

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE INSTITUTE FOR A DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE FOR SOUTH AFRICA

OCTOBER 1989

New mood in white community

By Ronel Scheffer

Over the past two months thousands of ordinary white South Africans, fed up with apartheid and frustrated by the limitations of traditional ways of political expression, were seen actively participating in the wave of protest marches and demonstrations that swept the country. Many of them had their first unpleasant taste of police beatings, and some spent short periods under arrest in police cells and jails for taking to the streets in solidarity with oppressed fellow South Africans. But where do they go next?

The effective political accommodation of this growing band of whites is one of the key questions that will demand the attention of anti-apartheid strategists in the months ahead. The election results and the protest marches provided ample proof that a significant number of whites are beginning to identify with the vision of the mass democratic movement. They want an end to the injustices that have been perpetrated in their name for decades, they want to be free of the legacy of debilitating guilt and are keenly aware of the need to



Solidarity in Cape Town's streets

cut through the barriers of enforced separation that has impoverished them as human beings and brought shame to them as South Africans.

Alas, they are not about to break into a toyi-toyi with the comrades or join the structures of the United Democratic Front. The broken rhythm of the dance is as foreign and scary to them as the organisational culture. And herein lies the rub: the political aspirations and challenges facing the white converts are akin but by no means identical to those of their fellow black South Africans. They are fighting for their survival, and a new society, from the very different angle of the oppressor, the privileged enfranchised. It would be

To Page 4

Four Namibians spell out their hopes and fears for the future in an independent country. The real names of three of them have not been used at their request. Philip Shipulwa's name is real.

By Peter Kenny

Gabriel Shivute is a wine waiter with high spirits for his future in Namibia.

He is sure his party, the South West Africa People's Organisation, is going to achieve a massive victory in the November 7 elections and life will get better for him.

"Our president Comrade Sam Nujoma is back and we are going to rule ourselves. Life will be better when the Boers have gone," he says.

Mr Shivute is not a party activist, just a grass-roots supporter. Since he was a teenager Swapo was the party of hope for him, the only one that could push the South Africans out.

Every time Swapo holds a rally in Windhoek's Katutura township he wraps up in his dazzling blue, green and red scarf with the party's colours, even when it boils in summer, and stands on a dusty field in solidarity.

The jam packed little box-shaped bungalow that Mr Shivute lives in with friends and relatives in crowded Katutura is a far cry from the mahangu fields of Ovambo where he grew up, starting his working life as a herd boy.

His wife and five children carry on peasant farming there and he visits them for about a month each year, and sometimes for a long weekend.

Mr Shivute has a Standard Six education, and does not believe he will ever become the manager of the hotel where he works. But he is sure that once freedom comes, he will earn more, have better working conditions and be promoted.

Philip Shipulwa is a former fighter in Swapo's armed wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (Plan), but is now bitterly disillusioned with the movement.

He hated the system in Namibia so much that he left for Angola where he was trained as a soldier and was sent to the frontlines. But in February 1988 he was arrested, accused of being a South African spy. He escaped with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross in July 1989.

"South Africa was not guilty of killing its own people like Swapo," said Mr Shipulwa

Joy, fear on eve of independence

in a recent letter he sent to newspapers.

Swapo will, he believes, just introduce a corrupt system of neo-colonialism bereft of human rights unless it admits the crimes it committed by detaining hundreds and maybe thousands from within its own ranks.

Gerry Miles is a white man in his early forties who is looking forward to independence. He came to Namibia from Zimbabwe 11 years ago, but has no plan to embark on a chicken run if a Swapo government comes to power.

Mr Miles, a successful business executive, considers himself to be a Namibian now and qualifies as a voter.

"Look, I just want to put my nose to the grindstone, work hard and make a good living in this land which is God's own country. I am not running south because they are just going to go through what we went through in Zim and are experiencing here now."

"I am not going to vote for Swapo because I believe we must have a strong opposition. But I do hope a Swapo government we get is strong and self-confident. I think the new world political order with people like Gorbachev will prevent hot-head ideologues from wrecking the economic infrastructure."

Cattle farmer Gert van Blerk has grave apprehensions about independence. He is a long-time supporter of the National Party of South West Africa and is also sure that Swapo will be the dominant power in the new government.

"I am a Southwester, and am prepared to become a Namibian as long as they leave us alone and the education and health standards don't drop too much. If there is trouble here we won't hesitate to pack our bags and head south."

He admits his farm is mortgaged to the hilt through the Land Bank and he has sent a lot of money to South Africa.

"I don't really want to go down there because De Klerk is going to do the same thing that the Botha's have done here," says Van Blerk.

□ Peter Kenny is a journalist in Windhoek.

