

A conference on Development was held in Maseru from March 8 to March 13. Its theme was "The individual and social responsibility in a developing country—is there a conflict between development and individual fulfilment? "

IN THE HALL OF THE MOUNTAIN KING

—Personal reflections on the Maseru Conference

by Carmel Rickard

Apart from a vague interest in "development", my chief reason for attending this conference was to see and hear Ivan Illich, whose writings greatly appealed to me. I was a little hesitant about going—meeting the man Illich might destroy the picture I had formed, and I was reluctant to be disillusioned. I should not have worried, for he was exactly as he ought to have been.

The opening speeches given by King Moshoeshoe II and Dr Ivan Illich set out the view which prevailed most strongly throughout the conference. This view expressed the need for development projects to arise from the requirements of the majority of the people, requirements which are clearly articulated by them; for people to exert control in the choice of whatever type of life is open to them, and for some limits to be imposed on "growth". Other speakers besides Illich and His Majesty also advocated alternative ways of living. Dr Richard Jolly, from the University of Sussex, pointed out the importance of preserving a balance between the formal and informal sectors of society.

The informal sector, he explained, consists of those people who make their livings on the fringes of institutionalised society—the shoeshiners, the people who sell home-bottled fruit juice to the workers outside the factory, the taximen—those who contribute to what Illich calls the convivial ¹ part of our lives. Albert Tevoedjre, the deputy director of the International Labour Organisation, strongly advocated what he called "voluntary poverty". As he explained it, this does not imply "romanticised misery" but rather a freely chosen restriction on what one owns and spends: this would leave one free to **be** instead of to **have**.

The attention of the delegates was also drawn to the setting of limits at the top. When limits are set, they are the lower ones (eg the poverty datum line), but the hope was expressed that upper limits would also be set. This would be a partial solution to the problem of diminishing resources, and it would help to narrow the gap between rich and poor. Attempts to justify this widening gap on the grounds of an eventual overall improvement in living conditions for all are misguided: the notion seems to be merely a myth, unable ever to be translated into reality. Nor is the idea a strange



Ivan Illich at Maseru

¹ Illich defines "conviviality" in these words:

"I choose the term "conviviality" to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to demands made upon them by others and by man-made environment".

Illich, I. **Tools for Conviviality**, Harper and Row, New York, 1973.

one to the Sotho, in one of whose proverbs it is succinctly summed up: "Where there is no wealth, there is no poverty".

These views, shared by a large number of delegates, were contrasted by the views of other delegates and, even more blatantly, by the life-style which the circumstances of the conference itself seemed to epitomise.

There were speeches which outlined the **minimum** requirements which foreign experts were entitled to receive: at all times they should be able to live in the manner to which they were accustomed; they were entitled to their clubs and should be paid bonuses so they could educate their children at institutions of their own choice; they should be made to feel secure and should not be expected to leave when their tasks were complete. Instead the host government should create additional posts to accommodate both the foreign expert and his local counterpart.

The conference itself was held in the magnificent banquet-hall of King Moshoeshoe II. This building is very close to the palace, although separated by a fence; but each time an official had to go from one building to the other, he seemed suddenly to become paralysed. A man would assist him to an excessively ostentatious waiting car. (Illich called them "motorised thrones"), open the door for him (the paralysis obviously being of a serious kind), help him into the back, and then drive him around the fence, usually under escort and with headlights on.

In contrast to all this pomp and panoply stood Illich. He appeared completely uncompromised by the affluence around him. A visit to Matsieng had been arranged for us to see the Moshoeshoe II High School and the projects of the Matsieng Development Trust. The Cadillac convoy of conference VIP's with outriders and sirens belied the

earlier talk of conviviality, but Illich arrived unobtrusively during the proceedings and almost immediately became involved in a conversation with a group of pupils from the school. His ability to transform the potentially pedantic to the strangely exciting was always evident. This is the result of, amongst other things his intense anguish at injustice and his startling ability to penetrate the type of argument which seduces with impressive statistics: in this way he shows how the myth and the reality are incompatible.

The conference showed the great dilemma of the developing countries. It was clear that "wants" —artificial needs—had already been created by the "capitalistic carrot", and that the satisfying of these wants had brought Lesotho into a hopeless struggle for the kind of life which apparently not even the developed countries can perpetuate. One sensed the great need for answering Illich's radical, exciting challenge to withdraw from the type of competition which destroys rather than creates, and to live a self-sufficient life; to withdraw from the race that will not enable one to improve the quality of one's life, but which will leave millions disillusioned and convinced of their own inferiority, while providing luxuries for only the few.

More generally, the conference was a strange experience for a White South African. Here one confronted Africa, not through newspapers or other peoples' experiences, but as a personal challenge. One's views had to be reconsidered; seeing one's reflection in other people's eyes made it essential to reconsider one's prejudices and reassess oneself. After the week's conference, coming back to South Africa was like entering a land peculiarly pallid. But this impression was somewhat balanced by the personal development which one sensed was perhaps the most lasting result of this conference. □



Ivan Illich at the Royal Village of Matsieng with pupils of the Moshoeshoe II High School