

Fast pace of reform surprising most – Mbeki

THE process of reform was happening much faster than most had anticipated, Thabo Mbeki, ANC director of international affairs, told a public meeting in Port Elizabeth recently.

In fact, Mbeki said it would not be altogether impossible to have a new constitution by the end of 1991 – provided processes like the return of exiles and release of political prisoners were speeded up.

Mbeki visited the city as the guest of Idasa. During his stay he also addressed 40 leading businesspeople and a capacity audience of students at the University of Port Elizabeth.

Some 350 people attended the public meeting where he also highlighted the following aspects:

- That one person, one vote should not lead to a domination of minorities; the ANC therefore

endorsed a system of proportional representation.

- Regarding an interim government, he rejected the argument that South Africa was a sovereign state which could not permit such a structure. Rather the issue was one of the acceptability and legitimacy of the present government, most particularly during the transition process. "If Kaiser Chiefs are playing Orlando Pirates, the former can't referee the game at the same time!"

- On the acceptability of a white president in a future South Africa: "I don't know what Nelson Mandela would think, but

it could be a very good thing!" Mbeki seriously believes that non-racialism, as "an idea of the heart", must also find practical expression.

- Cautiously positive remarks were conveyed to the SA Police for their apparently more impartial conduct during the events of the previous weekend in Alexandra.

An excellent discussion took place between Mr Mbeki and the businesspeople and early indications are that it could lead to the establishment of a working group between the ANC and the local business community to address the

housing crisis in Port Elizabeth.

At UPE's "apolitical" campus, Mbeki received a standing ovation from the 500 students present.

Mbeki told the students that sanctions would remain in place not until the ANC called for their repeal, but until political stability was reached and investor confidence restored.

He also emphasised that it was imperative for students to become involved in political debate as politics could, and should, be influenced by the entire South African community. The ANC's policy documents, he said, should be available on campus so that their policies could be intelligently debated and criticised by the student community.

Keith Watrus
Regional Director

Action, not guilt, needed from whites

FEELINGS of guilt, warmth and solidarity in themselves are ineffective regarding reconciliation. What is needed is action, according to two British activists.

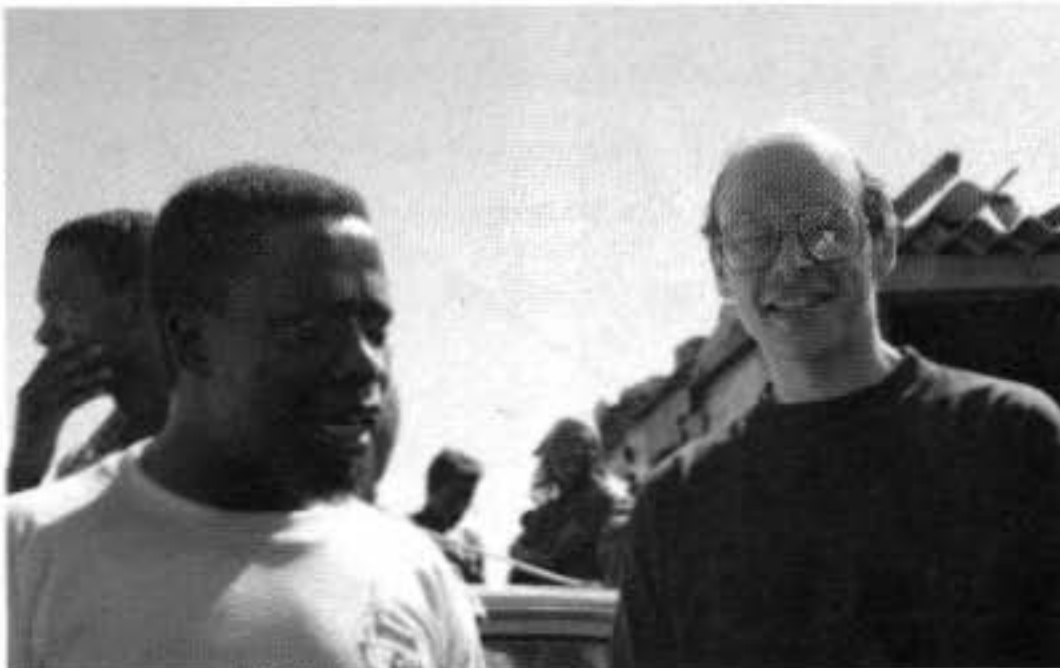
Robert Haines and Frank Anti of the Churches Anti-Racist Enterprise (Care) in Liverpool, who were guests of Idasa in Pretoria recently, made some important observations after meeting a wide range of local organisations.

"The government seems to be unaware of or unwilling to accept the sophistication of political analysis at grassroots level," they said. They saw evidence of commitment, hard work and disciplined action at the local level. "This apparent ignorance strikes us as being most dangerous."

Mr Haines and Mr Anti were introduced to a variety of NG Kerk ministers, the Pretoria Council of Churches, the SA Catholic Bishops' Conference, and visited Soshanguve and Winterveldt. They attended a mass meeting at a squatter camp, and an ordination service in Winterveldt, at a church which serves Mozambican refugees.

"The order of commitment and dedication to prevent violence and build confidence and hope, was high and impressive.

"This experience led us to



Robert Haines (right) with Idasa regional co-ordinator Paul Zondo in Soshanguve.

believe that the perception of whites of the situation in the black community is so different from the actual that their perception of what is to happen and when it has to happen is dangerously deficient.

"One perceptible area of similarity between here and the UK is that 'liberal' whites, who seem to regard the government's reforms at face value, talk of reconciliation and 'individual enlightenment' as if the key to the reordering of things is to be found primarily at the level of beliefs and attitudes. There is the similar talk of 'de-programming' and the establishment of contact, encounter, et cetera.

"Whilst not writing the above off, the more stark, and in our view, realistic analysis, is the one which seems to be more prevalent amongst black activists and their allies – the reordering of society must begin with structural and institutional change which attacks the economic injustices which oppress the majority of people in this country. Sympathy without relief is like mustard without beef.

"Community organisation and mobilisation at grassroots level seems to be orientated firmly in this direction through civics, community committees and local networks.

"Apartheid was not born out of

racist beliefs and attitudes alone; these were nurtured as an "anaesthetic" to allow the rulers to ignore the pain and destruction of the policies they pursued in order to gain and hold wealth and power.

"To repeal racist laws without rapidly following this up with a programme of restitution is a cosmetic exercise which does next to nothing to ameliorate the lot of the great mass of people.

"For every racist law repealed a 'positive action' or just law must be promulgated, and worked out in practice and detail by the present regime.

"Luring the liberation movements into a semblance of 'democratic' politics before this has happened could however be disastrous for the whole country.

Mr Haines and Mr Anti said the government must "put its own head on the block wherever there is failure" – not the head of the ANC.

"A political sleight of hand whereby the government raises expectations, calls and loses an election, and leaves the mess to its successors, would be a serious blow to the likelihood of peaceful and just progress to unity and a redressing of the balance."

Kerry Harris
Regional Co-ordinator