

The campaign to "open" cities throughout the country is gaining momentum with major events planned in Cape Town and Johannesburg to break down Group Areas barriers in the community.

By **ANDREW CLARKE**

ALMOST every major city in South Africa is becoming an open city, and there is nothing the government can do to stop it. "Whatever the Nationalists do or refuse to do," the Rev Beyers Naudé said at a recent IDASA conference, "Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth and even Pretoria are on their way toward becoming open cities."

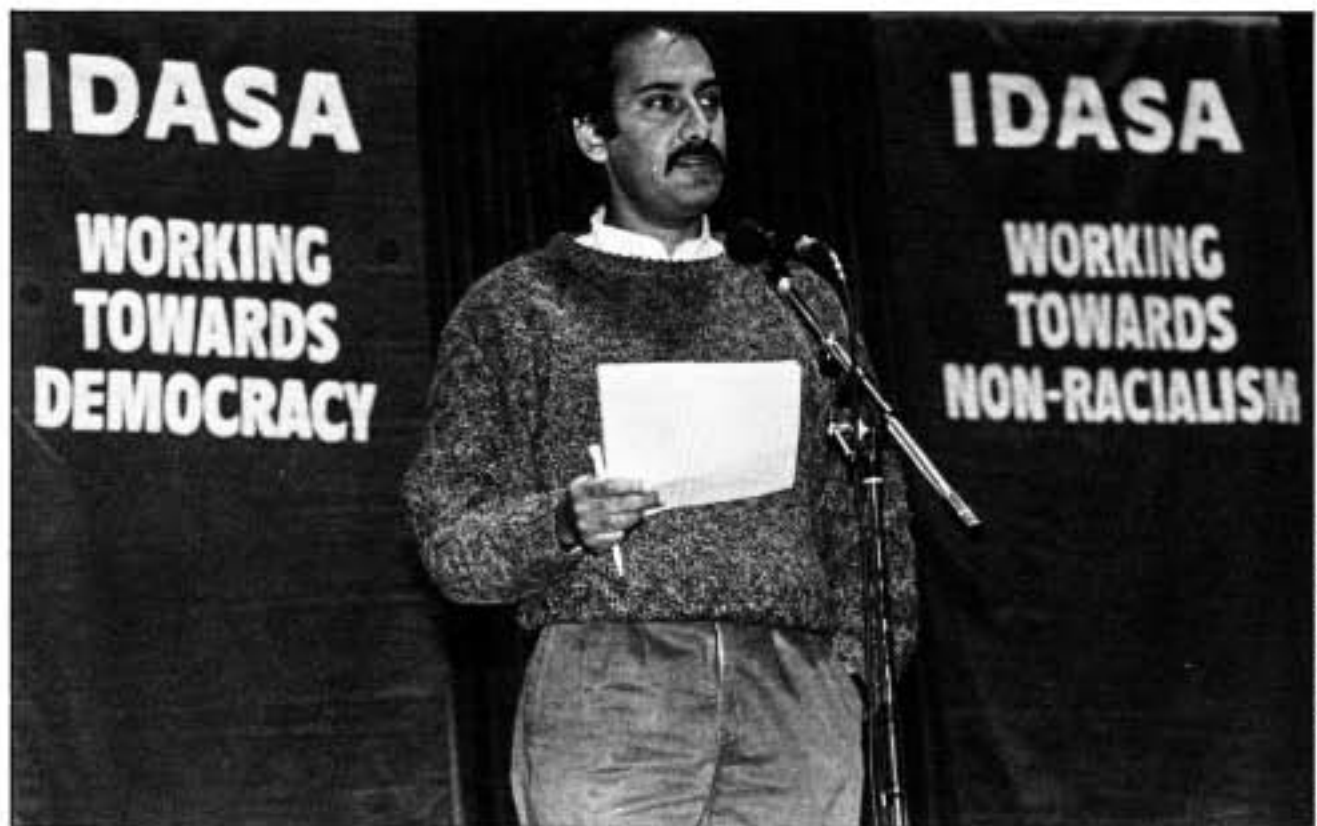
The question is not if, but only how and when housing, education, medical care, transport and recreation will be available to all citizens in the cities.

