

Civil society: more than being nice to each other

The meaning of civil society and its implications for a potential democracy were debated by University of Cape Town political scientist Prof André du Toit, Mr Wynand Malan (former Democratic Party leader), Methodist Church Bishop Peter Storey, Mr Mark Swilling of Planact and Soviet historian Prof Appollon Davidson.

Setting the scene, Du Toit defined civil society as the social formations which were relatively independent from and outside of the state. It was, however, also an approach to democratisation which focused on the role of associations and churches, that is, all aspects of civilian life outside direct politics.

It was not enough, suggested Du Toit, to democratise the "political kingdom", all other aspects of social life had to be included too.

Neither should democratisation be confused with the free marketer approach where privatisation was the cure-all. This led to a situation where authoritarianism became privatised and civil society was left to the mercy of giant privately controlled corporations and the whim of the market.

Du Toit cautioned that following the resurgence of civil society in the anti-apartheid struggle there was the danger that these groups were so rooted in the liberation movement that they converged with political society and took the form of a "state-in-waiting".

The key to a strong civil society, he sug-

need to be protected from the state.

"A strong state is necessary for a civil society and strong civil society is necessary for a

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SWILLING: civil society should not be equated with democracy.



DU TOIT: democratising the "political kingdom" not enough.