

Is it too late to participate?

Two contributions dealing with the politics of participation appeared in the last issue of *WIP*. One, by Guy Berger, challenged the 'new realism' of 'writers from the left' who have been arguing for participation in state structure - albeit under specific circumstances. The other, by Daryl Glaser, used the example of the Indaba proposals in Natal/Kwazulu to advise that doors be left open to the possibility of 'going in' on the regional option at some future date.

It is this second article with which I take issue, both because I have some familiarity with the terrain and because there has been a dearth of critical, especially organisational, response to the questions it raises.

The 'debate' about participation, at least in its public manifestation, has been limited to a very small number of participants. When Glaser justifies his sortie into this area he finds rather dubious immediate antecedents: 'some on the left' who have 'begun to reconsider opposition to negotiation'; the ANC 'tentatively reaching out' (Dakar); the UDF's 'cautious endorsement' of the National Democratic Movement and Five Freedoms Forum; reference to 'left intellectuals' and 'some on the left'; and finally the Soviet Union which 'seems eager for a political settlement in the region'.

Part of the problem lies in the generalisation that Glaser uses - 'the left'. The issue of participation needs to be located in the specifics of the occasion. 'The left' in Natal is not the same as 'the left' in the

In a previous edition of *Work In Progress*, Daryl Glaser debated whether progressive opposition organisations should participate in the Kwazulu/Natal Indaba. But, argues GERHARD MARÉ in a continuation of this debate, the Indaba has involved a long process, with different phases and stages. Each moment in this process demanded organisational responses based on a coherent opposition strategy for the Natal region.

Western Cape, for example. It has different strengths and weaknesses, has been shaped by different historical processes, and is up against a particular alliance of classes, drawing on specific ideological symbols.

I agree with Glaser that 'regional autonomy' and federal structures are not in themselves to be rejected. However, with the history of fragmentation of South Africa, with the regional (ethnic) patronage patterns and political mobilisation that has occurred under apartheid, a prior demand is for national change and a national identity. A national solution might well include regional democratic structures, but this will not involve regional decisions shaping the national structure.

Glaser suggests that by neglecting the Indaba option 'political and

economic elites' in the region might be lost to 'regional insurgency'. He does not specify who these 'elites' are. Is he talking about the sugar barons, the midland farmers, Inkatha leaders at the local and the central level, a black petty bourgeoisie, the tricameralists - any, all or none of these?

Whoever he is referring to, there seems to be little that 'the left' can offer to wean these 'elites' (capitalists large and small) away from an Inkatha leadership option - for that is what the Indaba is in essence. Inkatha has long been their chosen partner in the reshaping of the region, if not of South Africa.

Glaser contradicts himself when he says that the Indaba's bill of rights does not explicitly protect capitalism, and then says that the Indaba's purpose is to 'preserve the basis of the capitalist order'. He cannot have it both ways. There is, at any rate, no real ambiguity on capitalism within the Indaba: after a couple of meetings the Indaba accepted a set of principles, one of which was that the 'free enterprise' system would form the basis of negotiations.

Those 'elites' are committed to the Indaba and to Inkatha, and not to 'the left': because Buthelezi's movement has a track record of 13 years in power in the region; because apparatuses and agents of control are firmly ensconced in the Indaba constitution (such as the tribal system, a house of chiefs, tribal police, a Natal Regional Force, etc); and because it is through the 'moderation' of Buthelezi that they hope to circumvent sanctions and prevent or control civil unrest. The hundreds of deaths in and around Maritzburg dented that hope when it became clear that

Inkatha was as much a fuse for violence as an agent of control.

Glaser suggests that the 'democratic and legitimate demands' of the elites be separated from 'those of more nefarious purpose' and 'accorded due respect'. By that I take it to mean that they form part of the platform of participation for 'the left'. But these mutually acceptable demands cannot in themselves be a programme, devoid of the interests of the working class and the demands of millions of poverty-stricken and near-homeless people in the region whose demands are ultimately incompatible with the 'elites'.

