

# Thumbs up from those who responded

IT IS one of the peculiar facts of existence that very few people respond to questionnaires sent by mail, even very brief questionnaires like the one enclosed with *Democracy in Action* earlier this year. This is the bane of researchers, frustrates the rare institutions seeking to improve, and leaves open the question of whether those who reply represent that great bulk who do not (apart from offering scope for subterfuge which the fundamentalist right has busily tried to exploit in surveys on abortion, for example).

For those who not only didn't reply but

also don't remember, the questionnaire was a card which asked readers what they like and dislike about *Democracy in Action*. Readers were asked to fill in their names, addresses and titles and there was a space indicating ability or willingness to give a donation.

If the 2,4 percent who replied to the survey represent the readership as a whole, *DIA* is a magazine unusually blessed with approval. Readers like its relevant, comprehensive, informative and high-quality content! They praise it for being non-aligned,

unbiased and objective! They think it is sensitive, balanced and mature! Some even go so far as to call it "sound".

The staff of *DIA* were further encouraged to hold out for enormous salary increases by the amazing 62 percent of respondents who said there was nothing they disliked about the magazine.

There were the complaints, however, and they directly contradicted the accolades.

According to the carping minority, *DIA* is biased, not objective and concentrates too much on the centre-left and the ANC. Another unkind and probably politically suspect group of readers finds it too academic, intellectual, esoteric – "heavy going" was how one put it.

Then there is the unhappy matter of mistakes in the mailing list, which are defying all attempts to penetrate the secrets of aberrant databases and still irritating a not inconsiderable number of people.

Cheering were the jokers among the diligent few, one of whom wrote in the space next to DONATION: "No thanks I'm doing fine", while another, resident in the crime-ridden left-wing enclave of Observatory in Cape Town, filled in next to TITLE: "Commoner".

Shauna Westcott

## Still on the sidelines

By LISA THORNTON

LOOKING FOR the first time at a session of the Negotiating Council at the World Trade Centre, one might be pleasantly surprised by the number of women at the negotiating table. If one listened for a while to what was going on, however, one would have to realise that although women might have won the battle for a seat at the table, they still sit outside the circle of power.

This bleaker view of the situation is not tempered by the provision for a Sub-Council on the Status of Women as part of Transitional Executive Council (TEC) sub-structures. For it is clear that establishment of the sub-council will entrench the position of women on the sidelines.

It would appear at first glance that the establishment of the Sub-Council on the Status of Women would mean that negotiators were making a serious attempt to address the oppression of women. But a closer look reveals that, while the sub-council appears to give women a role in government, it denies them any real power in relation to any of the issues facing the nation.

The language of the TEC Act is revealing. It makes the Sub-Council on the Status of Women responsible for liaising with and making recommendations to the TEC, the Independent Electoral Commission, other TEC sub-councils, and "policy-making" forums – but gives it no decision-making power on the issues that are the province of these bodies.

It might be argued that the sub-council will have the power to make decisions on issues relating to the status of women. However, apart from the obvious difficulty – not to say absurdity – of attempting to separate such issues out from the rest of the web of socio-political life in South Africa, such decisions

will not be binding on the TEC and women will have no power to implement them.

A clause inserted into the seventeenth or penultimate draft of the TEC Bill supports this view of the Sub-Council on the Status of Women as a device to achieve the appearance of inclusion while at the same time ensuring that half the population continues to be confined to a non-threatening position out on the margins, beyond the inner circle.

The clause, drafted in "bilateral" negotiations, provides that the sub-council shall designate from among its members persons who will be entitled to attend TEC meetings and address the TEC on matters that concern the sub-council. This right in practice will be accorded to all TEC sub-councils and is simply a mechanism for ensuring the effective operation of the TEC and its sub-structures.

The position of the Women's National Coalition, however, was that the legislation should ensure the participation of women on the TEC itself. Permission to address the TEC is an insulting substitution.

Lisa Thornton is an American attorney and currently a voluntary worker at Idasa's Training Centre for Democracy.

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