

# DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

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## A homecoming in Paris

By Ronel Scheffer

FOR A brief moment in Paris earlier this month some 100 South Africans had a rare taste of being fêted by the world. Europe's most charming city opened its heart to them in an almost overwhelming display of generosity and support for their efforts to resolve the conflict in their country. Escorted through the wintry avenues of Paris by presidential outriders and entertained in ministerial banquet halls, the group had cause to be both humble and proud.

South Africa had barely started out on the road of attaining the noble objectives of the French Revolution of two centuries ago, and yet many in the group had decades of proud struggle behind them, had experienced extreme suffering and made huge sacrifices - between them a total of 150 years behind bars, in fact. It was no coincidence therefore that the debate at the six-day Paris conference hosted by France Libertés, the human rights arm of the Danielle Mitterand Foundation, was characterised by an unusual spirit of humility, expressed almost without exception by all those among the diverse group of South Africans, the majority of them in key leadership positions in politics, business, labour, academia and the press.

There were important differences of perception and position in many areas, ranging from the De Klerk government's contribution and intentions to the relationship between revolution and negotiations and methods of restructuring the economy to achieve both growth and a redistribution of wealth. But there was remarkable common ground as well. Delegates agreed that the process of achieving a non-racial democracy had to be accelerated and that the internal debate between the opponents of apartheid must become more vigorous; that the white community must more actively be integrated in this process; that it would be counter-productive to build group rights into a future constitution, and that the return of ANC exiles was a matter of urgency.



Delegates to the Paris conference Hein Willemse of UWC, ANC members Pallo Jordan and Neo Mnumzana, and Dr Sam Motsuenyane, a Johannesburg business leader, at the new entrance to the Louvres. Idasa assisted in organising the conference.

On the first day of the conference the first lady of France, whose personal involvement with the dialogue programme between exiled members of the ANC and their compatriots inside the country goes back to the historical 1987 Dakar conference, placed her foundation's invitation to the South African delegation in the context of France Libertés' commitment to building a fairer world. She noted that at a time when dictatorships around the world are being abolished, South Africans are "awakening from the nightmare of apartheid". The world consciousness is expanding fast, she added, and ignorance can no longer be a pretext to justify passivity in the realm of extending human rights to people throughout the world. France Libertés, she said, was honoured to participate in a small way while South Africans were writing a page in their history.

Over the next five days, as delegates grappled with a wide range of crucial issues and debates surrounding the transition to a non-racial democracy in South

Africa, it became clear that Madame Mitterand's expectations of the conference were not exaggerated. The presence of both ANC leaders and leading MDM activists clearly introduced an important dynamic in the discussion, elevating the debate throughout. ANC leaders, white businessmen, unionists and activists in the mass democratic movement, leading journalists, academics and even a lone National Party supporter visibly moved closer together and were indeed writing a page in the country's history, and probably in an unprecedented spirit of honesty and openness as well.

It moved UDF publicity secretary Murphy Morobe in the final session to remark that despite the vigorous debate "it is almost magic that we leave this conference with not one of us showing a scratch from another".

"We are beginning to learn very critically from the lessons history has taught us - not to shy away from contradictions because without disagreement and

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# More talks with ANC needed, says Volksblad editor

**HENNIE** van Deventer, editor of Volksblad and a great admirer of F W de Klerk, returned from the Paris indaba committed to drawing other members of the Afrikaner establishment into discussions with the ANC and leaders in extra-parliamentary politics.

He felt enriched by the discussions and found it particularly valuable to hear how members of the ANC motivate and defend some of their "unpopular" positions in debate. "I am in a much better position now to authoritatively deliver comment on extra-parliamentary politics," he said.

He admits to having felt uncomfortable with some aspects of the discussions, but agrees that being in a position to "put faces to names" takes some of the sting out of impressions based on press reports.

Van Deventer, editor of Volksblad for the past 10 years, believes that Afrikaans newspapers should inform their readers more fully on the views of extra-parliamentary groups to overcome their extensive ignorance in that area.

Afrikaner intellectuals too should be more receptive to the views of the democratic movement, and also use opportunities for dialogue to voice their own aspirations to that community.

As far as his own role as newspaper editor is concerned, Van Deventer plans to step up the content of Volksblad on black views. "I will certainly make more information available to my readers, but it will not necessarily be sympathetic reporting. In fact, I have returned with some ammunition to still defend some of my earlier viewpoints."



The editor of the Bloemfontein newspaper Volksblad, Mr Hennie van Deventer, and Mr Thabo Mbeki, the ANC's director of international affairs.

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contradiction there can only be stagnation and no development," he said.

As the conference drew to a close, however, an ANC leader cautioned that constant focus on strategies to end apartheid should not overshadow the actuality of what is happening on the ground in South Africa. In spite of many positive developments, repression was continuing along with reform in the country, and there was enormous suffering among millions of people in the region. "We have an urgent task to end the hunger, to end the poverty, to end the death," he said, also focusing again on the need for unity among all South Africans. "None of us acting alone will be able to end the system of apartheid. We have to act together and find out what we need to do together to get to that commonly defined future."

