



**Picket outside Bop consulate**

**A**ll-Party Congress, Multi-Party Conference, Pre-Constituent Assembly Conference... Call it what you may; but virtually all organisations within the broad political spectrum agree on the need for some forum to work out modalities for the transition.

In mid-October, the ANC and the NP resumed preparatory talks for the APC. These talks were called off after the April ANC Open Letter to the government demanding decisive action to end the violence.

Their resumption comes in the wake of the ANC's decision to move speedily to an Interim Government of National Unity. The trail of facts about state involvement in the violence and government delays in implementing agreements, the ANC argues, show that the De Klerk government is the major obstacle to negotiations. It must give way to an Interim Government.

This means that the All-Party Congress must be convened as soon as possible. Unlike before,

the APC does not have to wait for the clearing of all the other obstacles: the two processes must proceed at the same time.

The preparatory meetings with the NP form part of a series of consultations by the ANC with other prospective participants. In the build-up to the Patriotic Front Conference, the ANC thrashed out some consensus with at least the PAC on the major questions pertaining to the transition (See Box).

#### **FIRST SITTING**

In the leadership of both the ANC and the NP, there is optimism that at least the first sitting of the APC could take place before the end of the year, possibly towards the end of November.

There is agreement that its agenda should include the following:

- where is the process leading to - broad principles for a future constitution;
- who is to draft the new constitution;

**The ANC and the National Party have just resumed consultations on the All-Party Congress (APC). There is optimism that at least the first sitting of the APC will take place before the end of the year.**

- who is to supervise the transition;
- how long should the transition take; and
- role of the international community.

There are certainly a variety of view-points on the substance of each question. The APC is there precisely to negotiate these issues.

But the motivation for an APC goes beyond merely the agenda items. In principle, it is necessary to seek the broadest possible consensus within society around the transitional process and the broad outcome of negotiations.

This will help ensure that the overwhelming majority of political forces pay allegiance to the process. By helping to shape it, they will carry their constituencies along. An idea that has not carried the day or has been modified in democratic discussion is less likely to become the platform of revolt against the process.

The APC should therefore be as inclusive as possible. All bona fide political parties and organisations should take part. If any organisations stay out and strive to sabotage negotiations, the

# All-Party Congress: Around the corner?



**Groote Schuur: Where it all started - will it be more than just Minutes this time?**

choice will be theirs. It will mean a conscious policy on their part to confront not one but all the participants.

To get around the problem of parties which exist only on paper, it will be necessary to bring together the more obvious participants for the first sitting of the APC. These organisations could then set up the necessary body to vet any applications.

What then would be the strength of representation at the APC?

The answer to this question lies in the principle itself. If the aim is to achieve consensus, the APC will have to move from the premise of equality among those taking part. Besides, to start a process of weighing the strength of each organisation would create complications that cannot be easily resolved under present political conditions. Forced recruitment by some in political office and the variety of criteria in determining membership are some of the myr-

riad of problems that would arise.

Given the differences among the parties on virtually all the issues on the agenda, it will certainly be difficult to reach consensus.

How then is deadlock to be resolved?

## **GIVE-AND-TAKE**

Firstly, the participants will need to exercise as much initiative as possible, in a spirit of give-and-take. This has to be done in constant consultation with their constituencies. Otherwise the leadership could find itself moving too far ahead or too far behind the wishes and aspirations of their supporters.

Secondly, there are those positions which various organisations view as a matter of principle. For instance, most anti-apartheid forces would not accept anything less than a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic state. Could deadlock on such issues be

## **Who will take part?**

\* **Among the more obvious:** ANC, PAC, SACP, NP, DP and other tri-cameral parties, IFP and other homeland parties...

\* **Will they take part:** AZAPO, WOSA, NUM (New Unity Movement), Conservative Party, HNP, AWB....

\* **"Independent homelands"** The TBVC states have got a vested interest in the process. A formula should be found to accommodate them.

\* **Sectoral organisations:** Trade unions, civics, religious and others have a central role to play in the transition. Yet they do not vie for political office. Their members do not necessarily share the same political outlook. The question of their participation in the APC will have to be resolved taking these factors into account. ♦





**Anti - VAT march in Johannesburg**

taken back to the people, for instance, in a non-racial referendum?

Thirdly, in the most extreme of cases, if one party chose to differ with the rest would the APC deadlock? If not, what would constitute "sufficient consensus" before any decision is taken?

Account here has to be taken of political realities: the number of participants who agree and the implications of going ahead without a given organisation.

For instance, if the NP or the ANC were to insist on a given position, and agreement is not reached, this would imply going back to the drawing board for all the participants.

However, it will be the responsibility of the various participants to try and harmonise their positions outside APC sessions. Some blocs will emerge from such a process; and this will facilitate rather than hinder the process. In part, the Broad Patriotic Front serves this purpose.

What will be the place and

role of present government institutions in relation to the APC? Decisions of the APC will have to be binding on the current legislature and executive if the APC is to be more than a talking shop. At the same time, the NP should not be allowed to continue using government resources to work out its negotiations positions.

### **UNITED NATIONS**

Further, the agreements reached should be reinforced with the necessary international backing at the level of the United Nations and other international bodies.

But before casting their eyes abroad, there are the more immediate hurdles that the organisations have to resolve: who convenes the APC; who chairs at least the first session; and who foots the bill!

If not handled with sensitivity, these questions might prove as elusive as the more substantive ones. ♦

## **How will the APC convene and operate?**

### **NEUTRAL CONVENOR:**

\* Who is "neutral"? The ANC has put forward the option of religious and business leaders such as in the peace initiative, to convene but not take part in the sessions. There are some who argue that FW de Klerk is neutral as state president. The other option could be to bring together the more obvious prospective participants and form a preparatory committee.

### **VENUE AND INFRASTRUCTURE:**

\* A neutral venue, that is, one not associated with any of the participants; and administrative staff provided by the participants. Most organisations canvassed do not agree with the proposal that these should be provided by the government.

\* The funds will have to be raised from sources including the government. But, like with infrastructure, they should be under the strict control of the APC itself.

### **APC SESSIONS:**

\* The first sitting of the APC will have to agree on agenda and rules, consider any applications from other organisations, administration and so on. In pre-APC consultations it will be necessary to agree on its first chairperson.

\* The major items on the agenda might be better tackled in commissions given that plenary of + 200 people will be too large for this purpose. ♦