

IDASA-ANC TALKS

The point of Dakar

The dramatic departure from parliamentary politics by Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert dealt a blow to the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) from which it is unlikely ever to recover. His statements at the time, and his subsequent establishment of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for SA (Idasa), indicated that he had lost faith in parliament as a body for negotiating and initiating change.

Idasa and the highly publicised meeting between it and the African National Congress (ANC) this week represent a reply to those who questioned his leaving the establishment. In effect, bridges are being built; a to-and-fro of debate has been set in motion on the crucial issues of SA's political and economic future. All of which is positive.

But criticisms of the Idasa-ANC conference need to be considered. One is its explicit dissociation from the Independent movement (see *People*). The institute's contingent is predominantly Afrikaans and intellectual — precisely the base on which Denis Worrall and Co contrived such success as they achieved in May. Yet they were not specifically asked along to Dakar — though they may have been approached and must have been aware of what was in the wind.

This gives some cogency to the argument — particularly, but not solely, in the government-supporting media — that Idasa is unrepresentative of mainstream Afrikanerdom. Is this so? Certainly, some of the names that have emerged are fairly predictable. Breyten Breytenbach's political position is well known — but he is also a pivotal cultural figure in Afrikanerdom. Beyers Naudé is a liberation theologian — but he is not, whatever some may believe, a Leninist.

And what of Johan van Zyl, Leon Louw, Tony Williamson, Albert Koopman, Revel Fox, Hermann Giliomee, Lawrence Schlemmer and Heribert Adam? As extra-parliamentary movements go, Idasa would seem to have no fears about representativeness, though it is preponderantly, and on this occasion deliberately, Afrikaans. The omission of the Independents remains odd.

What is important is that talks are taking place, and that debate cannot be one-sided. Again, government — at least in its initial reaction — has not rushed in with a flame-thrower of condemnation, as it did when the Stellenbosch students wanted to go to Lusaka. Indeed, student leader Philip

Verster is finally getting his wish to meet the ANC.

It is of course easier to take away students' passports than those of responsible academics and businessmen — and there is no election in prospect. But it is not inconceivable that figures like Stoffel van der Merwe and Pik Botha will make a point of keeping themselves briefed on Dakar.

The predominantly Afrikaner composition of the Idasa group is significant in various ways. Unlike many former white Rhodesians, thinking Afrikaners have neither the wish nor the desire to leave Africa, their birthplace. As such they are recognised as a tribe of Africa, and their presence in Idasa enables them to debate the various options of black-white political, economic and social accommodation that will have to be achieved in SA in future.

Debate, of course, is a two-way process. It is unlikely — as diehard National (and Conservative) Party (NP) propagandists would have us believe — that communist influences in the ANC predominate over nationalist ones.

But it is a question on the agenda at Dakar. Perhaps a message of conciliation will be brought back — but it would have to include a longer-term commitment to non-violent change by the ANC before the task of convincing government can be addressed.

But simply seeing the results of socialist experiments in Africa

should ensure that Idasa's capitalists have an answer to those — and not only those in the ANC — who propagate the tenets of a command economy and nationalisation.

Idasa is neither the first nor the last of the kind of contact-making exercises that will be conducted as long as the NP holds fast to racial social and political engineering, of which the statutory National Council for black-white negotiation is one example, flawed as it is by the "you talk to us — or else" syndrome. At least Idasa shows Afrikaners going to listen, and to set out and hear differing views on a common, and hopefully peaceful and productive alternative to SA now.

Over-reaction by Pretoria to the mission would be the worst possible outcome — it would entrench the laager mentality and heighten the propensity of a violence/oppression cycle in SA occurring every few years or so — indefinitely. After all, it was not all that long ago that P W Botha himself noted that the route to SA's reacceptance by the world lay through Africa. ■



Slabbert



Koopman



Louw



Williamson



Fox



Breytenbach



Van Zyl



Giliomee

THE DAKAR TALKS

On the inside track

Before flying out of Dakar to Burkina Faso, delegates to the talks between the African National Congress (ANC) and a group made up mainly of Afrikaners were given a Senegalese memento. The gifts — brightly coloured pictures reputedly made from butterfly wings — will serve as an exotic reminder to them of an extraordinary meeting in an unlikely venue.

Dakar, or rather the nearby Goree Island, was once the centre of the world slave trade. It is now the 10th most expensive city in the world and boasts some of the most aggressive gangs of pickpockets and would-be muggers. But the latter were well hidden when the Dakar conference opened in a carnival-like atmosphere more in keeping with the arrival of a circus, rather than a group of earnest South Africans intent on grappling with their nation's complex problems.

The Senegalese feted the South Africans, but occasionally their hospitality bordered on the ridiculous and cut deep into the time available for talks — a visit to a yoghurt factory in the middle of the main debate on violence was particularly irksome to the delegates.

