

THE task of persuading Whites to abandon apartheid and to commit themselves to a non-racial democracy assumes Herculean proportions when seen against the background of persistent and far-reaching state propaganda. A favourite theme of South African television and radio is the threat of Soviet invasion if the present government's policies are abandoned. The image is conveyed that the Red army of the Soviet Union is poised to invade South Africa and destroy its way of life, its economy, its churches and in particular White South Africans!

In IDASA's attempt to persuade Whites to move towards a democratic future, we are constantly faced with White fear of communism and the "Soviet threat". On the other hand, there are many statements and articles from Soviet academics as well as Sovietologists from the United States and Great Britain and elsewhere which refute this alleged threat. Therefore when an invitation came to visit the Soviet Union, it seemed wise to travel there and to see for myself.

Jenny and I spent two weeks in the Soviet Union during July, visiting Moscow and Leningrad with a number of visits to outlying areas. We talked with politicians, administrators, academics, leading members of the Russian Orthodox church and foreign ministry officials (apart from the many hours spent in discussion and debate, we were fortunate enough to attend a ballet, a concert in the Kremlin, folk dancing and singing in Leningrad and the Moscow Circus!). Insofar as Soviet policy towards Southern Africa is concerned, there seemed a clear commitment to encouraging negotiation rather than violence as a solution to the conflict within the area. We were specifically told that the Soviet Union's policy towards Southern Africa was that the region should not become the theatre for competition between the great powers of the United States and the Soviet Union. As far as Angola is concerned, they were greatly encouraged by the discussions taking place between the Angolans, the Cubans and the South Africans and were willing to offer any assistance to ensure that the discussions led to genuine negotiation towards the withdrawal of Cuba and South Africa from Angola and the implementation of the

From the Executive Director - *Perestroika and the Soviet Union*

DR. ALEX BORAINÉ

long-awaited United Nations 435 Resolution.

They were hungry for specific information about South Africa and

we spent many hours answering their questions. They stressed that solutions to existing problems in South Africa had to be found by South Africans themselves although they made no secret of their total abhorrence of apartheid and opposition to its policies. Clearly perestroika has touched every aspect of the Soviet Union including its foreign policy. As America discovered in Vietnam, so it would appear that the Soviet Union has discovered in Afghanistan that regional disputes cannot be solved by the intervention of the major powers.

Amongst the academics there was a real attempt to understand the nature and complexity of the racial and economic problems within South Africa. I was amazed when



Dr. Alex Boraine, a Soviet Union professor and Jenny Boraine with Russian Orthodox priest in 13th century monastery.

two of them greeted me in Afrikaans as I entered into discussions with them! I was particularly impressed by the detailed knowledge of our situation displayed by Professor Appollin Davidson, whose library on Southern Africa was extensive. They were well aware of the perception amongst many White South Africans of the so-called Soviet threat and emphasised that the Soviet Union had no desire to become embroiled in what was essentially a Southern African problem. Again, however, they stressed that they would do anything they could to encourage genuine negotiation between legitimate Black and White leaders within South Africa.

We were fascinated and even excited by the mood of expectation which seemed to run through the Soviet Union society in terms of Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership, and the emphasis on perestroika and glasnost seemed to pervade the atmosphere. Everywhere we went, people were discussing the new commitment to far-reaching and fundamental economic and political reform. People queued up from 5 am in order to secure newspapers which devoted enormous space to the perestroika debate. The Soviet Union citizens are fortunate in having Gorbachev, who has the power to turn back the havoc and repression brought about under the Stalin era and to unlock the vast resources, both human and material, for the good of all.

We have many people in opposition in South Africa who regularly over the years have spelt out a course of action which, if adopted, could bring stability, security and peace in South Africa. Tragically, the people in charge who have the power and therefore the initiative seem to lack both the will and the desire to resolve our own internal crisis. One thing is clear though — as developments take place within Southern Africa the fig leaf of the Soviet threat is going to be snatched away from the South African government, and they will have to resort to a different programme of propaganda in their attempts to confine South African Whites within the apartheid laager.

IDASA will continue to try and expose propaganda wherever it exists and to help all South Africans to be informed so that enlightened decisions can be taken about our future.

South African Students' Perceptions Changed in Zimbabwe

STEVE FOURIE

"WHAT do a Nusas head office staff member and the son of Professor Carel Boshoff, ultra-conservative leader of the Afrikaner Volkswag, have in common?" asks Robert Houwing of the *Weekend Argus*. Dries van Heerden of the *Sunday Times* begins: "He spoke of ANC members in Harare and found it a 'stimulating experience'. He saw the Biko movie, *Cry Freedom*, and enjoyed it."

These are the opening paragraphs of just two of a number of newspaper articles which have appeared in South African newspapers since the visit to Zimbabwe of a diverse group of sixteen students, drawn from the universities of Pretoria, RAU, Free State, Stellenbosch and Port Elizabeth. The trip was facilitated by IDASA in association with the Zimbabwe-based Cold Comfort Farm Trust during July this year.

Although newspaper articles have naturally focussed on two aspects, the presence of Carel Boshoff and the informal talks with student members of the ANC, the students' most commonly expressed highlight of the trip was their experience



Neil Shaw (right) in conversation with Zimbabwean students.

of life at the Zimbabwe University. The programme had been planned around a number of visits to the campus of the University of Zimbabwe to afford the South Africans the opportunity of interacting with the students and teachers. The very gracious welcome of the Chairman and Committee of the Students' Union set the stage for the vigorous, friendly debate which stretched over the next two days.

It was during the discussions at the university that the S.A. students met their compatriots, members of the ANC studying at the university. Although the relationship was a little stand-offish to begin with, it had developed into a warm, friendly one by the end of the week — evidence again of the possibility of our finding each other in discussion rather than destroying each other through conflict.

Also included in the busy itinerary were meetings with a number of people on the subject of the destabilisation of the Frontline States, their development and the "Zimbabwe experiment" (the government's reconciliation programme). For a number of the students another highlight of the trip was a visit to an Afrikaans farming community.

Students' comments on their trip include the following:

* "Zimbabwe is a land where democratic tolerance has become a reality. We heard lecturers and students at the University of Zimbabwe criticise the Mugabe government openly, and stayed with Afrikaans families in the rural areas who did the same from a fairly racist perspective."

* "When I listened to Zimbabwean students talking about their national struggle I could not fault them on anything. It is just a pity that they do not show the same understanding for the Afrikaner's quest for liberty."

* "Ek voel gemotiveerd om die stryd vir die totstandkoming van 'n demokrasie voort te sit."

* "Ten minste 50% van die dinge wat ek oor RSA in Zimbabwe gehoor het was vir my totaal nuut en het beslis 'n kwalifiserende invloed op my politieke mening aangaande RSA gehad."

* "Ons het almal se storie gehoor. Die boer wat swaarder kry, maar tog erken dat hy nog die lewe geniet en dink dat Mugabe 'n goeie, intelligente leier is."