

## DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

Idasa's goals are:

- To promote the development of a democratic culture in South Africa
- To address fear, prejudice, anger and other obstacles in the transition to a non-racial democracy in South Africa
- To engage influential groups and individuals who may be outsiders to the transition process
- To provide, wherever possible, information on critical issues and to explore ways of addressing these
- To facilitate discussion of constitutional and developmental issues relevant to Southern Africa
- To assist and encourage others to contribute to the attainment of these goals

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## EDITORIAL

# Signs of hope amid the gloom

**THE** horrifying violence which has left hundreds dead, many more injured and caused hundreds of thousands of rands worth of damage, has brought in its wake a deep sense of depression and gloom throughout South Africa.

While this is understandable, some positive measures have begun to emerge. Firstly, albeit belatedly, the state has shown its willingness to take seriously its responsibility in quelling the violence and to do so in an impartial manner. Secondly, the violence has shaken the complacency of many groups. Throughout South Africa there have been statements from political leaders, business leaders, church leaders and ordinary South Africans expressing their abhorrence of the violence, its total unacceptability and a commitment to peaceful negotiation. Thirdly, both Mr De Klerk and Mr Mandela are on record as saying that they will not allow violence from any quarter to derail the negotiation process.

### Alliances

This last point is extremely important and encouraging. As a result we can expect that parties will begin to seek partners and alliances as we look towards the beginning of formal negotiations and eventual elections.

Mr De Klerk and the National Party have put considerable pressure on other political parties in their decision to open the National Party membership to people of all races. In doing so the National Party took a very real risk; it may well be that they have lost some of their traditional support to the Conservative Party. Nevertheless, it would appear that Mr De Klerk has had the unanimous backing of the cabinet and the caucus in this decision.

Certainly there are a number of distinct advantages in opening up the National Party. In the first place, the party can no longer be accused of being racist. Secondly, it is a further demonstration of Mr De Klerk's commitment to genuine and fundamental reform. Further, it broadens the base of potential support which could be enjoyed by Mr De Klerk and enables the National Party to become a genuine centre party, thereby attracting a wide variety of supporters who cannot find a home in the ANC/Inkatha/PAC on the one hand, or the Conservative Party on the other.

### Membership

Having opened its membership to all, there is no longer any real need to seek alliances with the Democratic Party, the Labour Party or Solidarity. Mr De Klerk can now simply urge members of these parties to join this new centrist, non-racial party. Therefore the pressure is certainly on the other parliamentary parties.

South Africa's politics are remarkably fluid and any firm projections regarding

alliance politics are risky. But one thing is clear: there is a new dimension to politics in South Africa and the new space has brought about a new search and a renewing of positions. Consequently, there are bound to be many surprises ahead of us.

An obvious partner for the National Party to seek alliance with is Inkatha. This is no longer the attractive proposition it may once have been. Inkatha has become a political party in its own right, hoping no doubt that it can move into an alliance with the National Party. But Inkatha, since the outbreak of violence in Natal which has now spread so disastrously to the Transvaal, has become extremely controversial and the National Party may well want to keep some distance from Inkatha for that reason.

A second option which would have been unthinkable and impossible only a few months ago, is a possible alliance with the African National Congress itself. In this respect the South African Communist Party is a very serious problem for the National Party and this is the major reason why Mr De Klerk is seeking to isolate the SACP in his most recent speeches. Mr Mandela is the key to any possible alliance between the National Party and the African National Congress.

There are already the beginnings of an informal alliance and a degree of co-responsibility as witnessed by the frequent meetings and contact between the two leaders as well as between Mr Mandela and the Minister of Law and Order.

### Suspicion

It is unlikely though, that the present relationship will go beyond an informal alliance. Already there are tensions on the ground for the ANC because of the suspicion among rank and file members of the state and its instruments, notably the security forces.

Therefore, it is probably in the interests of both the National Party and the ANC that the relationship will be based on co-responsibility. This would be very much of an informal alliance, at least in the short term.

Whatever direction alliance politics takes, the search for relevance and fresh appraisals involve at least a measure of informal negotiation. This is healthy and points towards realignments which can only assist the transition towards a non-racial democracy.

What is equally important is that while the jockeying for power goes on and deals are considered, it is for ordinary South Africans wherever they are - in local government, at universities, in communities, at professional level - to begin seriously meeting each other so that the process towards a democracy and a new South Africa can begin to have a base which is far wider and deeper than can be expected merely from leaders meeting from time to time.

- Alex Boraine  
Executive Director