Political intolerance: long haul to new culture

By PAUL GRAHAM

THERE have been strong and increasing calls for South Africans to undergo a programme to develop their tolerance towards one another.

'No go' areas, the ready resort to weapons in order to deal with differences, political competition which seems designed only to eradicate the opposition, and the regular deadlock of peace structures all point to intolerance as a major threat to democracy.

The apparent unwillingness of some people to accept a free and critical press has meant that journalists have personal experiences which inform their reporting on the dangers of allowing an intolerant society to continue.

However, before any educational programme begins, the objectives of such a programme should be defined clearly. The forces driving people to behave in an intolerant manner need to be understood.

Resources could be spent developing a programme which has little impact. The experiences of public health programmes on Aids prevention and population growth should provide salutary lessons.

South Africa has many communities which have been fighting a battle for survival. Political oppression and socio-economic need have driven these battles. Leadership theory regularly describes the need for situational leadership. A classic example is of the sinking ship in which the captain acts autocratically and her commands are willingly accepted by the crew. Under conditions of high threat authoritarian leadership is not only appropriate, it is welcomed. The relationship between the leader, the community and the outside world is defined within this perception of threat.

The individual conforms to the norms of this authoritarian community for good reason – it ensures his survival. And because survival is only possible with coherence, the costs of dissent and individualism are too great to bear for this group. Territories (both in the real landscape and in the 'mindscape') become no-go areas and are defended vigorously and violently. Of course South Africa has additional problems. There is a growing warrior class. Young men – and to a lesser extent women – have become the defenders of these territories. They are trained and available. Serious unemployment amongst these same young people ensures that they stand apart from the citizens of the country. While the big wars are in a state of suspension and the little wars are increasingly privatising, the warrior class remains mobilised – if only by their own decision that there is no better choice for them. Communities that discover they have self-appointed private

Public examples of political intolerance in recent months have intensified pressure for (preferably) quick remedies. But are there any?

armies protecting them are only one symptom of a massive system of warriors throughout the society.

Finally, there is the problem of homeland-linked political parties. There is little tolerance for political parties which are perceived as having been established with 'apartheid' money to create an impression of legitimate support for homeland governments. The subtle and not so subtle tactics used to win support for these parties during the 'total onslaught, total strategy' era of the 1980s has meant that some of these parties' claim to a legitimate place in the political landscape is put in question.
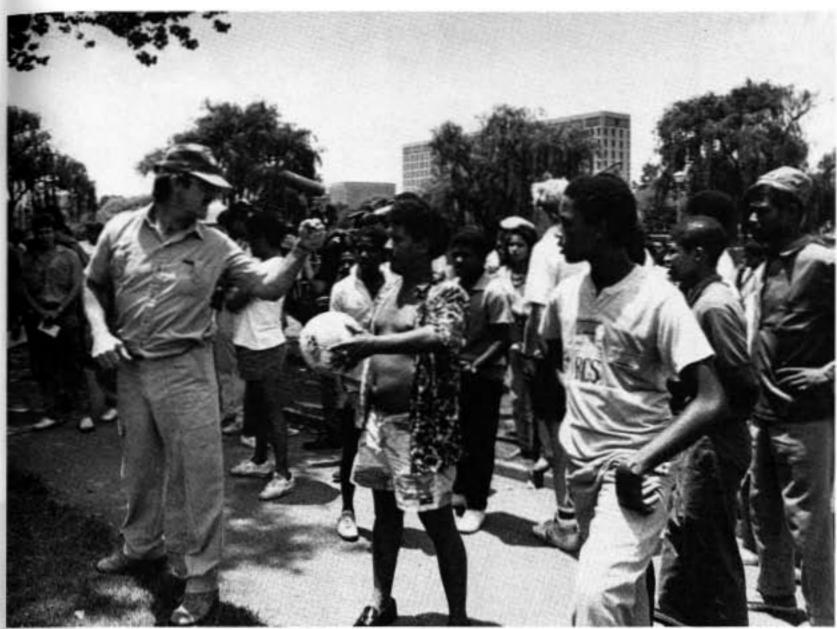
A programme to achieve a culture of tolerance will have to address directly the needs which drive intolerance. Personal security will have to be assured. Economic independence – whether through job creation or community development – addresses one source of insecurity. A responsive and reliable police force and judicial system will address another. In regard to the problem of existing political parties obtaining legitimacy, legislation which ensures that all parties re-register with disclosure of membership, financial openness, and adherence to a code of conduct might be the only way to 'heal the memories' and establish a new basis for healthy and tolerant competition.

