarding change or encouraging it and a great deal of attention needed to be given to the ways in which people consider and reflect on their or alternate value systems.

The programme used this working model together with an analysis of the key forces encouraging and discouraging change in the

tive with which they could engage. Thus the beginning of a series of indabas both inside and outside the country, at which the leadership of the ANC, UDF and Cosatu met with Afrikaner intellectuals, captains of industry, opposition MPs and a range of others. For both sides the experience was novel and challenging. The State of Emergency, and the detention of tens of thousands of activists, made it clear to the MDM that the government was not about to collapse. While its emphasis remained organising its mass following as the major force for change, the MDM noted the shifts in white politics.

UDF and Cosatu documents began to stress the need to isolate the government from all potential allies in the white community. Thus, from a position which simply urged whites to leave parliament and join the MDM, the emphasis now became maximising opposition to apartheid on all fronts. "The white community does not have a history of extra-parliamentary opposition," UDF acting publicity secretary Murphy Morobe told an interviewer early in 1986. "The whole tradition of boycott politics has not been prevalent, so a different approach is needed."

A new dynamic in white opposition was heralded by the Dakar meeting between the ANC leadership and a delegation of prominent white establishment figures in 1987. The desertion of Afrikaans intellectuals from the National Party grew in size and scope. Elements inside parliament, like Wynand Malan and rebel-Prog Jan Van Eck, began to test a bridging role between the MDM and white establishment politics.

A Five Freedoms Forum conference in September 1987 turned into the first major indaba on strategies between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition. At that gathering, the MDM revealed its concern to reach whites beyond the small group already within its ranks. "I believe there are thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of white people in South Africa who desire an end to apartheid and want to see genuine negotiation, but we only see a tiny proportion of them getting involved in anti-apartheid organisations," Rapu Molekane, secretary general of UDF's most militant affiliate, the South African Youth Congress, told the FFF conference. "We need to do far more to ensure that these people find a place for themselves to work effectively for change. They may not support all the aims of the democratic movement but may nevertheless have an enormous amount to contribute in building a new South Africa."

UDF treasurer Azar Cachalia was even more direct: "Let us be self-critical and admit that our work in the white community has

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white community to develop potential new strategies.

Richard Steele, International Fellowship of Reconciliation worker, described these as "Yes, and . . ." strategies which would encourage people to continue taking the initiatives they believe to be significant and would then stretch them to go further.

In a summary statement on the forces for change, the workshop identified that the de-racialisation of society is happening, that the African National Congress is achieving general prominence, and that the nature of a post-apartheid society is now on everyone's agenda. In the area of negotiations the questions are about control of the process and who is taking the initiative rather than about whether negotiations are possible.

All these factors make it difficult to work with the old divides and rhetoric. As one person put it, "we must talk with the people in the National Party and not treat them as the enemy."

It could be dangerous to criticise the present changes being promoted by the South African government because it could marginalise people opposed to apartheid in the white community. This was mentioned as an important reason for adopting a positive approach.

Paul Graham is Natal Regional Director of Idasa.

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perhaps been narrow in that we have not been able to reach out to significant sections of the white community. If we are not going to be able to turn enough whites against apartheid, the struggle is going to be much longer and much more painful. So in making a call to whites, the UDF is not narrowly asking them to join the UDF affiliates, or support the UDF. It is a call for whites to break decisively from apartheid and to act against it." Hence the MDM's recognition of a white 'middle ground' who were not prepared to align directly with the MDM, but were prepared to oppose apartheid.

WHILE parliamentary participation by white opposition parties could not be endorsed by the MDM, it could no longer be a stumbling block in the search for joint action against apartheid. In different parts of the country, alliances spanning traditional divides emerged over issues like the Group Areas Act and human rights abuses. A UDF official explained: "Alliances do not eliminate the differences between participants."

The parliamentary and extra-parliamentary groups differ significantly over the future socio-economic system, and strategies like sanctions, armed struggle and participation in government-created structures.