New era dawns for Namibia — Page 8

Challenge in changing mood of whites

From Page 1

both dishonest and foolhardy to disregard the implications of that reality — we can't all pack our bags and trek to the townships in one simple move, so to speak.

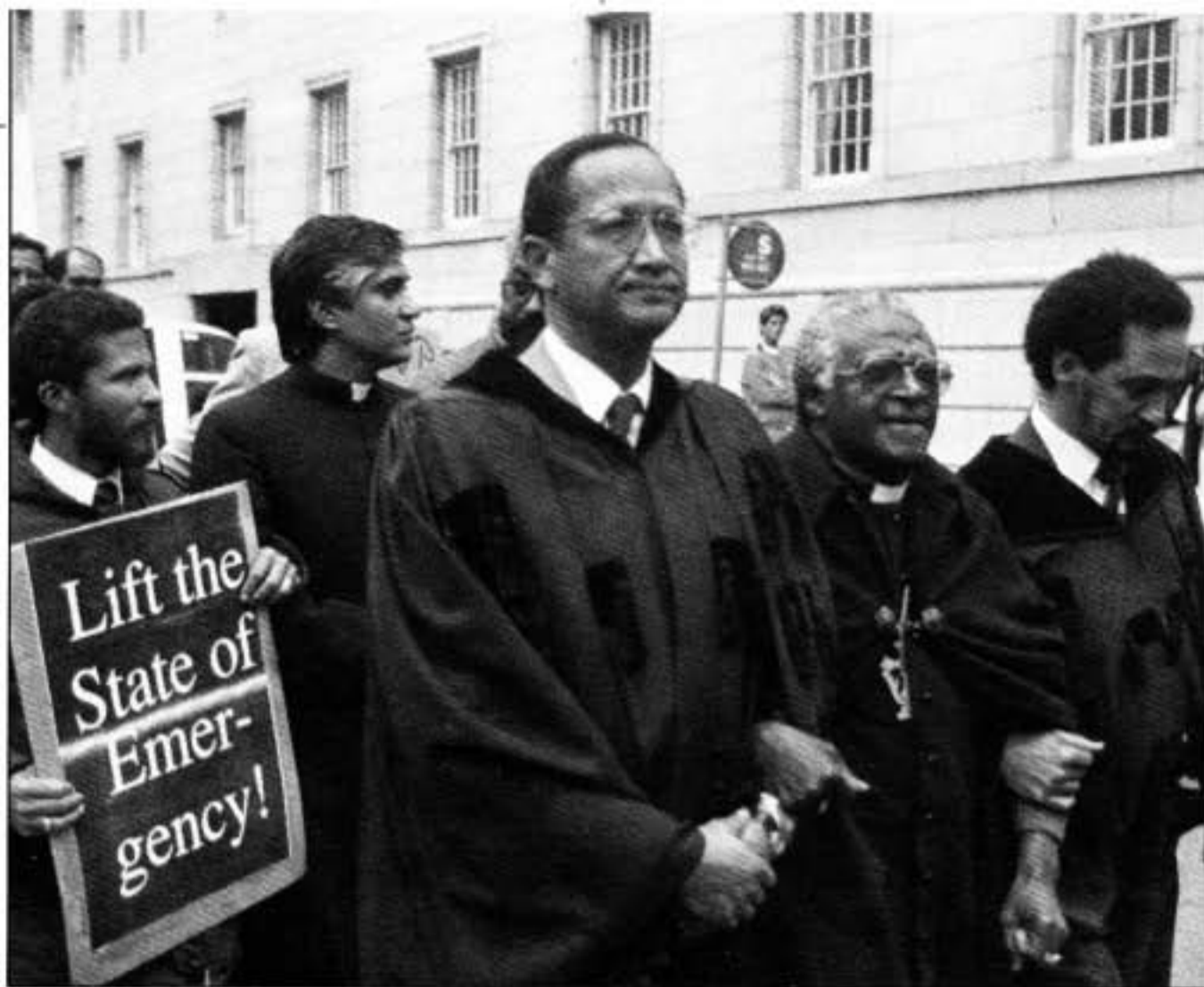
So whether aspiring white democrats? Often confused and not fully comprehending or in agreement with the rhetoric and political idiom of the MDM, they end up with one (guilty) foot in the Democratic Party and the other gingerly reaching for a "vastraplek" in the ranks of those whose proud record of resistance against oppression and exploitation, and vision of a non-racial, democratic South Africa, have captured their imagination. The uneasy relationship between the DP and the MDM, resulting largely from the DP's insistence on contesting the elections in the Coloured and Indian houses against the urgings of the MDM, adds to the dilemma of these whites who generally come from a monogamous political background.