The development of this environment waits in large measure on a political settlement within which the rehabilitation of government services, a culture of democratic rights and an economic programme can be negotiated.

Within this environment, programmes which develop self-esteem and self-confidence, a spirit of *ubuntu*, and an independent attitude are necessary. These form the backdrop to more specific programmes of citizenship and community responsibility. Dr Oscar Dhlomo, of the Institute for Multi-Party Democracy, makes the point that we should beware of merely reaching for Western sources and values during such programmes. Specifically African traditions must be identified and reclaimed. The development of the skills necessary for dealing with continuing competition for resources – such as skills in negotiation and mediation – can underpin a tolerant society but it is the environment of security and respect for others which drives people to choose these non-coercive problem solving methods.

There is also a fear of totalitarianism which lies at the heart of this upsurge in concern for tolerance. Dealing with this fear requires programmes which bring people from different cultural and racial groups back into contact with one another. One of the dangers of the race for power which an election engenders is that of polarisation around parties. In South Africa, despite all our weak efforts to the contrary, parties con-

Rightwingers protest against black youths' presence in a Reef park.

Graeme Williams, Southlight

tinue to be predominantly racially divided. We have not yet managed to overcome this cleavage in our society.

However, there are already models of tolerance in South Africa. Programmes will need to look towards these. Uniformed church organisations are a regular feature of township life. They encourage visible differences and often have very strict codes of conduct. Yet people go about their business unhindered. Other forms of religious tolerance (not always a feature of societies in conflict in other parts of the world) regularly manifest themselves here. Vigorous support for a particular soccer team, accompanied by

all the regalia of such support, has not deteriorated into the hooliganism seen in Europe.

A programme to develop tolerance, rooted in a firm commitment to the institutional transformation which will provide the necessary environment of support, is not a soporific to reduce citizens' concern for justice and reconstruction. There are strong suspicions that those who call for tolerance are actually calling for the status quo to be maintained. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The development of a culture of tolerance in a democratic country is designed to ensure that every citizen, without fear, can

express their opinions about the state of that country, about its rulers, and about the conduct of other citizens. That citizens should be free to organise others. That freedom implies that citizens have the space, the opportunity and the skills to organise.

In an article in the recently published *Preparing for Democracy* (see advert page 13), Vincent Maphai writes on democracy and intolerance: 'Attitudes will take time to change, but this change can be sped up where appropriate supportive institutions are in place. Political tolerance will not be occasioned by pious platitudes from the leadership; it requires organisational and institutional transformation at all levels.'

A programme for the development of a culture of tolerance must go hand in hand with a steady and sure transition to political democracy. Neither can wait for the other. But the creation of tolerance is a long term activity. While tension, violence and the needs which drive people to intolerance still exist, special mechanisms to reduce the cost to the country of this intolerance must be introduced now. The Peace Accord, monitoring structures, consultative forums around questions of policing and security, relief programmes, and even combined policing groups may be necessary to protect us from ourselves.

Paul Graham is Idasa's Programme Director.

Ushering in democracy.....with tolerance

By PAUL ZONDO

A PEACE deal was struck between competing political parties at an Idasa-facilitated workshop on tolerance and voter education in KwaNdebele on a weekend early in January.

More than 250 delegates from the African National Congress (PWV region) and the ruling party in KwaNdebele, Intando Yesizwe (IYP), attended the workshop and agreed to establish ties which would sustain them during the run up to elections.

Also present were two representatives of the United Nations Observers Mission in South Africa.

The general secretary of the IYP, Mr Mighty Mgidi, said that it would be difficult to come out with a model for political tolerance, and that leaders often contributed to the problem by not dealing with the troublesome issues timeously.

