

A German encounter

By David Screen

A PARTY of 12 South Africans recently spent 10 days in West Germany as guests of the Naumann-Stiftung, a Liberal Party foundation in that country.

The group, led by Idasa national director David Screen, was based in Königswinter, a lovely resort town a few kilometres from Bonn. The composition of the group ensured a lively and vigorous debate throughout the trip.

The essential objective of the visit was to provide the group with an understanding of how and why Germany works. To that end, the visit began with a two-day seminar on the social, political and economic institutions of West Germany.

The next few days were spent visiting various federal, state and non-governmental organisations. Among these were environmental agencies, Amnesty International and a youth organisation.

Two highlights – one on the day of arrival and the other on the day of departure – made the trip more than worthwhile for many of the group. Shortly after arriving in West Germany a fascinating three hours was spent with Sankie Nkondo, the ANC representative in Bonn. Sankie's frustration with the West German government's reluctance to engage the ANC and her obvious longing for home were apparent to all. She obviously enjoyed discussing the future with the group.

ON OUR day of departure we spent a few hours at the annual meeting of the West German Anti-Apartheid Movement. Idris Naidoo of the ANC, who is stationed in East Germany, addressed some 100 delegates at the gathering. A member of the Idasa delegation, Paul Zondo, thanked the AAM committee for their invitation and for the work they had done and are doing for the disenfranchised majority in South Africa.

The group also had its chance to relax. A wonderful afternoon was spent on a Rhine cruiser after a visit to one of the area's magnificent castles. May Day saw us in Cologne with its stunning cathedral, exciting streets and an outstanding Impressionist exhibition.

An overall impression of West Germany during a fairly hectic programme? Wealthy, industrious, materialistic, efficient and very sophisticated.

The group itself formed a cohesive unit while retaining its individuality and political agendas. We returned with a strengthened commitment to establishing a non-racial democracy in South Africa! Participants included Idasa staff members Paddy Clark, Paul Zondo and Liesel Naude, Mthetheleli Pobana (Black Sash, East London), Mandla Nkomfe (Soweto Youth Congress treasurer), Christine Burger (Cape Town attorney), Rochelle Kapp (UCT cultural projects co-ordinator), Siphon Ngwenya (UDF publicity officer), Baba Dlamini (UDF organiser), John Yeld (Argus journalist) and Chris Giffard (UCT lecturer).

Communication clears the way in Cathcart

For nearly a decade the white community in the Eastern Cape village of Cathcart stubbornly ignored the pleas of black residents. A crippling consumer boycott has now forced them to reconsider. HERMIEN KOTZÉ reports.

CATHCART is a quaint little town near Queenstown in the Eastern Cape. The beautiful old buildings and tranquil tree-lined streets belie a very different reality: that of a very divided community plagued by racial tension, unemployment, appallingly low wages, untenable living conditions, forced removals and, more recently, a consumer boycott.

The town is situated in the so-called "white corridor" between the Ciskei and Transkei. Since Cathcart, along with Stutterheim and Komga, have been excluded from the industrial incentives granted to other towns like Queenstown and King Williamstown, it has no industry whatsoever. It is therefore heavily dependent on the local farming community for economic survival.

Cathcart has a black population of about 10 000 for whom severely limited employment opportunities are available in the small business and public sectors. A majority of workers are employed as domestic workers and gardeners at wages of between R30 and R50 a month.

An estimated 75-90 percent of the people in the township live below the poverty datum line. There is a heavy reliance on migrant labour remittances and the pensions of senior citizens. Unemployment is rife. Exceptions to this dismal situation are those few employed as teachers, nurses and policemen.

In 1982 the East Cape Development board (ECDB) announced plans for the development of a new township in Cathcart. In spite of widespread opposition to the idea, ECDB officials went ahead. The town has since been the site of an ongoing confrontation over the "forced" removal of residents from the 100-year-old township, Daliwe, to the new site, Kati-Kati, three kilometres away. The importance of this confrontation lies in the fact that Cathcart is a very good case study in the government's new "reformed" version of forced removal.

In spite of Dr Gerrit Viljoen's announcement in 1985 that there would be no more forced removals, this hated policy continued – but in a more sophisticated guise.

According to Laureen Platzky (Surplus People's Project), the crude bulldozer version has been replaced by "... a fairly set pattern involving an escalating use of force to deal with communities under threat of removal".

It seems that this pattern generally consists of a three-pronged strategy: the first stage is to undermine resistance by creating or exacerbating divisions in the community, by destroying organisational coher-

ence via harassment and detention of individuals involved in resistance, and also by the banning and restriction of meetings. This strategy was obviously enhanced under the consecutive states of emergency since 1986.

The second stage involves a process of "persuasion", a fairly ironic term taking into account that this process involves deliberate neglect of the area under threat of removal, the withdrawal of services from that area and the prohibition on the erection of any new building structures.

The objective of this strategy is the creation of slum conditions which would eventually make it impossible for people to live there.

The third and final stage is using the threat of force. People are threatened with being loaded up and forcibly moved or are threatened with loss of compensation (for their houses). The ghost of the bulldozer is always looming.

While all of the above strategies have been employed in Cathcart since 1982, the authorities insisted throughout that no forced removal was taking place. They insisted that those who moved to Kati-Kati did so voluntarily. According to Rhodes University researcher Fiona Adams, the combination of legislative manoeuvring, repression and the refusal to allocate resources to the maintenance and upgrading of the township ultimately had the same effect as the more crude form of bulldozer removals but allowed the state and its agents to paint the removal process as a "voluntary" one.