Is Glaser suggesting that articulating these 'elite' demands along with 'popular' demands will provide protection during a campaign waged openly over an extended period? Or is he suggesting that a limited campaign be waged with generally acceptable proposals forming the content - a campaign acceptable to capital and privileged whites? If the latter is the case, it will need a campaign of enormous proportions to make the supporters of 'the left' understand and accept such a strategy.

I am not necessarily arguing against participating in a campaign, but then the campaign must be the goal and not participation. For the latter will not be allowed to succeed if it truly articulates working-class and/or popular demands: not by the central state, which will be calling the tune in any case during regional initiatives, nor by the bantustan branch of the state, in whose backyard the overwhelming majority of the regional population live.

The Indaba must be seen as a process, with the various stages demanding different responses. Such an approach indicates why the democratic movement needs a regional strategy, or a strategy in the region, before it needs a response to the Indaba proposals. Glaser is suggesting a response to the proposals, as though the debate around participation in the local government elections can be separated from the historical context of state attempts to establish legitimate local government.

The first stage was really the establishment of the Zulu Territorial

Authority in 1970 and Kwazulu in 1972, and the formation of Inkatha in 1975, to 'work within the system' and to change it from within. Despite ANC approval for this strategy it could not find local cadres to direct that thrust, and Inkatha became firmly wedded to the person of Buthelezi and the direction of conservative reform under capitalism. Kwazulu has now existed for 18 years, during which time patterns of politics have been established that we ignore at our peril.

But patterns of politics do not exist in a classless vacuum called 'the people'. More importantly, it has been the politics of specific class interests and aspirations - the regional African petty and proper bourgeoisie, and national monopoly capital as it operates in the region (especially as sugar production).

While capital had a brief period of concern about the bantustan's involvement in Natal labour matters in the first half of the 1970s, regional capital soon came to realise that such links existed around the person of Barney Dladla, then councillor for community affairs, rather than through the strong central figure of Buthelezi.

Since 1976, with the upsurge of 'community' rather than factory-based struggles, Inkatha, as regional government, has increasingly come into conflict with those resisting the central state. In most ways it is part of that state, and even when it is not it acts like any conservative government would. As such it is an essential element in the social reproduction of capital in the region.

The second stage can be characterised as 'regional consolidation' at the political level. It dates back to 1979-80 and Inkatha's break with the ANC. A decision was taken at central committee level that Inkatha would consolidate its regional power-base, despite the risk of losing its national impetus. The results were the Buthelezi Commission and aggressively politicised ethnicity, with regular appeals to the 'Zulu nation' as its political constituency.

The third stage of consolidated regional administration, did away as far as possible with the absurdities of two major second-tier administrative structures for the region - the Natal Provincial Council and the Kwazulu Legislative Assembly. These moves

resulted in the Joint Executive Authority, for which central state approval was needed and received. The JEA was formally launched by State President Botha in the Durban city hall.

The Indaba, the fourth stage, set out to establish a regional legislature, with powers that would be similar to those at present enjoyed by the bantustans, rather than those of the provincial councils.

The Indaba process must itself be subdivided into five phases.

- The decision to launch the Indaba and the sending of invitations to participate. It was called by agents of two structures created by the central state, the Kwazulu Legislative Assembly and Natal Provincial Council. Glaser agrees that this part of the process was undemocratic, and that the list of invitees posed 'serious problems of representivity'. No option of participation arose at this stage.

- The Indaba itself, with its closed-door discussions, loaded representation, operating under the state of emergency, was equally undemocratic. That it was intended to be such was clear from prior statements about the process. All left groups, such as the ANC, PAC, Azapo, UDF and Cosatu refused to participate under these conditions.

The state of emergency was extended to Natal during the process and elicited no public response, with Indaba participants unaffected by the restrictions.