In recent weeks several MDM spokesmen have remarked on the need for the movement to personally intervene in the white community and to go beyond merely supporting the work of organisations already deployed in that area. Within the UDF there appears to be a growing awareness of the strategic importance of drawing whites into the struggle. In an interview published in *Upfront* UDF national executive member Titus Mafolo stressed the need to draw as many whites as possible closer to the MDM's negotiation concept. On his release from prison ANC veteran Walter Sisulu also pointedly referred to the duty those in the struggle had to inform all South Africans, particularly Afrikaners, of their political objectives. "We think it is essential for our mutual education and enlightenment to have extensive contact with the Afrikaner, and the youth in particular," Mr Sisulu told *Vrye Weekblad*.

Some whites already active in the MDM hope that the December Conference for a Democratic Future, which should include a broad range of anti-apartheid organisations, may come up with a programme to work in the white areas.

White converts can draw some comfort — and guidance — from the example of Jan van Eck, probably the only white South African who has managed to bridge the gap between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics with relative success in recent years. The MP for Claremont does not find himself in a dilemma serving in the tricameral parliament and maintaining a close working relationship with the black community at grassroots level at the same time. "But I must confess that it is frustrating to sit in an unrepresentative parliament," he says.

A member of the white UDF affiliate, Cape Democrats, Van Eck is grateful that he resisted the temptation to leave parliament altogether and become fully involved in the democratic movement. "Whites must be freed from their fear and prejudices and we won't succeed in doing that by turning our backs on them — in the same way as one cannot turn



Franklin Sonn . . . whites should not overcompensate.

one's back on Lt Rockman because he is a policeman."

Strong differences still exist within the MDM about participation in the white chamber of the tricameral parliament (the coloured and Indian houses are rejected completely) and dual membership of political parties represented in parliament and UDF affiliates are also frowned upon. Van Eck feels comfortable with both and believes he has to work in both areas. "MDM people have on occasion told me that parliament may not be relevant but that I myself and the role I play in parliament (highlighting the plight of black communities and keeping whites informed in the process) is relevant."

He stresses the need to narrow the gap between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics. "The wider that chasm grows, the more violent our future will be," says Van Eck. His advice to whites therefore is that while they continue to exercise their vote and maintain a low level of activity in parliamentary politics, they should devote more of their energies to participating in the campaigns of the democratic movement so that they can also begin to understand something of the politics that will shape the future of the country.

The future of South African politics lies not in co-operation between the DP and the government but in co-operation between all white democrats (including the DP) and the MDM. In fact, Van Eck stresses, that the DP will have to move cautiously to avoid being co-opted by the state which will attempt to do this to prove its legitimacy.

Franklin Sonn, rector of the Peninsula Technikon and a key figure in education debates, argues that the worst thing whites can do is to overcompensate in their attempts to gain acceptance within the MDM. He sees the democratic movement as broad front which must bring together all those who share the ideal of a non-racial, democratic future, using the Freedom Charter as a guideline. Inevitably the political baggage of its participants will not be identical.

"If we draw too fine distinctions for participation it will debilitate the movement and we will have missed the opportunity to estab-

lish a broad pressure group for change . . . it will degenerate into a study group like the New Unity Movement where they spend hours examining the texture of people's hair and the shape of their toe nails under microscopes."

He believes that "tolerance and brotherliness" should typify the movement and that small differences must not distract it from the central issue of replacing the existing rigidly hierarchical and authoritarian "voor-sê" political culture with a truly democratic one, and moving from group-thinking to shared values. "The power and strength of the democracy is illustrated in the process . . . many people do not realise that democracy is a process and not an end result, and that we will discover its strength in the process of democratising people."

The strength of the democratic process also lies in its continued commitment to challenging and questioning, says Sonn. "Individuals must not be allowed to become inviolable . . . we must challenge and ask questions all the time."

Debra Marsden, acting chairperson of Cape Democrats, feels the time has come for serious discussions inside the country between whites and representatives of the MDM, along the lines of the dialogue programme the ANC has been conducting for some time now with white individuals and organisations outside the country. "It is especially important now that we are seeing a dramatically changing political climate to the extent that the government can no longer demonise the ANC to whites. The same 'undemonising' process is happening to the MDM," she said. The defiance campaign has made whites, who are generally still ignorant and fearful of the democratic movement, more amenable to learning about the UDF, the MDM and the ANC and even to working within the structures of the movement.

