

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

EDITORIAL

ANC: govt won't tango but it might two-step

IDASA's goals are:

- To encourage South Africans of all races to reject apartheid and discover an alternative that is non-racial and democratic in the true sense of the word.
- To assist people to accept and work for a post-apartheid society as a way of allaying their fears.
- To mobilise the skills, knowledge and experience of all those who can assist the communities in the crisis areas of South Africa.
- To provide forums and opportunities on a nationwide basis to find democratic solutions to South Africa's problems.
- To assist in creating a climate for genuine negotiation towards a non-racial and democratic South Africa.

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RECENT developments in the Southern African region have been so startling and fast-moving that they have left considerable confusion and bewilderment in their wake. This is particularly so for white South Africans who have been fed a particular diet for so long. Much of what has been regarded as sacred and conventional wisdom has now been turned on its head. Two examples will illustrate this.

Firstly, the South African authorities have been discussing (and wining and dining!) with Cubans, Angolans and Russians the future fate of South West Africa/Namibia. Secondly, there appears to be a new initiative under the leadership of the British Prime Minister in order to try and resolve the conflict which has its roots in apartheid. It is fairly clear that she is embarking upon this with the encouragement of Foreign Minister Pik Botha. It is equally apparent that his proposals and promises have the backing of the new leader of the National Party, Mr F.W. de Klerk.

New angels?

What are we to make of these developments? After demonising the Cubans, Angolans and the Russians for so long, have they now become the new angels? Hardly. But they are now amongst the "good guys" and this will make it so much harder for the state to maintain its "total onslaught" strategy.

Secondly, historical enmity and suspicion vis-a-vis Great Britain has diminished in direct proportion to the anti-sanctions stance taken by Mrs Thatcher. Ironically it may well be that the traditional enemy with all the overtones of the Anglo Boer War may yet become the facilitator for a new dispensation in South Africa.

And the ANC? Can we expect a new

attitude from the state towards this "communist terrorist organisation"? Can the ANC be regarded perhaps not as a "bunch of angels" or even amongst the "good guys", but as a key actor in the unfolding drama taking place on the South African stage? In my view this question can be answered with a tentative yes. There are a number of pointers which support this view. Firstly, there has been clear pressure from the international community in the West who continually call for the release of Nelson Mandela and emphasise the need to include the ANC in future negotiations.

Dividends

Secondly, it is common talk amongst some National Party MPs that the ANC cannot forever be excluded. The fact that representatives from the governing party attended the recent meetings in Bermuda, at which top ANC representative, Thabo Mbeki, was also present, is a further pointer. More significantly perhaps was the recent editorial in the government-supporting daily, *Beeld*, which concluded its editorial on the developments within the Soviet Union and Southern Africa by asking: "Is a discussion between the government and the ANC under a free Nelson Mandela actually so unthinkable?" Their concluding sentence reads: "Just think of the political and economic dividends which would accrue to South Africa and all its people if such a discussion could take place!"

Dakar

This is a far cry from the hysterical reaction which followed the Dakar conference organised by IDASA a short two years ago. At that time, government-supporting newspapers like *Die Burger* and *Die Transvaler* accused us of work-

Militant language offends whites

DURING A recent visit to Cape Town I was shown an IDASA poster bearing the slogan "Women in the Struggle for Peace". I learnt that this was to be the theme of an IDASA women's conference scheduled to take place in Harare in April.

While fully supportive of IDASA's goal to move whites towards acceptance of a non-racial democratic South Africa, I seriously question the wisdom of using

"loaded" terms like "struggle" if you want to dispel whites' fears about the future. It evokes negative images of bitter conflict and revolution which, I am sure, must scare off whites who would normally be quite receptive to IDASA's message of a negotiated settlement.

If you want to encourage ordinary non-politicised whites (yes, there are many of them) to accept their black

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countrymen as co-citizens, you should surely steer away from using militant language and symbols to which they cannot relate. We need positive and unemotional messages to encourage whites to be receptive to and participate in a democratic process which will bring peaceful change to South Africa.

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