More importantly, though, the individual residents who have voted with their feet against the Group Areas Act are taking their silent protest public in a campaign to rid their communities of apartheid laws. Since the conference held in April in the Johannesburg City Hall in conjunction with the Action Committee to Stop Evictions (Actstop), groups such as the Five Freedoms Forum, Jodac, the National Medical and Dental Association, and the Black Sash have come together to organise an "inner city encounter" (June 8-10) in which dozens of prominent Johannesburgers will be invited to spend two nights at the homes of so-called "illegal" inner city residents.

Besides the intrinsic advantages of getting different people to share experiences, the exercise should focus public attention on how the Group Areas Act affects the lives of specific individuals. Further action will include a peaceful protest against segregated schools, hospitals, and "separate amenities" which might include actions of civil disobedience such as a "swim-in" at a "whites-only" pool.

"The Free Settlement Areas, although far short of a solution, have only come about because the inner cities have already been desegregated by the struggle of the people," says Cas Coovadia of Actstop who made a call for action at the April conference. Partly in response to the planned campaign of resistance, the National Party-controlled Johannesburg City Council has voted to open further public facilities, including municipal buses, to persons of colour.

Cape Town is further along the road to a non-racial society, at least as far as recreational and medical facilities are concerned. Still, a coalition of organisations including IDASA, Nusas, the Democratic Party, and the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce is launching a similar campaign focusing on education, housing, and political representation. Cape Town has the advantage of a city council controlled by the Democratic Party which recently passed a resolution demanding that "Cape Town be restored as an open city with a common voters' roll, where people are free to live where they can afford, vote for whom they want and seek



Cas Coovadia . . . call for action

Open cities cam

election to a city council free from racial discrimination".

The Cape Town council's decision is important because it highlights the role that party politics can play alongside extra-parliamentary organisations to "open" cities. But equally significant is the fact that the council decided that it would neither apply to become a "free settlement area" nor

'Opening the hospitals up would raise occupancy and lower costs'

support any applications to the Free Settlement Area Board by a suburb of the city (such as Woodstock or Rondebosch East).

"The proposed Free Settlement Areas exist because of the Group Areas Act, and I feel strongly that it is an attempt by government to contain and cope with the integration that has taken place in spite of it," councillor

Annamia van den Heever said, reiterating the opposition of many councillors to stop-gap measures which prolong the life of residential apartheid. Moreover, if only pockets of Cape Town were opened to all, there would be unhealthy pressures on both "open" and "closed" areas: the non-racial areas would have to cope with an influx of people of colour seeking secure title to their property, and the racially-zoned areas would be subject to stricter enforcement of the Group Areas Act. Instead of going the "free settlement" route, the council decided to make application to exempt Cape Town from the Group Areas Act.

The movement to open Cape Town to all echoes the first of several general themes expressed at the Johannesburg conference, one of the first to bring academic experts on "grey areas" together with doctors, lawyers, community activists and other hands-on practitioners battling on the frontlines of urban apartheid. Namely, while there was optimism about the success that "illegal" tenants have had in breaking laws keeping

Rapport: raak gewoon aan swartmense!

DIE Sondagkoerant Rapport se politieke rubriekskrywer, Pollux, het onlangs interessante opmerkings gemaak aangaande twee voorvalle rakende afsonderlike geriewe en die Groepsgebiedewet.

Hy skryf soos volg:

* Toe mog 'n swart student nie in 'n lesingsaal gaan sit wat 'n buite-instansie by die Goudstadse Onderwyskollege gehuur het nie. En daarvoor sê die rektor, prof Piet van der Merwe, in 1989, elf jaar voor die eeuwending: "Studente by GOK is nie gewoon aan swart studente op die kampus nie."

— Dan sal hulle maar moet leer om gewoon te raak. Indien nie op die kampus nie, seer sekerlik van die kampus af!

* Og, daar sê adjunk-minister Roelf Meyer dit toe weer: Die Groepsgebiedewet sal met deernis toegepas word. 'n Voorganger, mnr Marais Steyn, nou politiek ter siele, het lank, lank, lank gelede dieselfde woord in dieselfde verband gebruik . . .

— Laat my dink — as ek iemand anders sitvlak skop, sal ek dit ook ewe deernisvol doen.



