

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

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Towards one nation



Two of the speakers at the "Options for the Future" conference . . . Prof Hermann Giliomee and Dr Charles Simkins.



Prof Servaas van der Berg and Mr Michael Coulson . . . differed on the redistribution of wealth.

SOCIAL, economic and political factors have changed the attitudes of people in South Africa towards negotiation and will continue to do so, Dr Van Zyl Slabbert told some 350 delegates who attended IDASA's Options for the Future conference in Johannesburg in May.

Dr Slabbert said IDASA was trying to build a climate for negotiations and "with a conference like this one we are articulating the cost if we don't move in a certain direction towards negotiation".

"As the hurdles of apartheid fall," said Slabbert, "the debate goes further and progresses." He predicted that the position of whites towards negotiation will continue to shift because "many planned and unplanned forces" which will influence the willingness of people to negotiate, will shift over time.

"Once we've knocked the shifts in NP policy as cosmetic, we mustn't underestimate the influence of these shifts on the political process. The NP is on a slippery slide towards accepting the idea of one nation. The debate about negotiation has now shifted and we are now talking about the kind of society we want to live in and this has placed the Mass Democratic Movement in a very powerful position to influence the debate," Slabbert said.

Dr Slabbert's positive observations came at the end of a day which was marked by a highly stimulating and sometimes heated

NP shift poses new challenge

By PIERRE DE VOS

debate between panellists and speakers from the floor.

Prof Hermann Giliomee, head of the department of political studies at the University of Cape Town, set the cat among the pigeons when he elaborated on his viewpoint that two nations — one black and one white — exist in South Africa at present. According to Prof Giliomee, a gradual change with a "definite timetable of between seven and 10 years" would be necessary in order to facilitate the reconciliation process between the two nations.

Giliomee said the policies of the NP had changed considerably over the last 10 years. "The NP are looking towards nation building. They want to build a new inclusive South African nation around the existing white nucleus. This new NP ideology is a more powerful adversary for the anti-apartheid groups than the old apartheid policies."

An angry delegate from Soweto asked Prof Giliomee if the Jews in Nazi Germany would have accepted a "gradual change" of

the system in Germany. Giliomee replied that if the present system couldn't be overthrown by force it was essential to get whites to sit down at a negotiating table. "It's the only other way out and it requires compromises," he said.

Several other delegates expressed their doubts about the willingness of the National Party and whites in general to relinquish power. "Whites are in the grip of greed, fear and irrationality," remarked one delegate.

Dr Alex Boraine later commented that Giliomee's view institutionalised the idea of two nations and this idea was exactly what IDASA was trying to get away from.

According to Dr Boraine, people should rather become involved in the debate about a post-apartheid South Africa. "There is a growing awareness in South Africa that we cannot leave this matter in the hands of the government or the normal institutional bodies who would give attention to constitutional matters," Boraine said.

Taking his cue from Dr Boraine, constitutional law expert Prof George Devenish, of the University of Natal, said that the ANC's constitutional guidelines could be seen as an important catalyst for a peaceful solution in South Africa. "The guidelines, if they are seriously debated, are a starting point that could lead to greater clarity on the important constitutional issues," he said. "But," warned

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Delegates at the conference . . . Aneliese Burgess, Francois Ferreira and John Solomon.



IDASA staff at the conference . . . Liesel Naudé, Melody Emmett (both from Johannesburg) and Cindy Deutschmann (East London).

Heated debate on economic system

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Prof Devenish, "the way in which we arrive at a new society will influence the nature of such a society. A ruthless totalitarian regime would be the outcome if South Africa is engulfed by violence and bloodshed."

Prof Devenish said, however, that the "constitutionalism of the guidelines indicates that the ANC foresees a peaceful resolution of the internal conflict in South Africa."

In his response to Prof Devenish and Dr Boraine, Mr Mathole Motshekga of Unisa's law department once again questioned the willingness of the NP to relinquish power. He rejected Prof Giliomee's view that the ANC should compromise on certain key issues to entice the government into negotiations. He scoffed at the idea that the present government had "changed its tune" because of its "kindheartedness". "The apartheid state found itself in a crisis as a result of the mobilisation of the oppressed by the ANC and other democratic organisations," he said.

"They challenged the legitimacy of the state and forced the NP to reform. The failure of the government to handle this crisis forced them to make negotiations a buzzword."

Mr Motshekga also rejected the possibility of a federal constitutional structure in a post-apartheid South Africa which was mentioned by both Dr Boraine and Prof Devenish as one of the possible constitutional options that needed to be looked at.

Delegates differed sharply over the desirability of a federal system of government. Some felt that a federal system with its decentralisation of power would help to prevent the abuse of power by an all-powerful government. Other delegates argued that the ANC was formed in 1912 with the goal of forming one nation and said that a federal system could create division and retard the process of nation building. Prof Devenish cautioned the delegates to distinguish between a real federation not based on race and "the corruption of federalism in the form of bantustans".

After an intense debate all the delegates agreed that, during genuine negotiations, the federal system of government would also have to be put up for discussion.

The debate about a future economic system

for South Africa had the tempers of some delegates flaring. Mr Michael Coulson, deputy editor of the *Financial Mail*, criticised Prof Servaas van der Berg of Stellenbosch who said in his speech that the ANC's economic guidelines are disappointingly vague, but a step in the right direction. Coulson said that any policy of a redistribution of

'The answer lies in upliftment through a better growth rate that would negate social distribution.'

wealth as envisaged in the Freedom Charter and the new guidelines would be "horribly and totally unacceptable". "This fallacy of redistribution is a recipe for universal poverty," he said.

Mr Coulson also said that the elimination of inequality would not necessarily lead to a growing economy. "We need equality of opportunity. We will not improve the lot of the people of South Africa by destroying the present economic system."

"The answer lies in upliftment through a better growth rate that would negate social redistribution," Coulson said.

One delegate responded by saying that she didn't have an academic interest in the

situation like Coulson did. "I've been living as a black person in this country for the last three decades and I have experienced the inequality and discrimination," she said.

Later Dr Alex Boraine intervened and pleaded for a compassionate approach in dealing with economic issues. "We must deal sensibly, economically and compassionately with this issue," he said.

After some discussion it became clear that the disagreement between Mr Coulson and some delegates was partially caused by the emotion attached to certain terms by delegates. Dr Charles Simkins, consultant to the Urban Foundation, pointed this out. "The debate must begin on how economic growth could be stimulated. Then everyone would be able to look with more clarity at the situation and would understand in detail what must be done. We cannot do this however, if terms like redistribution is linked with emotional tags," he said.

The whole conference was marked by some detailed discussion on intricate constitutional and economic matters.

In his concluding address Dr Slabbert, "stating the obvious", went much further: "Conditions for negotiations have to exist before they can take place," he said. "With conferences like these we are helping to build a climate in which negotiations can take place."

□ PIERRE DE VOS is attached to IDASA's publications section.



During the tea break . . . Van Zyl Slabbert and Eric Balayi.