DESPITE widespread opposition in the black community to the announcement of plans for Kati-Kati in 1982, ECDB officials embarked on evaluation of houses in the old township for compensation purposes. In the confusion that followed they had everybody, save one family, sign what appear to have been agreements to sell their houses.

In 1983 the present "town committee" was "elected" in an election that drew a meagre 11 percent poll. By 1984 the development of infrastructure was completed in Kati-Kati. In the same year rents were arbitrarily increased from R15,59 to R21 and a rent boycott ensued that lasted for 18 months.

The combined issues of rent and removal led to the formation of the Cathcart Residents Association (Cara) and the Cathcart Youth Organisation (Cayo).

The councillors were asked to resign. Some did and others were driven out of the

FORCED REMOVALS



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township. 1985 saw the start of a consumer boycott in protest against the removal and the deteriorating living conditions in the old township of Daliwe.

The consumer boycott lasted almost 18 months and must have hurt enough because the white municipality eventually agreed to meet Cara. It is, however, very clear from their ignorant and insensitive response to the very reasonable political and economic demands, that they had very little insight into the seriousness of the situation. They assessed it in terms of racial criteria and seemingly understood very little about the inter-related nature of the demands. They chose to deal with every demand separately and projected the blame for things on the black community themselves.

The demand for a minimum wage of R50 was met with the following response: "The people of Cathcart don't want to work, that is why their wages are so low." It is obvious that this level of logic could never solve the problems of Cathcart. A stalemate was reached and no further communication took place between Cara and the municipality.

In the meantime, the first houses were being built for state employees in Kati-Kati. Teachers and nurses were allegedly threatened with the loss of their jobs if they did not move. The residents' attitudes hardened towards the town committee which was by then all geared up for the development of the new township.

It was, however, clear that neither the town committee under its infamous mayor, Mr Sili, nor the government, were prepared to accede to the demand to stop the removal and to upgrade and maintain the old township.

The declaration of the State of Emergency in June 1986 finally brought Cathcart to the third phase in the process of "voluntary removal" described earlier. The community leaders were detained, amongst them Mr T Nkwenshe (a state prosecutor) and Mr K Sigidi who runs the Cathcart Advice Office. The detentions and general repression un-

der the State of Emergency made organised resistance just about impossible. The rent and consumer boycotts collapsed and the residents' and youth organisations and street committees were unable to operate.

This was obviously ideal ground for the removal process. The mayor of Kati-Kati was well-connected in government structures and managed to obtain a staggering amount of R10 million for the development of the new township.

Conditions deteriorated in the old township and more and more pressure was exerted on residents to move. No attention was paid to residents' very legitimate reasons for not wanting to move.

The central reasons being that they could not afford the new houses, were not happy with the compensation originally offered, nor with the size of the plots and that they have a right to stay where they choose - a place they have occupied for over a 100 years.

Structures that people erected on vacant plots were demolished - in winter. People who eventually agreed to move were required to demolish their old houses. Many instances are quoted by the Advice Office in Cathcart of people who demolished their solid brick or stone houses to be offered accommodation in tents, or, even worse, in plastic, cardboard and tin shelters in the new township. The official reason given: "to get rid of illegal squatting".

The reasons for developing a new township are very vague.

One can only speculate that the real, unspoken reason is that Daliwe is less than a kilometre away from the white town, and that for political reasons it was decided that any expansion in black housing should not take place on their doorstep.

This situation has been going on unabated until earlier this year when the Cathcart community, especially in the light of the new political climate in the country, decided they had had enough. They marched in their thousands to the offices of the Kati-Kati Town Committee and de-

manded members' immediate resignation and the investigation of their financial affairs. Other demands included the administration by a single municipality (the white municipality as an interim measure), the immediate suspension of forced removals, scrapping the Group Areas Act and the upgrading of Daliwe (roads, facilities, etc).

A consumer boycott was called again to pressurise the white community to pay attention to the demands. The white community started to react as before.

The municipality said there was no forced removal in Cathcart, that most of the demands should be directed to central government, not to them and insisted that the Kati-Kati Town Committee was the "elected" representatives of the black population of Cathcart and that demands should therefore be directed to them.

The business community originally responded by sending the following communique to the town's white residents: "The business people of Cathcart are appealing for your support in trying to counter the current boycott. We would like to prevent as much money as possible from going into the black townships and thus force the black people to stop boycotting. This can be effected by either paying your servant(s) off or if not, putting them onto short time and reducing their salaries appropriately. This can be done with the understanding that these people will be re-employed once the boycott is over."

They added that the demands could only be solved by central government.

Fortunately this hardline did not get them anywhere: the economic situation in the country has worsened considerably since 1985 and the new political climate prevented them from calling on the state's repressive machinery to solve the problem.

EVENTUALLY talk of outside mediation was heard from both sides and Idasa's director in the Border region was asked to come and assess the situation and possibly act as a mediator. Many hours of discussion followed and many documents were read in order to understand the history and context of this confrontation.

Eventually Mr Andre de Wet, DP MP was also involved, and after one wondrous day of talks with all parties concerned, people were shaking hands, saying the usual "we did not know" and planning future meetings.

The mayor of Cathcart, Mr Rossouw, said he first had to get a mandate (people learn fast) from the white ratepayers before entering into negotiations. This mandate was given and a meeting took place between Cara and the white municipality. Although there is still a long way to go, the consumer boycott has now been suspended and hopefully more goodwill will be created in a process of ongoing dialogue.

Idasa in the Border was once again amazed at the power of information. The overall reaction from white councillors was one of "we never thought of it like that". This has motivated us to concentrate on "information spill", as the Americans say.

Hermien Kotzé is the regional director of Idasa in the Border area.