

FIVE FREEDOMS FORUM/ANC CONFERENCE JUNE 29 - JULY 2

COMMISSION B 3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT

At first sight, the subject of local government appeared to be a rather arcane and unchallenging subject, and the ability of the Commission to sustain four hours of intercourse was feared.

However, it became increasingly obvious that in addressing the issue of city management, we were striking at the very core of the South African crisis. For it is in our cities that we will confront and resolve the gathering crises of poverty, unemployment, political alienation and homelessness. That is, of course, in no way to underplay the human devastation that is occasioned by rural poverty, but it became clear that local government is a dangerously neglected field of political and constitutional enquiry.

It is also in our cities that the constitutional divide between own/general affairs finds its fundamental foundation, reaching its apex in the Regional Services Councils.

This, of course, occurs against the background of a state policy which is essentially anti-city, which has expressed a tradition of hostility to the metropolitan areas.

This anti-city philosophy finds tangible expression in such elements of policy as the industrial decentralisation programme, the regional development policy and the announcement 2 years ago by Minister Barend du Plessis that revenues from privatisation would be used to reinforce decentralisation policies and retard the imperatives towards increased urbanisation.

The switch from this philosophy towards an acceptance of the role of the city as a generator of opportunity has been accompanied by two significant developments.

The first is the almost universal collapse of the ethnic balkanisation of the urban areas. Particularly the pervasive political illegitimacy and resource-starvation of the black local authorities cannot be exaggerated.

Secondly the fluidity, confusion and incipient paralysis which characterises government policy toward racially defined local authorities is counterpointed by an unprecedented interest in the nature and governance of the post-apartheid city, and by a plethora of local initiatives designed to seize the momentum for change from the organs of government and to explore alternative local structures through the establishment of urban coalitions.

From the background paper Patrick FitzGerald sought to assess the implications of the state's local government reform package, focussing on the establishment of parallel control structures such as the JMC's, the role of Regional Services Councils in reinforcing the apartheid city, and the consequent mass township resistance to virtually every aspect of urban control from group areas to education.

We sought particularly to initiate an exploration of the potential value of the many regionally based initiatives which have tentatively attempted to set the foundations of non-racial democratic and integrated city management, while at the same time cautioning that any such initiative toward genuine democratic control at local level is critically constrained by the diversion of interests and objectives between central government and those intended for local government.

Our other presenter, Frank van der Velde, analysed the extent to which the Cape Town City Council has attempted to keep alive the value of a non-racial local government franchise, and to push back the boundaries of urban apartheid, stressing particularly that council's long standing rejection of the Group Areas Act and its more recent efforts to launch a participatory planning process designed to formulate a goal - orientated sense of vision which is shaped and endorsed by all the city's people.

By far the bulk of the Commission's deliberations was devoted to an exchange of experiences by local authorities in their attempts to desegregate urban societies, and to create strategic alliances and coalitions around urban issues, for example in open city projects where progressive councillors, extra-parliamentary white groupings and the MDM coalesce

around single issues.

There emerged a clear consensus that our core urban crisis is the fact of the segregated city and the resulting distortion of resource allocation, and that we must shift perceptions towards an acceptance of the one city concept.

We must begin to drive into our urban political culture that Cape Town, for example is not an agglomerate of separate polities such as Langa, Gugulethu, Athlone, Khayelitsha and the core Mother City, but a single conurbation inextricably bound together as one city by the imperatives of economics and interdependence.

Much time was thus spent on the exploration of the room for strategic and tactical manoeuvre available to progressive local authorities or individual members of city managements.

Recent attempts in this arena indicate a number of questions;

1. The high level of suspicion and distrust which exists between elements of the MDM and white local authorities.
2. Will the openness and frank intercourse which has marked this round of consultations find a like-minded readiness at home?
3. If purposeful negotiation is to occur, there is a role for white local authorities and white extra-parliamentary groupings to support the rebuilding of shattered democratic structures.
4. Progressive white local authorities must begin to exert a more aggressive style of moral leadership. There is enormous opportunity to influence attitudes and mobilise whites through exposure to single issue campaigns.

In conclusion, we are faced with the fact that future local governments structures in the post-apartheid city are at present receiving a attention only from those actually involved in urban management, the Urban Foundation, and a number of academic research units.

The Commission thus threw up more questions than pointers to the future.

Specifically there is a real need to examine policy positions and strategies for the following areas, the solutions to which are not immediately obvious.

1. How are we to move from the segregated city towards the establishment of a single integrated non-racial and democratic city?
2. What structures and processes would be necessary to ensure genuine community participation in local government and the provision of urban services?
3. In the transition phase, how do we optimally forge those linkages and local coalitions in order not only to achieve tactical objectives such as the abolition of group areas, but the generation of a shared political culture which recognises our cities as single political entities.
4. Particularly a need was expressed for the establishment of networks among progressive whites to share experiences and the lesson to be learned from those experiences, and to lend a supportive and coordinating framework.