But once these groups had rejected the Indaba they acted in most cases as though it then ceased to exist. Glaser is correct, in an obvious way, when he says that 'it (the Indaba) is a reality', but this seems to have escaped the opposition.

- The post-Indaba publicity campaign has similarly received relatively little attention from progressive organisations in the region or nationally. It is going to be difficult to make up for lost ground, other than through a simplistic political short-hand which equates the Indaba with apartheid, and anything that comes from it with the state.

It is understandable that under the state of emergency, with the progressive movement split along sensitive 'community' lines, and up

against a professional, financially well-endowed, and full-time Indaba campaign, this should have been the case. However, this lag in response will have to be taken into account in decisions about participating in any of the future stages.

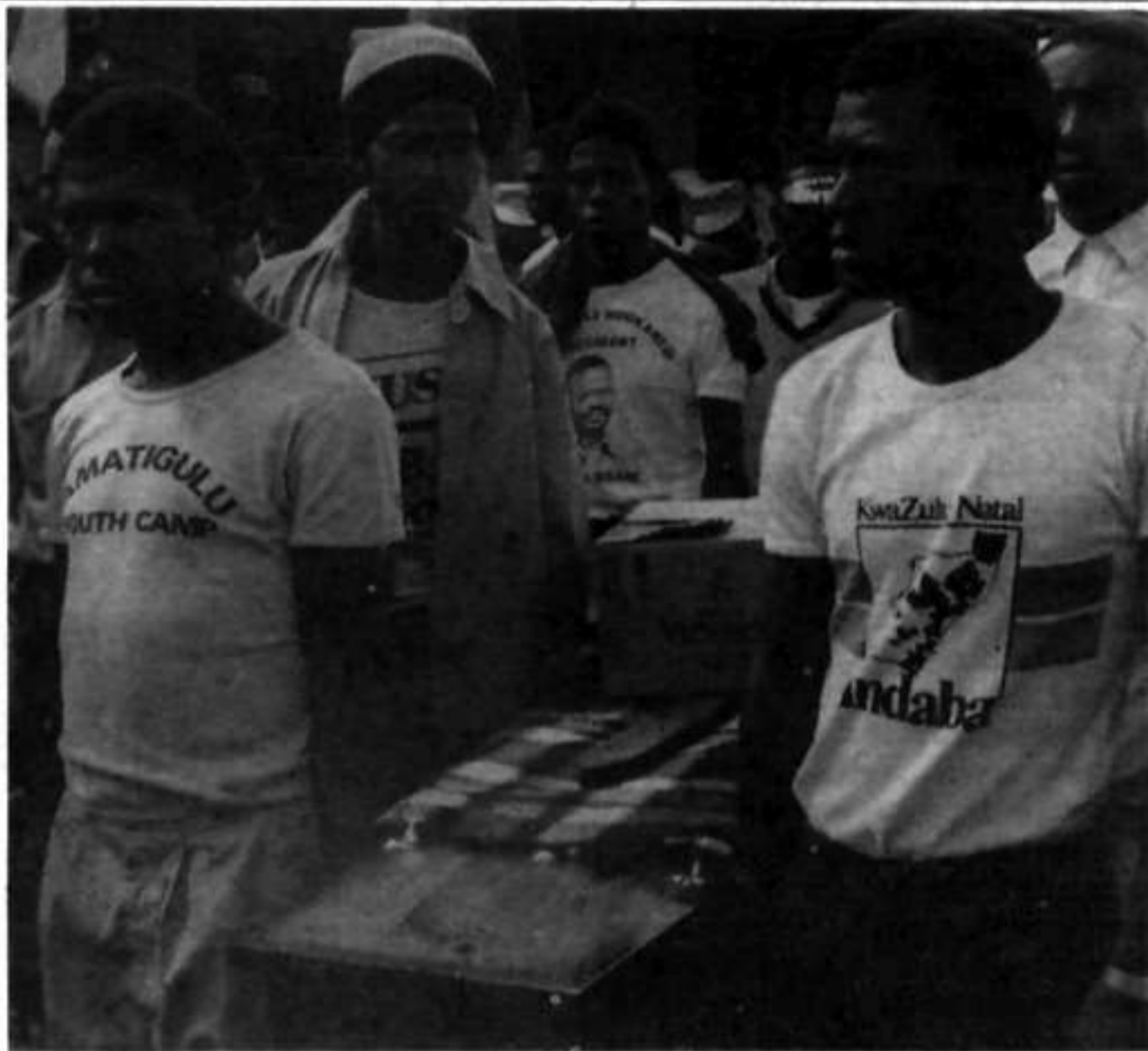
The Indaba learned its lesson well, and shied away from too close an identification with any one political party soon after the constitution was released. It has been careful to create its own 'apolitical' corporate identity, away from the Progressive Federal Party's close embrace that turned out to be near-fatal in its planned negotiations with the central state on acceptance of a version of the constitution.

