

Sowing non-violent s

WHAT DID we expect to happen when apartheid went or began to die? A great loss of life was in fact predicted by elements in Umkhonto we Sizwe and also in the security forces. Figures cited were of as many as three million people being killed either to maintain apartheid or to destroy it. That's almost 10 percent of our population.

In 1979 the South African Council of Churches asked me to head their commission on violence and non-violence. At one of our earliest meetings we looked at the situation and we could not see how it would be resolved by anything other than war or something pretty near to it.

Yet we resolved that we were not going to give up the beliefs that we had acquired from Mahatma Gandhi and others. We would go on sowing the seeds of non-violence, ways of action and hope that would grow when the fire had passed.

As it happened, those seeds grew better and quicker than we had expected. And I believe they actually influenced the present transition. The sowers were individuals and organisations – many adopted the methods of non-violence. This internal resistance, I believe, saved us much loss of life in producing the turnabout that we saw in February 1990.

Of course the external pressure of sanctions also played a decisive part. But being a rather blunt instrument in terms of non-violence, sanctions left us with unemployment, with frustration and also with crime.

Drawing on worldwide experience of civil disobedience, it wasn't so hard to develop a programme against apartheid. But it is not so easy to devise a pro-



What hope does non-violent of widespread communal c Africa? ROB ROBERTSON, *Non-Violence News* for the lessons from Gandhi's life.

movements relating to this new "movement" which, again by persons rich to give vast tracts of land to the

The other was the Shanti Sena volunteers who were prepared not only to rival groups, but also to interpose themselves if violence broke out and not to strike back. T



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Non-violent seeds

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capable of being clearly understood and within the power of the opponent to yield. Civil disobedience in terms of independence, without the co-operation of the millions by way of constructive effort, is mere bravado and worse than useless."

In South Africa we took the Freedom Charter as a kind of inspirational hope, but it was not a programme of action. Instead we used civil disobedience, which became "ungovernability", to bring apartheid down, intending thereafter to rebuild. We have to pay a price now, and we should not complain. It was a half-baked approach, but better than all-out war.

We used the methods of non-violence but not always the spirit of non-violence, and I want to emphasise this. To Gandhi this spirit was fundamental. Non-violence had to be based on love, even for the opponent, and this is what made it so powerful.

We used the methods of non-violence, but sometimes the spirit of war. It is the purpose of the Fellowship of Reconciliation to regain this spirit.

Gandhi said: "Non-violence is a power that can be wielded equally by all - children, young men and women and grown people - provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and therefore equal love for all. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied in isolated acts."

Two helpful tests can be applied to test current actions to ensure this spirit. Firstly, are we trying to weaken our opponents or to empower them? There are two kinds of power. Good power is the human ability to co-operate voluntarily by persuasion. Evil power is the ability to coerce by fear or violence. It is the latter power that corrupts.

The spirit of non-violence is to help one's opponent into a wider co-operation with the rest of humanity and with oneself. "Passive resistance is an all-sided sword; it can be used anyhow; it blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used. Without drawing a drop of blood it produces far-reaching results."

'Non-violence had to be based on love, even for the opponent, and this is what made it so powerful'

The second test of the spirit of non-violence is: who bears the suffering, we or they? It is not always easy to get a clear answer here. If our non-violent action is designed to make the opponent suffer until forced to change, it's not in the spirit of non-violence. If we put ourselves in the line of suffering to highlight and absorb the violent policies of the opponent, then we are acting in the spirit of love and

We're doing okay

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finding it difficult to reach consensus.

Slabbert said this reflected a problem that would have to be resolved: a debt which was built on an apartheid budget. There was no short-term solution to existing problems in housing, education, health and social services, but it was vital that solutions be found.

Stability was also an issue which could threaten the success of the negotiations. Slabbert said the different political parties were "highly unresolved" on this question.

"If we don't settle stability it will be difficult to settle legitimacy. If there is no legitimacy, there will be no growth, and if there is no growth, there will be no redistribution."

'The politics of liberalism in tone and nature to government'

Holding elections would not solve the situation in the country, nor would it ensure stability. He said other countries which had adopted democracy, such as Chile and Poland, had a thorny issue of stability before them.

On 1 May South Africa would go to the polls but Slabbert cautioned that governments had a tendency to spend because they had the money, and were also not necessarily capable of doing so.

Slabbert listed five possible proposals:

- Composition of the government
- Co-ordination of the administration via the civil service;
- Stability of local communities
- Delivery of services;
- Political populism.

The matter of the participation of the government would need to be resolved to ensure stability by giving the Civil Service, agriculture and the army to the people, and the responsibility for health, housing and