

Morality 'must be restored' in transition process

Most political parties turned up at Idasa's seminar on the multi-party conference but their speakers left many questions unanswered – and were challenged to represent the interests of ordinary people in negotiations.

By Sue Valentine

AN IDASA seminar on "Perspectives on the all/multi-party conference" brought together an impressively broad range of politicians in Johannesburg early in April and an equally diverse audience of more than 350 people.

The interest in the subject seemed to bear out Bishop Peter Storey's sentiments when he said the issues to be raised at a multi-party conference were "far too important to be left to the politicians".

The aim of the seminar was to hear perspectives as to who should attend a multi-party conference (MPC), what should be on the agenda and what would happen to those who did not attend.

In general the views offered by the eight speakers did not provide much insight into the possible composition and agenda of an MPC, leaving many in the audience frustrated at the apparent lack of substance in the various presentations.

It was Bishop Storey of the Methodist Church, who drew applause for his appeal for the restoration of morality in the transition process and for the interests of ordinary people to be represented at the negotiating table.

"A range of organisations led the struggle in spite of claims to the contrary by others later on the scene. The writing on the wall was made by many ordinary people, the difference about Mr De Klerk is that he was the first state president who could read," he said.

It was not enough to thank those people for their involvement and then relegate them to a lesser role.

Storey said a monitoring group which had no interest in gaining power for itself was needed to monitor developments. Those making the constitution faced a paradox: to achieve as much as possible in terms of political power or to balance as many different interest groups as possible.

On the dilemma of violence, Storey said both the government and its opponents had trained people to use violence to achieve their ends.

There could be no impetus for a peaceful resolution while any party held open the possibility of using violence as a last resort.

Concluding with a word to all political organisations, Storey said: "As long as you rely on violence, you must not expect us to take you

too seriously when you speak of peace."

Idasa director of policy and planning, Van Zyl Slabbert, said many people assumed wrongly that there would be a "magic moment" in the transition process when the government would be overthrown, the old flag struck and a new one raised in its place.

He argued that because of the nature of the transition in South Africa, the government of the day (National Party) would be involved in the change.

Three mechanisms to assist in the transition process had emerged, he said. A multi-party conference, an interim government and a constituent assembly. No matter what one called these various forums, the issue remained that responsibility for the transition had to be shared by the different political groupings. An MPC would decide on the agenda of the transition. From that conference would flow the decision on the status of the negotiating parties.



Bishop Storey: a range of organisations led the struggle.

"The only other way to manage the change is through revolution, partition or external intervention. The process that is dominant at the moment is negotiation," he said.

A member of the ANC's legal and constitutional committee, Penuel Maduna, said there was broad agreement on the need for an all-party conference. However, he suggested a limited agenda for such a conference, arguing that a constituent assembly was the most democratic mechanism by which to transform racial rule.

South Africa's emergence as a new force in African politics should reinforce this new mood, and the OAU will be a good place to start.

Like many other international organisations, the OAU was forged on a fundamental compromise. In the difficult days of May 1963 when the ideal of unity proved illusory, African heads of government gathered in Addis Abbeba heard an emotional appeal from Ahmed Ben Bella, then the president of Algeria. He called on sectional interests to, as he put it, "die a little so that African unity can become a reality". The understanding was that different models for unity would be put aside so that the continent's attention might be directed towards opposing colonialism and helping to liberate the "white south".

The end of apartheid, therefore, terminates one of the lives of the OAU: its new challenge, in which South Africa can play an important role, will be to redirect the continent's course into the next century.

It will be foolish to suggest that this will be easy. In addition to the manifold economic problems, the continent is riven with political strife. Of these, the hoary and complex question of tribalism looms large.

Actually this issue when gradually linked to the sanctity of African national boundaries was, with Ben Bella's compromise, the only glue which has kept the OAU together for these past 28 years.

'SA's most powerful long-term contribution to Africa will be to discover a bridge over its own ethnic divides'

Vexed and intricate formulae will be needed for dealing with the persistence of ethnicity on the continent. In many ways, South Africa's unhappy experience with ethnic manipulation throughout the apartheid years will be instructive. But its most powerful long-term contribution will be to discover a bridge across its own ethnic divides and offer this as an example to the continent.

Together with Nigeria, South Africa will dominate African forums. Its new fully-representative, non-racial diplomatic corps will be active in African capitals and, almost certainly, South Africa will itself offer aid and assistance to fellow African states. This, incidentally, might be the only way in which to help stem the tide of humanity which, as we have seen, will be drawn to South Africa.

A compelling and exciting African future beckons South Africa. It is true that many will continue to wallow in Afro-pessimism: perhaps, however, like the poor or decrepit, latent racism of this kind will always be with us.

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Prof Vale, an Idasa trustee, is head of the Centre for Southern African Studies at the University of the Western Cape

Four key issues had to be resolved: basic principles underpinning the process of transition; arrangements surrounding an interim government; appropriate and democratic mechanisms for constitution making; the place and role of the international community in the transition.

