

DEMOCRACY in ACTION

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DATE WITH DESTINY

By SHAUNA WESTCOTT

SOUTH Africans are days away from the most significant event in centuries of our history. We have snatched from the ashes of apartheid a chance that was unimaginable only five years ago. We must not lose sight of this fact, whatever the difficulties that lie ahead.

This means that everybody must make an effort to vote on 27 April – or exercise their right not to vote, peacefully. But it means more than that. It means taking a stand against intolerance wherever we may find it. It means refusing to participate in panic. Every person who stays calm, every person who is non-violent, every person who refuses to be stampeded into doomsday stockpiling of groceries, will make a contribution to ensuring a free and fair election.

Idasa Training Centre for Democracy Director Paul Graham put it like this: "This election will work only if everyone realises that they must play a part. We must all cooperate. We must look after one another, deal fairly with one another. We all need to understand that this a great moment in our history and it is one that we might not have again."

Ultimate responsibility for managing this "great moment in our history" rests with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). It is a responsibility no one can envy – the scale alone has been daunting. Arrangements had to be made for about 25 million voters to cast their votes in about 80 000 voting booths in almost 10 000 polling stations spread across a vast territory.

Nearly a quarter of a million people will staff polling stations on election day, in addition to more than 10 000 monitors. Not only did this vast army of workers have to be employed, trained and deployed, it all had to happen in less than two months.

Western Cape Chief Electoral Officer Mary Burton, for instance, attended her first IEC meeting on 23 February. Yet she is upbeat and imperturbable. "The timeframe looks



PRAYER FOR THE FUTURE: Prominent South Africans bow their heads at an Easter service in Moria, Northern Transvaal. SATV

Idasa encounters 'Q'

By BEA ROBERTS

WE LIVE on the edge at Idasa, but we did not know how close to the edge until "Q" – who subsequently became the Goldstone Commission's "Deep Throat" – approached staff running a community policing project with allegations that plunged us into a shadowy and chilling world of covert operations, gun-running, enormous financial pay-outs, shady deals and murder.

Most people learned about the allegations of "Q" on 18 March, when Justice Richard Goldstone released his by now well-known report. The broad thrust of those

allegations is that senior police generals were among those involved in an orchestrated effort to sow violence and mayhem in the country, with the East Rand and KwaZulu/Natal particularly targeted.

Activities alleged to be part of this conspiracy include the manufacture and purchase of weapons; the delivery of weapons to the Inkatha Freedom Party; orchestrated attacks on trains; and other terrorist attacks – in short, the "third force" operation whose

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New SA, new director

Wilmot James explains how he plans to lead Idasa into the future — See Page 16

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Ballot safe

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● *Ndinamntu wam; uye athethe, athi umntu nguzipeqe kanti akamazi. Ligqirha xa livumisayo* (I have a person of mine; she is used to speaking and saying a person is this and that, and yet she does not know the person. It is a diviner when she divines).

Nevertheless, the old sociological axiom remains valid that what people define as real becomes real in its consequences. If people believe that it is impossible for their votes to remain hidden from magical powers, these beliefs need to be taken seriously.

Claiming to have the power to know how people voted is a form of political intimidation. Intimidation is illegal. The social control function of healers is not compatible with the democratic process.

'The diviners' capacity to reveal concealed truths depends in the first place on the willingness of clients to allow them to do so'

However, short of locking up all the indigenous healers in the country, what can be done to address the problem?

Although there is a whole mythological complex which surrounds diviners, it is important to remember that in reality diviners are often as illiterate as the people to whom they give advice. In the same way as everyone else, diviners rely on the media for information.

The only effective solution is for indigenous healers country-wide to become a target group for voter education. Various bodies represent indigenous healers throughout the country and could co-operate in the task of taking voter education to their members.

Voter educators can make contact with indigenous healers in a particular locality – for example the rural/urban areas of Crossroads or Nyanga East – and explain why it is important for the ballot to remain secret.

Based on close contact with Cape Nguni diviners over the past 20 years, my own impression is that most indigenous healers will respond positively if they are approached politely and respectfully. Such an approach delivered co-operation between health workers and diviners in Grahams-town to set up a TB clinic.

Manton Hirst is the Principal Museum Human Scientist at the Kaffrarian Museum in King William's Town.

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manageable," she told *The Weekly Mail* in the first week of March. "Yes, we are coping," she said early in April. "We're keeping up to date with our timetable. We've got some really good people in place and good relations among them all. Everyone is carrying out their tasks."

IEC commissioner Ben van der Ross agrees. "We South Africans are a pretty resourceful lot. We're getting the message from the United Nations crowd that we can't do it. But we'll pull this thing together."

Fellow commissioner Helen Suzman shares this determination. Looking forward to retirement after what she hopes will be the final stretch of long public service ("This is Custer's last stand!"), she said of the IEC brief: "It's a pretty awesome task but everyone is working flat out and we intend to complete the job."

Suzman emphasises that the election should be seen as the harvest of years of struggle. "Although the fruits of victory are somewhat sour in some instances, they are to be savoured," she says.

Burton agrees, says work in the IEC is giving her a real sense of the delightful flavour that life in the new South Africa could have.

"One of the things that is wonderful is that people working in the IEC come from all sorts of different political persuasions and histories. This is illustrated by the fact that security in IEC offices is being provided jointly by the South African Police and the ANC. To see them working together day after day, shift after shift, is wonderful.

"In our office we're beginning to get a real sense of what things are going to be like in the future. So that's what I hope: that we're developing a little model of how things can be."

And it's not just the police and old ANC cadres who are in on the act of building the future. An astonishing variety of people have flooded IEC offices with offers of help. The person now responsible for human resources in Burton's office demanded to be released from his top-level job in the commercial sector for the election period. "This is the first and possibly the last time I can do something for my country," he told his boss, "and I am determined to do it."

It is also important to remember that, in addition to the vast effort of the IEC and other transitional structures, thousands of South Africans are quietly working away at

hundreds of projects, big and small, to build a better future. These people seldom make newspaper headlines. Their projects are unsung. Yet in a range of fields – from education to agriculture, from small business to conservation – South Africans are already engaged in reconstruction.

So, when you see the latest catalogue of horror on your TV screen, remember that you see only part of the picture. Over 90 percent of our country is at peace. The vast majority of South Africans want peace and many are actively engaged in making it happen.

At the same time we cannot be indifferent to how much suffering there is. Nightly we see or hear about the savagery that has been part of the South African political landscape for decades. Each person speechless with loss, each weeping victim of atrocity is one too many. Each rightly evokes our horror, our deep sympathy, our sense of outrage, our commitment to urgently seek ways to end the terror.

This commitment was a fundamental part of the motivation behind the meeting between State President FW de Klerk, ANC president Nelson Mandela, KwaZulu Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi and King Goodwill Zwelithini that took place on 8 April. The meeting was preceded by an encounter between three of these leaders – and others – at the traditional Zion Christian Church assembly of millions in Moria over the Easter weekend.

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However sceptical some might have been about their motives, the sight of the three on their knees amid the masses of the faithful gave hope that there could at last be a breakthrough. It is profoundly disappointing, although not really surprising, that there was not.

Nevertheless, we should not despair. De Klerk said after the meeting that he thought much progress had been made, adding: "I think we have achieved today the beginning of negotiations that should have started long ago." The king said he hoped the meeting would show people at grassroots level what South Africa's leaders expected their followers to do. A task group has been set up to pursue unsolved issues.