

# DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

IDASA's goals are:

- To encourage South Africans of all races to reject apartheid and discover an alternative that is non-racial and democratic in the true sense of the word.

- To assist people to accept and work for a post-apartheid society as a way of allaying their fears.

- To mobilise the skills, knowledge and experience of all those who can assist the communities in the crisis areas of South Africa.

- To provide forums and opportunities on a nationwide basis to find democratic solutions to South Africa's problems.

- To assist in creating a climate for genuine negotiation towards a non-racial and democratic South Africa.

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## EDITORIAL

# Constructing economic justice

**THE** socio-economic conditions under which the majority of South Africans live cast a long shadow over the present talks about talks. They also put the current debate on nationalisation, privatisation and the redistribution of wealth into the correct perspective.

The central issue is how to redress the historic and genuine grievances of those who have been systematically discriminated against and whose position is now desperate.

Some figures illustrating the differences in income, living standards and benefits from government expenditure between black and white tell a grim story.

INDEX	YEAR	BLACK	WHITE
Wage level in non-primary sectors (monthly average)	1987	R593	R1959
Employment in formal economy (% of labour force)	1987	58%	89%
Life expectancy at birth (years)	1980	58	70
Infant mortality (per 1 000 live births)	1982	90	14
Incidence of TB (per 100 000 people)	1985	206	15
State expenditure per pupil (primary and secondary level)	1986/7	R367	R2746
Matriculated labour force (% of labour force)	1985	2,2%	53%
State social pension (annual average)	1987/8	R900	R2400

Source: Race Relations Survey 1988/89

**IT IS** these and other stark facts which led Sam Mabi, deputy editor of the *Sowetan*, to say in a recent address: "The blacks are angry, I am angry, and no amount of talk is going to satisfy us."

The majority of blacks are illiterate or semi-literate; they have been excluded from political institutions and in large measure from the "free enterprise system". Black perceptions are shaped by chronic homelessness, unemployment, poor education and inadequate health facilities. In the new climate their expectations are high.

Socio-economic pressures have serious

and far-reaching political implications, particularly for the African National Congress, who have entered into discussions with the Nationalist government.

If the ANC cannot deliver, in the *short term*, some measure of relief to those who form the larger part of their constituency, then they will lose support to other organisations which are totally opposed to negotiation politics.

Instability will be the inevitable consequence and nothing frightens away foreign investors faster than a country in the grip of instability.

It follows that a far-reaching debate on restructuring the South African economy is not only necessary but for moral, economic and political reasons, it is inevitable.

A number of seminars, workshops and conferences have taken and are taking place involving the business community, leading economists and members of the ANC. This is all to the good - there can't be enough of them and they must be broadened to include the widest possible representation. But this in itself is not enough.

**THE** ANC has been challenged to put together a much more comprehensive and clear economic policy which goes beyond the Freedom Charter and the Constitutional Guidelines. Fair enough.

But the onus is not only on the ANC. The business sector in particular has a clear responsibility. If nationalisation is not the answer, if privatisation has merit, if socialism is discredited, then clear alternatives must be offered which address the socio-economic problems which are the legacy of apartheid. We are in this together - but how to reach consensus on this urgent challenge?

One opportunity for innovative and creative proposals would be for the ANC to transform their economic study group (which will be preparing an economic policy document in preparation for their conference on 16 December) into a *commission* which would take evidence from a wide cross-section of interest groups.

If they could be persuaded to take this route it would prevent their findings from being cast in stone and would possibly lead to meaningful action which goes beyond the rhetoric which so often characterises debate on all sides.

Alex Boraine  
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