Perceptions differed sharply on the motivating force behind the more liberal management style of the new National Party leader. At the one end of the spectrum MDM and ANC leaders insisted that F W de Klerk had not had a change of heart, but that he was acting under the pressure of internal and external forces mobilised by the democratic movement, and indeed merely shifting the line of defence. It was not apartheid that De Klerk wanted to save but power and control, argued the director of the Legal Resources Centre in Port Elizabeth, Fikile Bam. "In the process De Klerk is even prepared to put apartheid in jeopardy," said Bam.

At the other end of the spectrum, the editor of the Bloemfontein-based Volksblad, Hennie van Deventer, maintained that De Klerk's initiatives were not a "cynical exercise to maintain strategic advantage" but the result of a moral

**"It is almost magic that we leave this conference with not one of us showing a scratch from another."**

awakening of consciousness among the Afrikaner leadership who sincerely wanted to establish a just and equitable society. In this context Idasa's director of policy and planning, Van Zyl Slabbert, cautioned against the rarefication of any particular form of struggle to end apartheid, stressing the importance of both the planned and unplanned forces of change. "The whole South African situation is driven by an internal dynamic," he said.

As the debate shifted to negotiations, Dr Willie Breytenbach of the African studies department at the University of Stellenbosch stressed that there was an inherent danger for the ANC in the De Klerk government's apparent readiness to allow mass mobilisation inside the country. "The more the government allows mass mobilisation, the higher its international credibility will grow and the ANC might well be seen as intransigent and to be delaying the process of transition," he said.

The ANC countered that its insistence on a normalisation of the political process inside South Africa was being misconstrued as pre-conditions for negotiation. Their demands for the unbanning of the

ANC, releasing of political prisoners and the lifting of the state of emergency in fact merely amounted to the creation of a climate for negotiation. But there was concern too that the ANC was approaching negotiation as a "trick used in the revolutionary paradigm". Slabbert said negotiation would unleash a dynamic which would create a completely new situation on the ground and neither side would have complete control over the agenda. Jay Naidoo of Cosatu argued that there was an inextricable link between revolution and negotiation in resolving the South African conflict, and that the one would not be possible without the other. Democratic Party co-leader Wynand Malan made a plea for flexibility on both sides. "The problems of the past will only be solved by the politics of the future," he said.

Idasa's executive director, Alex Boraine, noted the importance of the process of local level negotiations that has started in several centres of the country. Community structures were in this way beginning to challenge the power base of white councils and all parties were learning valuable lessons for future in the process.

ANC and MDM views on the participants at the national negotiating table proved interesting. While some argued against the presence of groups like Inkatha (because it is not active in the struggle against apartheid) in a formal negotiating forum, it appeared that there may be room for all significant groups at the table but that it will consist basically of two sides - with those who share the vision of ANC and MDM on one side and the rest on the opposite side.

There was a tentative exploration too of the concept of an honest broker to super-



# The human face of socialism

**A SOMEWHAT** protracted debate on sanctions in the French National Assembly on the second day of the Paris indaba put the conference in the right frame of mind to seriously deliberate the future of the economy, a debate which emerged as the most fruitful part of the discussion.

JCI economist Ronnie Bethlehem suggested that delegates should bury the

Africa needed a mixed economy, but the question was "how to get the mix of the mixed economy right", said Pieter le Roux of the University of the Western Cape. The present vast inequalities were the result of "apartheid on top of capitalism" and there was an urgent need for investment in human capital - which could be a form of redistribution of wealth - to secure the survival of the economy in the long-



Van Zyl Slabbert, Madame Danielle Mitterrand, Prime Minister Michel Rocard and Alex Boraine.

hatchet on sanctions as it really was "yesterday's debate". The most important issue that needed to be settled was the redistribution of wealth and growth of the economy, and "tomorrow's debate" would be the meaningful integration of South Africa's economy with that of the sub-region.

The undisputable star of the economic debate was Alec Irwin, education secretary of Numsa, who didn't mince his words and exploded a myth-a-minute as he set out to prove that labour was not intent on destroying the economy.

"We do not hide the fact that we have a socialist approach, but our concern is the development of the whole society and to do that we need a coherent approach." He identified the central areas of dispute as that of growth and ownership. On both issues capitalists had outmoded ideas, he claimed. "The important question is whether people are being employed while we grow, are we talking about caviar or food."

There was some consensus that South

term.

Le Roux said nationalisation drove the "fear of hell" into capitalists, but at issue was not so much who owns the means of production, but how to establish democratic control over the surplus.

Irwin argued strongly that neither free market capitalism nor command economy socialism could solve the critical unemployment problem, low wage levels, vast housing shortages and the housing and education crises.

Current privatisation policies would prove disastrous - what was needed was an investment policy which would ensure that companies were internationally competitive, the cost of production was lowered and employment increased.

Irwin said the labour movement was critical in its approach to socialism and had no objection to an interchange with economists to begin to fashion policies to deal with the problems of the economy. Labour was also not proposing the nationalisation of every company, but would insist that any restructuring be democratically planned.