Elections obviously remain a point of difficulty. The MDM has toned down calls for whites to leave parliament, and has not campaigned for boycotts of white elections. They insist, however, that their respect for the strategies pursued by the anti-apartheid white political parties demands an

Activists work out solutions

By Sue Britton

THE struggle on the way towards a democratic society in South Africa is long and costly. The road is hard to find and there are no clear answers to the questions about which way is best. Most maps seem to confuse the route rather than make it more clear.

The Idasa workshop on "Strategies for Change" held in the Transvaal in November helped participants to understand this at a deeper level. Instead of listening to papers presented by experts on various aspects of the topic, and then discussing all these opinions, comparing them and drawing some conclusions, people who came to the workshop were challenged to work out their own solutions.

All the delegates were people who have been working for change in the white community for many years. Between them they had amassed a vast amount of experience. The workshop was designed to help these people share that experience and reflect on it in such a way that new strategies could emerge from the learnings.

But it didn't happen quite as easily as that. Halfway through the second day of the workshop people were struggling with the sheer amount and complexity of the information that a group of 35 highly moti-

vated and articulate activists had generated. Because everyone was also skilled in planning workshops, there were also inevitably numerous opinions as to how to work with all this information. It was a struggle indeed, and some felt it was not worth it.

But for those who recognised the need for and value of allowing a creative process to take its course, the seeming intractability of that "stuck" time was a challenge to persevere and not to give up the process. Participants continued to struggle with how to handle the information so that it would yield results.

And yield results it did - and they were gold. As participants gathered on the grass in the sunshine on the Sunday morning, it was clear that a shift had taken place, that the creative process had given birth to a fresh understanding of change at the present time in South Africa. People articulated a variety of strategies. What was amazingly common about all of them, was the positive tone and basic trust in the people of South Africa to take control of their own lives and to create a new society of justice and peace.

Ms Britton is social action organiser for Diakonia in Durban.

equivalent respect for the major strategy pursued in black communities: non-participation. Moves by white political parties to put up candidates in coloured and Indian elections therefore put those parties on a collision course with the MDM. The Democratic Party's fielding of Indian candidates in the recent general election generated widespread hostility within the MDM.

Nonetheless, the MDM remains committed to maximising active opposition to the NP. Through its defiance campaign, the MDM reasserted the centrality of the extra-parliamentary dynamic in dictating the pace of change. "The defiance campaign has created further cracks within the ruling bloc," an MDM spokesperson recently observed. "White mayors and councillors have joined the marches against apartheid. This is a victory for the struggling people of South Africa."

The defiance campaign underlined the challenge of organising the thousands of whites who joined its marches and beach picnics. The MDM will obviously seek to draw as many as possible directly into its structures, through its white affiliates. Some potential recruits balk at the idea of participating through a predominantly white affiliate. At present, however, the MDM's very strength is premised upon building its residentially-based structures. In practice, this means that the Group Areas Act determines the composition of its primary structures (although these are drawn together in non-racial co-ordinating structures and campaign work).

The breakdown of residential segregation in some city centres presents prospects for a new type of organisation, but at present the dilemma over non-racial structures

continues. The number of whites who will directly join the MDM is still a minority, even among anti-apartheid whites. The MDM is therefore faced with the challenge of relating to those outside of its own ranks. Here the object is to seek a consistent programme of joint action on immediate issues, such as segregation of residential areas and schools.

White workers

Although not a priority, Cosatu is also committed to joint action with white workers over economic grievances, which they hope will ultimately draw those workers into non-racial trade unionism. There have been limited but significant successes on this front. The deteriorating economic position of white workers increases the potential for such action. The Conference for a Democratic Future scheduled for early December reflects the MDM's concern to unite the widest possible anti-apartheid front. Here again, the question of drawing in a wider range of whites is a concern. "The CDF should not be indecisive about making further progress in this regard. We should seek ways of engaging in action all forces who are breaking away from the ruling bloc," an MDM spokesperson said.

It can be expected that the programme of action adopted by the CDF will give attention to the objective of drawing large numbers of whites into mass activity. Whether it be directly within its structures, or through alliances, the MDM is taking more seriously than ever the challenge of involving the maximum number of whites in the demolition of apartheid.

Tony Karon is the editor of New Era magazine.