

# Talking to the ANC

Talking to the ANC has become a growth industry. Hardly a week goes by without some group or other flying into Lusaka from South Africa. ... to talk. Now P.W. Botha has made it all look respectable by talking to Nelson Mandela. We have come a long way since van Zyl Slabbert's Dakar expedition broke the ice by doing the unthinkable less than two years ago.

Most of the groups which have been to Lusaka, or to meet the ANC at other places, have been fairly specialised. They have represented women, or lawyers, or businessmen, or educationists, and so on. The Five Freedoms Forum delegation which went at the end of June was different, not only in that it was much larger than any of its predecessors, consisting of over a hundred people, but because those people represented a fair variety of organisations and views. They were more typically "white South African" than anything else the ANC has met, although by no means fully representative, because none of the hardcore of white conservatism was there.

In spite of this last weakness the comparative ordinari-

ness of this large delegation gave it a special importance. The ANC was probably able to get a better idea of the hopes and fears of white people about the future from this large delegation than it has from any of the others it has met. And it is very important that the ANC should know about these things, especially the extent of white fears, if it is to make a proper assessment of the obstacles to negotiating an end to apartheid.

One of its own members described the Five Freedoms Forum delegation as being distinguished only by the fact that nobody in it had any political clout. This is only partly true. In terms of present power, they certainly had none, but in terms of a fairly broad organisational base from which to start influencing white people towards an acceptance of the inevitability of negotiation with the ANC and other bodies, it is that very ordinariness which may give them a special clout. We hope that serious negotiations is what they will all now be pushing for, along with everyone else who has ever visited the ANC. These cannot be delayed much longer. □

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by DUNCAN GREAVES

## TOWARDS THE GREAT SOUTH AFRICAN JAILBREAK

Review of Charles Simkin's books;

1. **THE PRISONERS OF TRADITION AND THE POLITICS OF NATION BUILDING** (SAIRR 1988);
2. **RECONSTRUCTING SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERALISM** (SAIRR 1986);
3. **LIBERALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF POWER** (SAIRR 1986).

In one of his more careful observations on the nature of ideology, Marx once remarked that "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living". A less striking way of putting the same point is to say that ideas are not always and everywhere the creatures of economics, and even when they are they can acquire an independent life, often to the dismay of those who once profited from them but would now rather see

them extinguished. Sometimes Marxists need to be reminded of the truth of this proposition. Sometimes liberals need to be as well.

This is particularly true of South Africans, Marxists and liberals alike. The perennial debate on the relationship between apartheid and capitalism illustrates the point. Despite very sharp differences of approach and substance, a common theme in this debate for a long time – almost a consensus – was that systems of belief are essentially governed by the economic matrix in which they appear or are deployed. Whether one is dealing with Hobart Houghton, O'Dowd or Legassick this belief in the primacy of the economic holds – though of course in very different ways.

Stanley Greenberg's *Race and State in Capitalist Development* went a long way towards recasting this debate. Drawing on a comparative analysis of racially ordered societies, Greenberg argued that certain semi-class alliances typically usher in such orderings, but that once