Towards the end of the discussions they had clearly achieved a more open attitude towards each other. There was a plea from business that the adversarial relationship between business and the unions should be played down so that they may arrive at a point where everyone saw themselves as stakeholders in companies. JCI chairman Murray Hofmeyer maintained his position that business needs to take advantage of any opportunities it may get to influence the government. It was untenable for business and labour to continue lambasting one another with "recrimination upon recrimination", he said. The time had come for serious dialogue between these two parties in the economy. On the side of the unions there was an encouraging recognition of the importance of the business community in the generation of wealth.

In the closing session of the conference, the vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town, Professor Stuart Saunders,



UDF national treasurer Azhar Cachalia and Murray Hofmeyer.

highlighted a lesson that was implicit throughout the deliberations. He said although it was generally agreed that negotiation had to come as quickly as possible, it was vital to remember that these negotiations should be aimed at securing the future. The debate on the economy therefore had to be extended as a matter of urgency to investment and participation in programmes to improve of education, health and housing, the critical areas of need in the country.

Breyten Breytenbach, the world renowned South African poet who "master minded" the conference and the lavish reception in Paris of his fellow South Africans, remarked that there was a need to strengthen the dynamic process between our methods and what we are aiming for. "We should try to take as many people as possible with us."

At the end of the Paris indaba, one was left wondering how long Idasa could continue to play a role in initiating debates of this nature beyond the borders of the country. Clearly everyone at the conference was feeling the effects of this dimension of the South African schizophrenia. Everyone wanted the ANC to come home soon, not only to end the personal suffering of the individuals concerned, but also so that their remarkable vision of the future can be shared among all South Africans.

## NEGOTIATION

# World watch as NP, ANC manoeuvre for moral high ground

By Pierre de Vos

**ALTHOUGH** both the National Party and the ANC have in principle endorsed the concept of negotiation, it is clear that the two groups hold profoundly different views on what the result of these negotiations should be.

Both groups would like to see their constitutional framework adopted as a starting point. At present, both parties are manoeuvring themselves into a position which would enable them to gain the initiative for the moral high ground without a commitment at this stage to sit down at the negotiating table.

The eventual outcome of this game may hinge on the government's willingness to accept a negotiated settlement that would culminate in the handing over of power from the white minority to the majority of the people in South Africa. This in turn may depend on whether the opposition forces would be willing to sacrifice at least some of their principles to entice the government into striking a bargain.

At present the possibility of such a historic compromise seems most unlikely - not the least because this would entail that the present government would then become the first power in the history of the world to voluntarily negotiate themselves out of power.

But in the rapidly changing world in which we find ourselves almost anything seems possible. Despite the very conservative record built up by State President FW De Klerk before his election as leader of the NP, he started talking about the promotion of a climate for negotiations shortly after ousting PW Botha.

But the fact that the once mighty and rigid National Party has transformed itself into a flexible and, some would argue, much more dangerous opponent, does not mean that the party is on the defensive and on the brink of going into "surrender talks".

According to Prof Hennie Kotzé, head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Stellenbosch, the state of the economy had a lot to do with the way De Klerk acted during his first two months in power. The devastating effect of the economic isolation of South Africa, the difficulty in repaying foreign debt and the absence of a foreign banker for the developing country all contributed to make the government realise that "things can't go on as they used to".

According to Kotzé, the Minister of Fi-

nance, Mr Barend du Plessis, had no final control over government spending before De Klerk took over. "He could not bring the reality of the economic situation home to the Cabinet. But that is all changing now."

The government's skilful handling of the Commonwealth summit in Kuala Lumpur and the successful re-negotiation of their foreign debt demonstrated a new understanding of the political and economic realities they find themselves in. "De Klerk knew he had to deliver something to stave off the sanctions threat in Kuala Lumpur," says Kotzé.

The question remains, however, whether De Klerk's tenure in office won't be a repeat performance of that of former President Botha. Will the new president turn out to be a smiling version of the previous NP leader?

James Selfe, Democratic Party member of the President's Council and DP research officer, is one of many people involved in Parliamentary politics who believe that De Klerk is qualitatively different from his predecessor. "It might even be that the man had a ideological change of heart after coming into office. He is definitely far more clever than PW. Intellectually he has accepted that the present regime is unacceptable."

### Tactics

Whatever the political make-up of President De Klerk may be, his new tactics have forced both the MDM internally and the ANC externally to change their tactics. The ANC and the MDM met in Lusaka in July to thrash out a position on negotiations.

New Nation, a newspaper which supports the MDM, commented recently that the Lusaka meeting came out of the realisation that "the imperialists and the regime" hoped to win new space and regain the initiative by launching a negotiation initiative with which they plan to confuse, divide and demobilise anti-apartheid forces.

Titus Mafolo, a member of the UDF executive, explained that the MDM also viewed negotiations as a weapon used by both sides to advance their interests and positions. "Thus it is important that we see negotiations as part of struggle to be waged simultaneously with other forms of struggle. Some liberals argue that negotiations will solve all our problems. But this is based on the mistaken view that conflict between the NP and the ANC is based on a misunderstanding.

"The ANC and the government represent classes whose objective interests are in