Four days after the talks opened, the two groups issued a joint communique, which Frederik van Zyl Slabbert described as an indication of "the extraordinary meeting of minds on a number of important issues" that was achieved. In the sense that the groups committed themselves to a future SA based on a pluralist nonracial democracy, this was true. But hardly surprising considering that the internal group were hardly a bunch of rightwingers.

Neither could the 17-member ANC group, led by charismatic Thabo Mbeki, in any way resemble the bloodthirsty communists the government would like people to believe they are.

But once the furore created by the talks has calmed down, and the internal delegates begin to recover from the ANC's charm offensive, they might begin to realise that apart from the butterfly paintings they returned from Dakar with very little else. While all except two of the Afrikaners entered into the rather grey area of accepting the historical reality of violence without actually supporting it, the ANC did not budge an inch. Some internal delegates accepted that the ANC could not at this stage renounce violence, given the Pretoria government's lack of commitment to negotiations, but the ANC would not add its support to a section of the joint communique which expressed deep concern over the proliferation of uncontrolled violence.

To be fair, ANC delegates did say this

state of affairs was counter-productive. They would not, however, condemn it. On other issues like attempts to make townships ungovernable, and sanctions, there were also no concessions.

By the time the conference got down to discussing the economy, most of the delegates had already exhausted themselves in the debate on violence. This might explain the vaguely worded public statements about the almost unanimous acceptance of some form of mixed economy which would allow people to operate freely in pursuit of economic growth.

The ANC did appear to make one concession when it said that, although still committed to nationalising "the commanding heights of the economy," this could be delayed by an ANC government and only implemented after consultation with groups of experts — including businessmen. There was also an appreciation of the vital importance of increasing the overall size of the economic cake. But this is all in the future and delaying nationalisation still puts the ANC several years behind even socialist parties in Europe, who have finally come to realise it simply does not work.

Hermann Giliomee, who stressed in the talks that the ANC had to come to terms with Afrikaner nationalism as well as the military strength of the present regime, was labelled a conservative for his efforts. Giliomee argued that a vast majority of Afrikaners were simply not ready to accept a black majority government. His arguments for the need to compromise and to accept that a nonracial democracy might not be immediately available got short shrift from the ANC. They insisted that the concept of a nonracial democracy was not negotiable — even in an interim arrangement.

Their game plan appears to be that in seven to 10 years' time, P W Botha will have gone and been replaced by someone less committed to not negotiating. The growth of the rightwing and deterioration in the economy, as well as the activities of liberal Afrikaners like those present in Dakar, would have weakened white resolve to maintain a racist state. At that point the ANC would be called in and a democratic SA would begin to emerge.

However, Giliomee was not the only person present in Dakar to believe the ANC members are not as confident as they sounded. They are not yet prepared to break ranks and forgo purist statements like "SA must be the only country in the world where the victims have to give guarantees before the system of oppression can be displaced."

But the Dakar declaration does commit

the delegates to future talks. Perhaps next time those from within SA will be less likely to succumb to the charm offensive and more inclined to play hard-ball. The more this happens, the more likely it will be that they can extract a few concessions from the ANC, rather than just making them. ■

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Metal strike deferred

As the *FM* went to press, the National Union of Metalworkers of SA (Numsa) called off its strike against the metal industry pending a ruling on the legality of the strike.

Having followed the procedures entitling it to stage a legal strike after its deadlocked wage talks with Seifsa, Numsa was bowled a googly on Tuesday, the day its strike commenced.

It came in the form of a renewal notice published by Manpower Minister Piet du Plessis, extending the life of the old agreement covering the metal industry. In terms of the Labour Relations Act, this immediately rendered illegal any strike on any matter covered by the agreement.

While the timing of the renewal notice appeared suspicious to some — the old agreement expired on July 1 — Manpower Director-General Piet van der Merwe tells the *FM* that renewal notices are nothing



Manpower's Van der Merwe . . . renewal notices are not new

new; 86 were published last year. And, since the amended agreement was due three days later the old one had to be in force.

By lunchtime on Tuesday, Numsa said that according to an incomplete survey about 50 000 of its members had downed tools around the country. A Seifsa spokesman said employer members had been advised not to sack strikers.

The union was awaiting advice from its lawyers, who had been instructed to seek Supreme Court action to counter the Minis-

CAMPUS VIOLENCE

Gagging Worrall

The disruption of Denis Worrall's proposed speech by about 120 University of Cape Town (UCT) students during a formal dinner at the Leo Marquard Hall, will be high on the agenda when Education Minister F W de Klerk meets university chiefs this week. This was the type of behaviour that he warned academic institutions about, De Klerk will probably emphasise.

De Klerk's meeting with the chairmen, rectors and principals of 17 university councils takes place as a follow-up to a previous discussion about academic disruptions on various campuses. The main theme will be to discuss "arrangements to maintain good order and effective control over the utilisation of public funds at universities," says De Klerk.

