

Meeting the people's expectations

Sisulu's challenge to business community

By Lisa Seftel

IT WAS literally a "Who's Who" of the business community that gathered at the joint Idasa/Wits Business School Graduate Association breakfast in March to hear ANC leader Walter Sisulu speak on "Meaningful Political Change: The Role of Business".

Outgoing Anglo American chairman Gavin Reilly, Reserve Bank Governor Chris Stals and JSE president Tony Norton were among the crowd of 550. A TV screen beamed Sisulu to a part of the audience in an adjoining room.

But a hectic schedule (he had returned only three days earlier from an African trip and had gone the previous day to Cape Town) had taken its toll on 77-year-old Sisulu. He did not appear to be the same person we heard at the FNB Stadium in October and had difficulty hearing questions posed to him.

Nevertheless, Sisulu's speech was not without content. He explained why he felt present government and business economic policies were not in the interest of the majority of South Africans and thus why the ANC is seeking new and original approaches and solutions.

"The history of our country has been marked by a grotesque sense of social irresponsibility on the part of the business sector towards the black people. This experi-



More than 500 business people came to hear Sisulu

ence leads us to believe that the remedies we seek will not be met by a post-apartheid state whose government refrains from intervening in the economy.

"We need to employ the powers of the resulting democratic state to bring about a planned redistribution of income and wealth in favour of the people as a whole," said Sisulu.

"Old ways of resolving the crisis have ceased to exist," he said, citing the fact that black people are no longer willing to be forces of labour as determined by government edict.

A new approach needed to begin with a recognition by the business sector that the people had unquenchable expectations that needed to be satisfied. These included a living wage, the basic requirements of social security and free and equal education.

"Whatever the rate of growth of the economy, there must be a flow of the nation's output towards meeting these expectations," said Sisulu.

This might result in a loss of profits and even a lowering of white incomes. But if we were to secure the conditions for peace, renewed economic stability and growth, we had to be prepared to make the necessary sacrifices.

A future state would require an "activist

economic programme" which could involve:

- The use of resources released by the abolition of duplicate apartheid institutions and structures;
- A movement towards the redistribution of income in favour of the people as a whole. To achieve this, business would have to play a part in funding the state's requirements, and
- A revision of the structure of relations between labour and capital in industry and business to ensure a good working relationship between trade unions and management.

Sisulu said that a mixed economy, which is what the ANC advocates, would come about through:

- The curbing of monopoly power through legislation;
- Greater diffusion of power within industry through the spread of ownership;
- The nationalisation of the privatised parastatals to maintain the industrial and service infrastructure and to move towards a redistribution of wealth, and
- Legislation to steer the economy in directions which develop adequate infrastructures for a growing population with respect to health, welfare etc. and with appropriate controlling mechanisms for preserving ecological balance.

Sisulu was at pains to stress the ANC's desire to establish a good working relationship with the business sector - aimed at a serious and productive dialogue about the policies required to secure the future of South Africa and the economy.

In conclusion, he called on the meeting "to put aside your fears and preconceived notions and join us in finding ways of addressing the very real and pressing needs of all our people".

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Fiddling against the flames

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Lewis rejects the myth that "big private bureaucracies are more efficient than big public ones" and argues for decentralisation. "Lack of democracy is also a consequence of size," he says, adding: "No one in their right mind would want to own Anglo in its present form. It is an inefficient private bureaucracy."

On the vital question of economic growth, no one has gone further than the enunciation of a few broad principles.

Erwin has delineated key areas in which research and discussion on parametric planning is taking place: investment policy, a science and technology programme, a manpower (sic) programme related to education, health and welfare, the environment, and recreation and tourism. He has also stated that Cosatu's aim is a low-cost, high-wage growth path (dismissed as "gobbledegook" by Bethlehem) but has not spelt

out any details.

But if the liberation movement has still to come up with a detailed programme that can be debated in democratic structures, it has clearly moved a great deal further than the business community.

Bethlehem admits that "things are moving too slowly", that most of the business community is "flapping all over the place" at the thought that the next government might be formed by the ANC, and that most are "still stuck in the starting position".

As one who has pleaded for business to come up with a programme for redistribution that will pre-empt the need for state action, he welcomes the open and honest raising of the nationalisation question by Mandela.

"It's very important," he says. "It's good that it's generating anxiety. There are parts of the business community for

whom the penny has dropped and they have started to put on their thinking caps."

Significantly, difficult though it may be to credit, the issue of the gross inequality that exists in South Africa is still "beyond the thinking of most business people", according to Bethlehem. "They haven't had to bother," he says.

He warns that "one has to be careful not to lead people to solutions before they recognise the problems" but it may be asking too much of the liberation movement to exercise any more patience with a wilful disregard that summons up the image of Nero fiddling against the flames.

A further consideration crying out for recognition in debates about restructuring the economy is the question of the environmental cost of endless growth. Business hasn't "had to bother" about this either.

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