The chairperson of the NP's study group on constitutional matters, Frik van Heerden, said there was a difference between an MPC and a final negotiation forum.

The MPC had several objectives. It aimed to initiate the process for finding consensus about the negotiating forum; to establish the criteria for participation in such a forum; to set out the guidelines for assessing proven support; to decide upon methods to persuade unwilling parties to participate; and to determine how decisions will be taken by the negotiating body.

"AN MPC is a pre-requisite for a constitutional assembly," he said, "we will be amazed at how much common ground there is among all South Africans."

A representative from the PAC's legal department, Richard Ramodike, said the PAC was opposed to an MPC.

He said the most widely accepted way of determining the will of the people was by the vote. The only way to reach this point was through a constituent assembly.

The vice-president of political education in Azapo, Molahlegi Tlhale, also rejected the idea of an MPC. Tlhale said there was no way Azapo would be "smuggled into the negotiation train". Black people no longer sought to reform the system, because that gave credibility to it.

The SA Communist Party, represented by lawyer Firoz Cachalia, endorsed the idea of an all-party conference. He said it needed to be as inclusive and as representative as possible and would help create a political culture of tolerance and institute a political pluralism. If need be, it should be delayed to give more time to persuade others to participate.

Cachalia said a new political discourse was emerging, one that had the potential to reconcile as well as liberate. It would be a mistake to involve the all-party conference in transformational issues such as the land question or the economy - these were policy matters for a constitutional government to decide.

The need for tolerance was also emphasised by Inkatha Freedom Party representative and KwaZulu Finance Minister, Denis Madide, who said South Africans had to find out how to live together.

He suggested three important functions of an MPC - to prepare people for the abandonment of apartheid; to reconcile irreconcilable groups; and to synthesize the various divergent viewpoints.

Madide said a constitution was a compromise document, but before people could learn to compromise they had to stop seeing each other as enemies.

"I do not care why De Klerk is going to call an MPC, all that is important is that I don't want to die a slave, I want to die a free man." □

By Ronel Scheffer

IF IDASA'S seminar on "white fears" in Port Elizabeth in March confirmed anything, it was that there is little tolerance out there (in the new South Africa!) for those who define themselves, or their disposition, as "white".

From the outset, participants in the debate made it clear that the organisers were wrong to initiate a discussion on whites' fears about the future outside the context of the myriad of concerns of broader groups like, for example, "blacks", "humans" or "democrats". Observing the sprinkling of whites among the 100 or so people present, one could not help but sympathise with these sentiments. Should whites' fears be taken seriously, in fact, if they don't even bother to show up at an event dedicated to their concerns?

Among the representatives of political parties present, there was some acknowledgement that the fears whites harbour of "black" rule could become an obstacle to the transition. However, there was no agreement on whether these fears should be addressed or if it was at all possible to allay them. But there was a feeling that whites could at least be encouraged to realise that many of their fears about the future - losing control, a breakdown of law and order, drastic suffering and so on - were shared by the majority of people, including blacks. Frankie Connel, a counselling sociologist from Wits, said such an understanding could produce a foundation of hope and promote solutions.

Ms Connel, and a few members of the audience, fought gallantly against a convincing analysis of Stellenbosch political scientist Jannie Gagiano, who said "white fears" were really "middle-class" fears and suggested that these could not be allayed without retaining several, if not all of the features of the current system of domination.

Using the results of numerous surveys among white university students, Gagiano illustrated the systematic links between these fears and whites' current position of power in society. Their fears include losing control of government and accompanying privileges, declining law and order, expendability, drastic suffering, becoming subordinate, black revenge, cultural obliteration and losing status and influence. Successive surveys showed that black government was associated with, among other things, an increase in white unemployment, corruption and tribal conflict, a decrease in personal safety and the collapse of welfare services in general.

The challenge, according to Gagiano, was how to moderate these fears to prevent them from becoming a powerful force that could affect the negotiation process.

What made this challenge more daunting was the current depressed economic climate. He argued that middle-class fears would be best addressed if the negotiators opted for economic growth and order and stability as immediate goals. This would mean that the goals of political participation and equity - around

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'White humans'

Whites' fears about the future participants in an Idasa seminar indicated that black people would be expressed by'

which much of "black fear" revolved - would be "left on ice for a while"

In his opening remarks at the seminar, the Rev Mcebisi Xundu, a member of Idasa's board of trustees, stressed that the alleviation of whites' fear should not "cost the oppressed too much". He said the fears of minorities in South Africa had caused tragedies of national proportions in the past and these should not be repeated.

'The alleviation of whites' fear should not cost the oppressed too much'

After years of being misled by the false promises of a white government, black people had difficulty in accepting the bona fides of the government. "Blacks are genuinely saying, 'when can you begin to trust a white'. Is this negotiation process not just another sugar coated pill?" asked Xundu.

Mark Shinnars of the PAC warned that the topic of the seminar might be pandering to the worst "swart gevaar" predilections in our



Jannie Gagiano (right) with Max Mamas