South Africans had entered a period of uncertainty, fear, hopelessness, confusion and intolerance and this was characterised by a lack of understanding of how to usher in democracy.

He said that unfortunately the prevailing conviction was: 'we want to be the only organisation in the area' whereas what was needed was an acceptance of multi-party

co-existence. In KwaNdebele this tension had fortunately never reached a level of national attention and had never led to open physical confrontation.

The deputy chairperson of the ANC in the PWV region, Mr Mathole Motshekga, said political intolerance was not confined to KwaNdebele only, but was a product of apartheid and rooted in a history where people who held different views and interests were banned, killed, exiled and the like.

The conference also addressed the need for a process whereby all would adhere to the principles of political tolerence. In addi-

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Ushering in democracy

tion, delegates drew up a series of resolutions and a draft a code of conduct.

The resolutions included:

- all members shall accept and practise the principle of political tolerance;
- all members have the right to constructive criticism;
- all people and organisations shall be afforded the right to assembly;
- the right to own property shall be guaranteed;
- the right to life shall be guaranteed;
- all organisations are to have free access to media and amenities without hindrance;
- discipline is to be exercised by the respective executive committees of the transgressors;
- the system of hereditary rules is to be observed and respected;
- agreements made at national level by both organisations need to filter down to the grassroots, and this should be the responsibility of both organisations;
- the IYP should not monopolise KwaNdebele state resources because state resources belong to all the people of KwaNdebele;
- the civil service must be separated from politics;
- there must be a clear distinction between IYP and the KwaNdebele government;
- since the IYP has influence in the government it should support other community organisations which have genuine problems with the government; and
- communication channels to be created at all levels through the secretary-general in order to resolve problems.

It was agreed unanimously that a joint report-back meeting to members in the region be organised, and the secretaries general of both organisations were mandated to form a regional liaison committee.

A liaison committee was appointed with the task of ensuring the implementation of the resolutions and code of conduct.

Elements of the code of conduct included the freedom to organise and canvass support; the right to free assembly and equal access to venues; freedom of expression (including access to the media and the right to positive criticism);

UN observer Antonio Cubeiro with Idasa's Braam Viljoen at the workshop.

and a commitment to the protection of lives and property.

This new deal entrenching peace and tolerance in KwaNdebele has already begun to give rise to other events.

The IYP and ANC are now looking to a bright future where they will be organising joint political education programmes such as voter education, and the message will be filtered through to grassroots membership.

Ronnie Mamoepa, ANC regional publicity secretary, said the conference deserved praise since it had served as a 'pace setter' for promoting a culture of democracy in our country.

Paul Zondo is a regional co-ordinator in Idasa's Pretoria office.

Have you seen them? What do they mean?

The SABC seeks a way of changing the world while changing itself.

By SUE VALENTINE

YES, what do they mean? Those brief adverts on television with South Africans of varying shades of pigment and political belief, airing their views on liberty, equality, the economy and a host of other 'popular' concerns.

Reaction to the 'People Say' campaign, produced by advertising giant Saatchi & Saatchi for the SABC, is varied. Some regard it as an SABC image-building effort, others see it as an attempt to encourage debate and build tolerance in a divided society.

Both perceptions are correct. In recent years the SABC has been at pains to polish its tarnished image – hiring consultants to advise it on how best to tell the world it is changing, at the same time as attempting to fulfil its role as public broadcaster.

Certainly the initiative to air a diversity of viewpoints and to promote public debate is encouraging. No matter how long it has been in coming, the use of the national airwaves to attempt to foster understanding and tolerance is a welcome development.

What exactly is being done *inside* the corporation to encourage a climate of tolerance, independent investigative and credible journalism remains shrouded in defensive secrecy. Besides the public relations exercises, there's been little attempt by the SABC to

Ruth Tomaselli: audience in the dark

What other

Gavin Stewart, professor of journalism, Rhodes University

'The ads do seem to raise people's awareness of each other, but I'm a bit bewildered at the people they're choosing...They seem to be taking fairly far-out views to the left and the right and I'm not sure what this actually achieves.

'It reminds me of the Archie Bunker series in the United States which was intended to ridicule bigotry, but had