STEVE HILTON-BARBER, AFP/PIX

Participants at IDASA's 'open city' conference listen attentively to the discussion

ampaign takes off

... races apart (it was estimated that 165 000 or fully one quarter, of Johannesburg's population is black), there was pessimism about the government's various reactions to "grey areas", ranging from the "verligte" free settlement areas to "verkrampste" eviction proceedings.

A second point emerging in the entire "open city movement" is that townships must be included alongside the towns. "The future open city must be a Johannesburg that includes Soweto — or should I say a Soweto that includes Johannesburg?" Naudé asked at the conference. This may well be the second major reason that city councils should apply for exemption from the Group Areas Act rather than recognition as a free settlement area. Only white areas can become

'Exuberance of community life in open schools'

"free settlement areas", and a city council such as Cape Town's doesn't have the authority to open Mitchell's Plain or any of the other areas under the control of coloured or Indian management committees. The same problem exists for "autonomous" sister cities like Soweto and Johannesburg.

Finally, although there is need for action in all the areas under discussion, residents of the inner city have seen a degree of progress in access to housing and education through informally "mixed" buildings and "open schools". But because the government serves as the gate-keeper to hospitals, recreational facilities, and state schools, it has been harder to penetrate these apartheid barriers. For as long as the government is either laggardly or reactionary in its approach, it will be necessary to primarily use voluntary and non-state

institutions in the struggle for a non-racial society.

The most disturbing examples given at the conference of the effects of apartheid came from the medical field. Dr Max Price of the Centre for the Study of Health Policy Studies and the National Medical and Dental Association (NAMDA) related how two young boys — a white boy in Yeoville and a black boy in Hillbrow — with nearly identical illnesses on exactly the same day obtained dramatically different treatment. The first received immediate care from the barely-used casualty department at the Johannesburg Hospital. "He was not disturbed by other children in the ward as the eight-cot ward only had one other child in it." The second was turned away from the Hillbrow Hospital and sent to Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto. Two hours after his parents arrived, he was put in an oxygen tent and given a drip. "His parents were only grateful that they had not waited any longer before taking him to the hospital since he might not have survived much longer," Price said.

What makes the situation especially absurd is that the segregated health service costs more than an integrated service would cost. "Opening the hospitals up would raise occupancy and lower costs," Price noted.

But the depressing facts of government health and recreation policy may be matched by the optimism Brother Neil McGurk, headmaster of Sacred Heart College in Observatory, generated by pointing to the "exuberance of community life" present in the schools that have opened their doors to all.

"In all suburbs up to 10 kilometres from the CBD, there is an immense educational crisis of numbers, with schools operating at less than 60 per cent capacity," McGurk said. Johannesburg Girls School in Berea, in the heart of "grey" Hillbrow and Berea, operates at around 30 per cent because it

may not take in blacks. "Rather than opening up these schools, though, the government has been handing them over to the post office and army for storage depots."

"As these schools decline, they lose vitality. White education is in internal malaise while schools that have opened have become thriving centres of community life." When the Catholic schools followed this route in 1976, Sacred Heart grew from 400 students to 1 200 last year (currently 50 per cent black) and, by McGurk's estimation, has never seen a better day either academically or as a centre of learning.

Whites can petition the Department of Education (House of Assembly) to allow blacks into government schools, McGurk pointed out, provided that the numbers are not too large and that they do not "change the character of the school". He encouraged communities to apply this pressure, but obviously thinks that these restrictions will not allow for an open school system in its full sense.

Although the residential "greying of Johannesburg" took a back seat in the presentation part of the conference, the fundamental issue of black people living in cities remained a constant backdrop and source of frequent questioning. "Several times we have had to speak to landlords regarding rents and conditions," said Pressage Nkosi of Actstop. "And by and large, they have made it quite clear that they think black people are supposed to pay exorbitant rates because they are illegal tenants."

But Lawrence Schlemmer of the Centre for Policy Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand adopted a more conciliatory attitude: "Landlords are both friends and enemies. Johannesburg has started to open up because landlords were willing to take chances for profit and fill the oversupply of units in white areas. The way to solve this oversupply now is to open up additional areas either through the creation of free settlement areas or through scrapping the Group Areas Act."

□ ANDREW CLARK reports on urban issues for the Weekly Mail.



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Brother Neil McGurk . . . "closed" schools are losing vitality