It is clear that the state of affairs on some English-speaking campuses is increasingly

The FM brings its readers the most news, comment and interpretation possible under the new regulations restricting publication of certain matters.

It does not believe that the restrictions are necessary or in the public interest, but will obey the law.

irritating government which is being exhorted from several quarters not to spare the rod.

Monday night's disruption came about a year after UCT students similarly silenced visiting academic/politician Conor Cruise O'Brien whose subject was to have been freedom of speech.

The disruption of the Worrall dinner was reportedly organised by the exclusively black organisation, Bisco (Black Inter-residence Students Committee). Earlier it had issued a pamphlet calling for a boycott of the dinner

and making various allegations against Worrall.

A statement from UCT's Moderate Student Movement says a group of black students marched into the hall chanting pro-ANC and pro-Mandela slogans shortly before the dinner was due to commence. UCT vice-chancellor Stuart Saunders' attempts to address the demonstrating students failed.

The statement claims Saunders at one stage handed his megaphone to one of the ringleaders, "who apparently had indicated that he wished to restore calm, but instead used it to continue the chanting and singing.

"Eventually Worrall had to leave as it was obvious that he was not going to be allowed to speak and, moreover, his physical safety would have been at risk if he had entered the dining room," the statement says.

Saunders has personally apologised to Worrall, saying that he views the matter "in a very serious light" and promising that disciplinary steps will be taken. ■

FREDERIK VAN ZYL SLABBERT

FACE TO FACE

The lessons from Dakar



The FM spoke to Idasa chairman and former Official Opposition leader Frederik van Zyl Slabbert soon after his arrival in SA after his controversial talks with the ANC in West Africa.

FM: What specifically did the Dakar talks achieve?

Slabbert: One has to be quite clear as to what Dakar was all about. There has been a tendency to either overestimate it or underestimate it. There are those who pump it up as an attempt at mediation and then knock it down as being inadequate. Dakar was never an attempt to mediate anything. We had neither the mandate nor the power to mediate. It was an attempt to have a workshop between predominantly Afrikaans-speaking individuals and the ANC on certain critical issues; to clarify positions; to get rid of ambiguities and to see if there was a meeting of minds on some issues.

In that sense Dakar was an immense success. We came away with a clear idea of where the ANC stood on the armed struggle. They got a very clear idea of the concern of delegates on the question of arbitrary violence and the capacity for escalating violence in our society. We also clarified points on multi-party democracy and so on. That essentially is what Dakar was about.

In the wake of the Dakar talks, do you believe it is going to be easier or more difficult to accommodate all the competing aspirations in SA?

Based on the experience we had, I'm

greatly encouraged. That doesn't mean there aren't very critical issues over which people will differ, but one came away with a feeling that throughout the conference these were South Africans trying to get to grips with a South African problem. As a very preliminary step towards the kind of tough debate that lies ahead if we are to move beyond the present conflict, Dakar was a good omen.

The Dakar delegation included some influential businessmen. What role do you see for businessmen in bringing about reconciliation in SA?

The business lobby is very powerful for two reasons. Firstly, business is essential for growth, and the economy is there to either prop up domination or get rid of it. Business has a crucial role in deciding to what extent free enterprise is going to survive as a factor for growth in a future SA.

I've never said business has to choose a political party or an organisation, but it certainly has to define its own position in the very difficult period of transition SA is going through. The only way to do so is to have the information at its disposal. The worst that can happen is that business gets trapped in a cocoon of ignorance as happened in Rhodesia, where increasingly there was an official view of what was happening, although the vast majority of people who experienced the changes in society knew that things were different.

We are being trapped in the position where we can rely on only one source of information. That is why it is important for businessmen, and any other group that wishes to play a role in shortening this conflict, to try to get first-hand information.

How can violence be de-escalated or eliminat-

ed altogether?

I can only state what the ANC said and that is that the only prospect for an end to violence, and for them to reconsider something like the armed struggle, is if the conditions which led to them adopting this strategy were to disappear. These are the banning of their organisations, the imprisonment of their leaders and the basic elements of apartheid which persist in law.

This is a formula put forward by the ANC as to how the violence can be stopped. Only the government can exercise the option to accept the formula. But even more so the government has the option of calling the bluff of the ANC, so the option for playing on the violence issue seems stronger on the part of the government than the ANC.

What then would you regard as a positive step away from escalating violence?

Two things; firstly an unambiguous commitment to freedom of association, in other words a movement away from compulsory group membership, that would have a fantastic effect; and secondly allowing communities to generate their own leadership free of a State of Emergency. You can't arrest 500 community leaders — as happened in the eastern Cape — and then say, come and talk to us.

Anyone who goes forward under those circumstances does so at the risk of his life. But you can be sure these steps are not going to be enough. Eventually you are going to have to get to the unbanning of organisations and the release of prisoners.

You take a chance, that's the risk, but if you don't start along that road we know what's going to happen — conflict, escalating conflict.