

Hope springs eternal ...but times are trying

With negotiations apparently on the back burner again, *Democracy In Action* asked around for comment on the mood in the black community... about negotiations, politicians and the state of people's pockets.

CONTRARY to the expectations of the average prophet of doom, there is hope out there that we shall yet arrive in a democratic South Africa.

While not condoning or sympathising with the pathetic political manoeuvring we have seen so much of lately, the general attitude among black people seems to be: "We can wait...but we mustn't relax the pressure."

However, this remarkable generosity in political affairs sits uncomfortably next to increasing despondency and mounting anger about security and financial matters. Here are some of the views:

HUMPHREY KHOZA, general manager of public affairs, Shell, and Western Cape chairperson of the Black Management Forum

"The stalemate in the negotiations process, the continuing violence and the bickering by political leaders, at the expense of innocent lives, is absurd and intolerable.

"Generally black people are tolerant and faithful. There is goodwill in the community, but times are very trying and I wonder how much more misery and poverty we can continue to assimilate. "Political leaders seem to think that they have a God-given right to lead and to govern. They need to awaken to the fact that trust can neither be bought nor demanded, it must be earned.

"If they stretch the people's patience to unacceptable proportions, the outcome will be too ghastly to contemplate.

"The economy continues to worsen, and unemployment, crime and homelessness are eroding the very fabric of our society. Attention must be drawn to the seriousness of this situation before it reaches lawlessness and ungovernability levels. This is not political rhetoric, but is caused by mere lack of basic fundamentals in life such as food, shelter, safety and security.

"Whilst we accept that there is no gain without pain, there is a limit to which any people's patience can be stretched.

"Whatever the outcome of the socio-political and economic reconstruction in South Africa, the material needs of the country's growing population have to be satisfied - and commerce and industry must grow to meet them."



MOODLEY: leaders' compromises don't touch sides

'It is up to the people to see that this society gets transformed into a better one'



WILLIAMS: increasing level of despondency



GINWALA: talks lack pace

MOEGSIEN WILLIAMS, deputy editor of *The Sowetan*, detects an increasing level of despondency in the black community, much of it fuelled by financial hardship and signs of breakdown and lawlessness in the community. He cites a recent example of two teenage girls who were dragged from their home in Evaton, allegedly by young comrades, and shot dead with AK47s in the grounds of a nearby school. Their assailants accused them of being informers for the KwaMadala hostel from where the Boipatong attack was launched.

"This kind of thing contributes to an air of despondency. Ordinary people are getting it from all sides," said Williams.

On the other hand, he feels that although people are concerned about the lack of progress in negotiations and their optimism has diminished, there is still a lot of confidence that "we will pull through". People who have suffered the worst ravages of apartheid have acquired the strength that arises from suffering. "They feel they can deal with this, it might be difficult but they've been through worse."

Williams believes that the protracted negotiation process has had a positive spin-off for the relationship between politicians and their supporters, which bodes well for the future of democracy. He says most of the struggle leaders who were revered and hero-worshipped in the black community have been brought down a peg or two and are now seen as normal mortals.

FRENE GINWALA, national convenor of the Women's Coalition and head of research in the ANC, expressed personal frustration with the slow progress of negotiations.

She says the National Party, on the one hand, still has to come to terms with the demand for a genuine democracy and, the ANC, on the other hand, needs to achieve consensus within the organisation about the objectives of the negotiation process.

Once agreement is reached on the need for a genuine democratic solution, the talks can proceed to finding appropriate mechanisms to realise this.

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A further cause of frustration, said Dr Ginwala, concerned the shameful absence of women in the negotiation process. All the parties continue to pay lip service to the importance of having genuine representation from the entire South African population in the process. "When you say everyone must be there, it must mean women too. That's what all the parties are saying, but nothing is happening," she said.

SHADO TWALA, Radio Metro DJ

"People expected a lot from Mandela. They thought that when Mandela was released they would all wake up one morning and everything would be 'hunky-dory'. Black people expect far too much from the politicians.

"People must begin to understand that they have a chance to change things for themselves. This can only be done through education.

"But South Africans are always looking for a scapegoat to blame for all their problems. They love complaining. South Africans need to start changing things for themselves and they need to start first with changes in their own daily lives.

"Economically, we are going to go through bad times and everyone will feel the pinch. We need to try and get rid of the class factor and try to do whatever job we have to the best of our ability.

"We need to learn the value of work, like they do in Japan where even if you are a street sweeper your work is valued.

"On the whole I am confident and optimistic that South Africa has a bright future. We should stop looking back and start looking forward and forgive - but maybe we should not forget, but we have to forgive in order to go forward."

STRINI MOODLEY, publicity secretary of Azapo says in the present political climate black people are becoming more and more cynical as they witness their hopes of political and economic freedom fading.

"Their hopes lay for a time with their leaders in the various political organisations but as the leaders make compromise after compromise they are beginning to understand that their future is in their own hands.

"Their hopes also lie in the desire for all liberation movements - ANC, AZAPO and PAC - to come together in a Patriotic Front so that petty differences can be ironed out and a comprehensive strategy be mapped out for overthrowing the Nationalist regime.

"People do not have any faith in the present process as they see it whittling away their own demands. It is evident that the leadership's compromises do not even touch sides with the feelings on the ground.

"People don't think mass action is harming negotiations. They want mass action to be disciplined and well-co-ordinated. They believe that mass action is a necessary tool to overthrow the regime."



TWALA: people expect far too much from the politicians

'A characteristic feature of our community is that we have not allowed ourselves to become impotent because of despair'



PAHAD: fabric of society endangered



ROBERTS: fears of a violence-dominated society

AZIZ PAHAD, ANC department of international affairs

"There is tremendous anger and frustration in the community. The very fabric of our society is being endangered and yet some parties fail to see the deep crisis confronting us and continue to delay the coming into being of a democracy.

"In a situation of growing unemployment and deteriorating socio-economic conditions it is inevitable that people will despair.

However, a characteristic feature of our community is that we have not allowed ourselves to become impotent because of despair. People are using every opportunity to bring about a new democracy.

"The possibilities of negotiations restarting has encouraged many, and there is hope that within the next few months South Africa will have a government of national unity, and that within a reasonably short period of time we will have democratic elections for a constitution-making body.

"The people will not just sit and wait for a better future. They are organising in all their formations to make their hopes a reality."

SANDILE DIKENI, poet and freelance journalist in Cape Town, said people were still confident about a positive outcome to the negotiations. However, the longer it dragged on the worse the mood on the ground would become.

The current resistance in Ciskei, he said, was indicative of eroding tolerance. "People expected change when Sebe was ousted by Gqozo, they suffered terribly under Sebe."

Dikeni said young activists were "very uncomfortable" with suggestions that they must share responsibility for the level of violence in the country.

"We are being made to feel guilty about the mess in the country, but that is wrong. Apartheid should have stopped in the 1950s but the regime used their army to maintain it.

"When we look at the rest of the world - the Vietnamese and East Europeans - we realise how docile we in fact are in this country."

CHERYL ROBERTS, member of the National Olympic Committee of South Africa, believes that most people still support and put their faith in the negotiation process.

However, she thinks there are growing fears that a settlement may not usher in the non-racial, democratic society of everyone's hopes but that, instead, South Africa will become a violence-dominated society.

"There is a feeling that our future lies in the hands of both the politicians and the people themselves. Whilst the politicians may implement change and redeploy the apartheid network, it is up to the people to see that this society gets transformed into a better one."