Cape Democrats, established in April last year, is one of a handful of UDF-affiliated organisations that work in the white community. Similar groups, all of them broadly designed to give white democrats a political home and access to the democratic movement, exist in most of the bigger centres in

WHITE COMMUNITY

the country. Cape Democrats' membership, ranging from liberals to Marxists, has grown from about 100 at inception to 450. In practice they are part of the MDM debates and activities, giving content in the process to non-racialism. Through education and training programmes the membership gets equipped with the necessary understanding and skills to work effectively for change, both within the MDM and through outreach programmes and forums designed to create political awareness in the white community.

Mrs Marsden feels Cape Democrats' limited resources — and the restrictive conditions resulting from the State of Emergency — have hampered their efforts to bring the MDM to the white community. However, the issue is a priority on their agenda and will be receiving close attention in coming months. She believes that all elements within the MDM have to give serious thought to making themselves more accessible to the white community. "We must decide what it means in practice when we say there is a place for everyone in the struggle."

Cheryl Carolus, a member of the UDF executive in the Western Cape, says the democratic movement's door is open to anybody who opposes apartheid. But the MDM believes that effective opposition only comes through people participating in organisational structures. "We should learn together now what it means to be anti-apartheid and that is why it is important for people to consider some relationship with the UDF, if not active participation in its structures."

She defines the struggle as a process whereby the masses of people in an organised fashion seek an end to oppression and exploitation. "It is our belief that the struggle can only be effective when there is active participation by the masses of our people — as opposed to a few sharp thinking individuals. The form and the content of our struggle can only be determined by those formations which represent the masses of ordinary South Africans," says Ms Carolus.

For this reason, the movement wants to encourage anti-apartheid whites to join any of the progressive structures, be they political, professional, church, community or women's groups. Whites, says Carolus, should think of themselves first and foremost as South Africans and the MDM would encourage them to participate in activities which seek to promote non-racialism. Participation in organisations would be a further step because this is the most consistent and disciplined way of building non-racialism and giving non-racialism content.

of the people about some of the statements made by DP leaders. We try to refrain from attacking them in public but they must know they can't have their cake and eat it."

The tension between the DP and the MDM is to some extent inevitable, but it clearly needs to be kept at a constructive level. In a recent interview in *Upfront*, a committee member of the Western Cape interim co-ordinating committee of the UDF, Cameron Dugmore, stressed the need for the DP to define how it sees itself. "There is a growing concern that the DP, or certain elements in the DP, see themselves as providing a future middle-ground in South African politics," he said. "Their decision to enter those other Houses, despite the fact that the individuals have no community support, is a serious contradiction."

'Whites should think of themselves first and foremost as South Africans and the MDM would encourage them to participate in activities which seek to promote non-racialism.'

the white community, should not lose sight of this, says Carolus.

She adds: "It is difficult to control the anger



Debra Marsden... dialogue needed between whites and the MDM.



Jan van Eck... narrowing the gap between democrats.



Cheryl Carolus... white politics produce a narrow vision.

Carolus says the confusion which is articulated from time to time by whites — and people engaged in white politics generally — in relation to certain strategies and actions of the MDM, often stem from the very narrow vision they have of the severely disadvantaged position of the voteless majority in the country.

A few examples of this "narrow vision" are reflected in some recent disputes related to the Democratic Party, says Carolus. The MDM was perplexed and disturbed, firstly, when some DP candidates suggested that the defiance campaign was ill-timed and that it should possibly be scaled down to avoid a drift of whites back to the right-wing parties. Carolus says blacks find it incomprehensible that anti-apartheid whites, fully knowing that they (blacks) do not even have an inferior vote, could want to deprive them of their only means of protest at such a time.

Similarly, the concern in white ranks about elements within the democratic movement disrupting DP election meetings was based on an inadequate understanding of the situation, she says. The UDF at no time made an official decision to disrupt DP meetings, yet it cannot completely control the actions of people on the ground who were, and still are, deeply disturbed about the party's decision to contest the elections in the coloured and Indian houses. The tricameral parliament remains a powerful symbol of rejection to the majority of people in the country and the DP, or any other section of

He continued: "The DP should not be surprised at the level of animosity they are generating. If they are serious about playing a significant role in bringing about a non-racial democratic society they have to realise that they must take the MDM a lot more seriously. They also need to understand that they are not a government in the making."

Dugmore said the fact that whites were beginning to identify with the vision projected by the MDM was very significant for the resolution of South Africa's problems. The strength of the MDM, and the fact that it clearly represents the majority, is forcing more white people to look elsewhere for a solution. "And they are definitely not finding that solution in FW's five-year plan or in the DP."

He attributed the increased potential of whites in the direction of the MDM to the fact that the movement had concretely taken up non-racialism in its struggle. "Compared to Zimbabwe or Namibia, South Africa has more possibilities to do this."

□ Ronel Scheffer is Director of Publications with Idasa.

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