

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

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Not black or white ... but green

By Sue Valentine

ALTHOUGH the ANC does not have an environmental policy at this stage, a clean environment must be an important issue on the political agenda, according to returned exile Prof Albie Sachs.

Speaking at an Idasa/Earthlife Africa forum on the ecology in Cape Town in August, Sachs said it was a priority to put the "green" issue in a South African context. No one wanted a polluted environment, but an anti-industrial thrust was not necessarily desirable either.

"Nature can be cruel and terrible in parts

of our country. We need piped clean water in every house, we need electricity, we need antibiotics and vaccines . . . the real problem is to do something that gets down to our people living in the townships, the rural areas - and those in the beautiful areas as well," said Sachs.

"You don't have to be white to be green," he added, stressing the point that the envi-

'The ANC depends on those in the field to advise it on environmental issues'



Albie Sachs



Ursula Eid

ronment should be the concern of all South Africans. "The poor people are often very much in touch with the environment because it presses in on them."

Sachs, who is a member of the ANC's constitutional committee and teaches at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London, candidly acknowledged his lack of ecological expertise, and stressed that the ANC was open to - and depended on - those in the field to advise it on the issue.

He said disagreement and criticism did not mean one was necessarily anti-ANC. It was more positive for the organisation to get

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Not a great day for women

By Shauna Westcott

IT WAS "a great day", ANC national executive committee member Gertrude Shope told the crowd of about 8 000 gathered at Curries Fountain in Durban to relaunch the ANC Women's League.

(It was a Sunday afternoon in August with a mean wind blowing and half the press succumbing to flu.)

It was a great day, Shope said, "because it has united all the women of South Africa".

Such is the delirium of rallies, the realm of the slogan, and there was lots of sloganeering at the launch. Most of it came from

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'In this hour of exasperation and exhaustion, let us stand up and be counted like our sisters of the Bible'

Left: The ANC Women's League is launched in Durban.

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men. Not much of it had anything to do with the struggle of women.

Natal ANC leader Harry Gwala kicked off with a bellicose message no different in substance from what Winnie Mandela got rapped over the knuckles for two days earlier: "If we don't get liberation through negotiations, we will take it by force."

He began by introducing himself as one known for talking about war and guns most of the time, adding: "Today I know is not my day. It is the women's day. Secondly, today is Sunday, when most of our discussion is related to church and the bible."

He then proceeded with a "war and guns" speech, tossing in two remarks presumably aimed at accommodating aspects of the day that were not his.

One was a reference to the biblical injunction to "turn the other cheek", which fitted smoothly into the war talk.

"That time of slapping cheeks has passed," said Gwala. "Now we fight with AK-47s.

So much for Sunday.

As for the women, he deemed it sufficient to characterise us as the "lionesses" that remain behind to protect the young when the "lions" run away, or alternatively, as those whose bowels do not betray them when the "diarrhoea" of panic seizes the males.

THE NEXT message from the men in the movement came from president Oliver Tambo. It was read by his wife Adelaide and offered little beyond statements of intent that are beginning to look a little tattered.

Tambo recalled observing at a 1981 conference of ANC women that: "If we are to engage our full potential in pursuit of revolutionary goals, then, as revolutionaries, we should stop pretending that women in our movement have the same opportunities as men."

He also recalled a joint pledge made in 1985 by himself and Namibian president Sam Nujoma that they "would not consider our objectives achieved, our task completed, or our struggle at an end until the women of South Africa and Namibia are fully liber-

ated."

Finally, he observed that in May this year the national executive committee of the ANC "re-emphasised the fact that women are not present in sufficient numbers in the structures of our organisations, especially at decision-making levels, and that as a consequence we have not yet fully integrated women's concerns and the emancipation of women into the practice of our liberation struggle".

While some would argue that we should be grateful for such pledges and observations, many others have run out of patience with formulations that beg the issue.

Far from being "not yet fully integrated", women's concerns have barely made the

'Far from being "not yet fully integrated", women's concerns have barely made the agenda of the ANC or other organisations in the MDM.'

agenda of the ANC or other organisations in the Mass Democratic Movement. Sexism is rife, sexual harassment all but unchecked, leadership all but entirely in male hands.

Sincerity must be proved in practice, as the ANC leadership is fond of telling the National Party. Where then is the evidence of the commitment to non-sexism of the ANC and the MDM?

Certainly not to be discerned at Sunday's rally, which featured a squad of drum majorettes in ANC colours who, horrible to relate, were a welcome distraction from the male ANC leaders who periodically commanded the microphone.

As for the women who spoke, Albertina Sisulu did make the point that "we are in the



Mrs Adelaide Tambo at the launch of the ANC's Women's League in Durban in August.

struggle not for one man, one vote but for one person, one vote", one that still needs to be impressed upon at least half the staff of the SABC, the press and a large number of the people whose views they foist upon us so relentlessly.

But the only person who conveyed any real sense of the rally as one dedicated to the struggle of women was an unnamed speaker from Natal who led the assembly in a prayer "in this hour of exasperation and exhaustion".

"Let us stand up and be counted like our sisters of the Bible," she said, invoking the examples of Deborah and Esther as women who rose above the strictures of the patriarchy.

IT MUST be said that the rally was preceded by a workshop attended by about 400 delegates from across the country. The hope remains that this was constructive and that the foundations were laid for an effective programme that will move the patriarchy – and their consorts – past the traditional postures.

But as a fleet of BMWs lined up to bear away the glitterati, and as the stadium emptied of people, hope seemed a small thing against the wasteland of litter left behind. The wind was meaner. Crows circled and settled among the crumbs.

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Not black or white . . .

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constructive criticism from those who were concerned about where the country was going.

"The question of talking and listening to others is crucial. You have the expertise, advise us," he said.

Sharing the platform with Sachs was an MP of the West German Greens Party, Ursula Eid, who said individuals could not wait for politicians to give the lead. Whether they joined political parties or civic groups, individuals needed to be involved in environmental issues at grass-roots level.

Citing the ecological degradation in East Germany as one example, Eid said the Greens believed the lines of conflict were not between capitalism and socialism, but between the industrial society and nature.

She added that many people on the left blamed industry for every-

thing but did not acknowledge the role of the individual in environmental destruction. The Greens believed the personal was also the political. "If I always blame others, then I will never consider my own role," she said.

Global problems needed joint worldwide action which should start at community level. It was also not enough to repair existing problems, the causes had to be eradicated.

Eid said South Africans had a strong tradition of civil disobedience and consumer boycotts which could be extended to boycott shops and manufacturers who produced ecologically-damaging products.

"Leave the washing powders with phosphates on the shelves," she urged.

An ecologically-orientated society, she said, was necessarily linked to a participatory democracy where people had the right to know, freedom of speech and organisation.

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