- The proposed referendum to test the Indaba constitution against the popular will has received very little publicity lately. Immediately after the release of the proposals there seemed to be some urgency, with several newspaper editorials calling for such a test. Since then one has seen only that South African surrogate for democracy, the opinion poll, of which there have been several, each one a central element in the Indaba publicity campaign.

The Indaba itself suggested at one point that a poll would be desirable as an alternative to a referendum. At present the Indaba office has tried to give added spice to the October elections, asking its supporters to vote for candidates who accept the Indaba constitution.

With the Indaba now engaged in equally undemocratic alteration of its initial proposals through 'implementation studies', and engaged in less high profile publicity than during 1987 and lobbying of other 'elites' (such as capital based in the Transvaal, the central state and Natal scholars) the referendum seems to have been shifted aside. Not that it matters much, for, at least publicly, the Indaba no longer exists for extra-parliamentary groups.

The question facing 'the left' at this point in the process would be two-fold - whether to vote in a referendum (if the participants' constitutional commitment comes to anything); and what to call for in a campaign. The logic of a 'yes' to the first part, would seem to indicate a 'yes' to the second part - if the Indaba will create 'space' then it has to



Inkatha - ongoing conflict with those resisting the central state

be supported. A 'no' vote in, or an active boycott of, the referendum would create problems of explaining participation in the next stage, the regional elections.

It might be possible to test the water before the referendum by setting certain minimum demands for participation of any kind: freedom of association; freedom of access to and dissemination of information; freedom of movement; freedom to operate under the present regional authorities; and other 'reasonable' expectations for free and fair politics (as partly set out in the Indaba's own bill of rights). The response to such a demand might indicate whether there is any more 'space' for progressives here than in the tricameral parliament.

- The fifth stage, depending on the acceptance of the proposals by 'the people' of the region and by the central state, would be the elections for a regional government. The factors that would have to be taken into account at this stage are impossible to list in full. Not even the constitutional proposals are final - with both the Indaba and the central state possibly tinkering with them.

Decisions at this stage would also depend on previous decisions. And

these, or the lack of clear decisions, may already have made worthwhile participation impossible, even if it was desirable or necessary.

Furthermore, to look at 'arguments in favour of participation (being) strengthened if extra-parliamentary spaces become even more limited' (Glaser) seems dangerous. To move into an arena that is so stacked against you, filled with ambiguities, demanding the full participation in and understanding of the decision by supporters, from a position of weakness - a last alternative - involves dubious reasoning.

Is not the lesson to be learned that unless there is accountability, which depends on strong structures and frequent contact with members, participating leaders tend to join the 'elites' against which they decided to participate - or become powerless in processes which they cannot change.

It is essential to examine the strengths, rather than the weaknesses, of organisations called upon to evaluate the politics of participation. Weakness might very well be the factor that rules out effective participation, rather than supports it. And that is even before gains from participating in an Indaba is concretely discussed.