

Waste no time, Hofmeyr warns

A NON-RACIAL government of national unity is so close that business should "waste no time in examining what its role under such a government is going to be".

This is the view of Johannesburg Consolidated Investments chairman Murray Hofmeyr, who addressed the first of the Natal Idasa office's Future Forums in March.

Speaking to a full house of 60 people, Hofmeyr stressed the need for business to assume a leadership role in shaping the non-racial democracy of tomorrow.

He said the gap between the ANC and the government had narrowed remarkably over the past year, mainly because the government's position had undergone a fundamental change, but also because both parties showed a willingness to compromise.

"Once the initial phase of talks about talks is over," said Hofmeyr, "we must brace ourselves for the prospect of a government of national unity."

"Even before a new constitution is agreed upon, we could have a non-racial government."

Of prime importance was restructuring the economy, Hofmeyr said.

This was necessary because of serious imbalances in housing, education, health, the balance of payments, government finance, and macro demand and supply.

"At the heart of the problems of the economy is the inequality of income and wealth distribution . . . It will compete with efficiency for top place on that agenda."

However, Hofmeyr argued that business should oppose a state-led restructuring of the economy. A non-racial democratic state would have to establish a framework within which market forces could operate, but the market could not be dominated by the state.

Business had three options. "Either it can do nothing, preferring to wait for such a government to emerge before adapting to any measure it might take.

"Or it can accept that such a government is bound to come into existence, in which case it has a role to play in anticipating the changes such a government is likely to bring about.

"Or, thirdly, it can exercise a leadership role of its own, knowing that whatever a future non-racial government might do, it will have to have regard to the basic structural problems in the economy.

"If the matter of restructuring the economy is not to be left entirely to the state, business will have to come forward and play its part without state prompting."

(The Future Forums are a monthly get-together to facilitate greater understanding of the future political environment within which business will be conducted.)

Gary Cullen
Regional Co-ordinator

BOOK REVIEW

A must for political animals

By Ian Liebenberg

DEMOCRATIC THEORY AND PRACTICE IN AFRICA, edited by Walter Oyugi, Atieno Odhiambo et al: Heinemann and James Currey Publishers, London, 1988; 237 pages including index, R53,65.

THIS is the literary outcome of a workshop held to reflect on and evaluate the post-colonial transformations which took place in Africa. Essentially the book focuses on the theory and practice of democracy in Africa.

It is divided into three sections: (1) The Idea of Democracy, (2) The Democratic Practice and (3) Democracy and National Development.

Part one provides background and introduces the concept of democracy as well as the uses and abuses of that concept. Gitonga argues in this conceptualisation that, in order to succeed, democracy needs to be firmly anchored on three levels, material (infrastructure), institutional (technostructure) and cultural (superstructure).

Ideological dogmatism and the values of democracy are dealt with by Masolo. The political-philosophical question of what constitutes "good" democracy is explored without pretending to offer a solution.

Part two is an enlightening and critical appraisal of democratic practice in Africa. Holy cows - be they Western or African - are eliminated. Simiyu argues that the traditional truth of "African democracy" is a myth, and substantiates his argument with historical examples.

Peter Wanyande deals with democracy and the one-party state (a common characteristic of the post-colonial era in Africa). He argues that "despite the many reasons advanced by African leaders for their preference for the one-party system of government, experience derived from the manner in which states have conducted politics tends to reveal that issues of democracy were not necessarily what these statesmen were interested in confronting". Specific case studies in a chapter by Mugaju deserve attention.

The problems created by the juxtapositioning of bureaucracy and democracy in Africa are dealt with by Oyugi, who concludes unpretentiously that, in the circumstances prevailing in Africa, "it is unfair (and unlikely) to expect of a bureaucracy that it can be a 'friend' of democracy".

Atieno Odhiambo provides fascinating reading for South Africans with a case-study on democracy and the ideology of order in Kenya - mostly because

an ideology of order is not unknown to us. An observation like "by the mid-1980s, the state is the presidency, the bureaucracy and the security apparatus" could have been written about South Africa. The "contest between freedom and authority" continues not only in "black" Africa, but also in minority-ruled South Africa.

Maria Nzomo tackles the contentious issue of women, democracy and development in Africa. She demonstrates in her contribution that freedom in a democratic state is indivisible from gender issues. Her argument that women are excluded from the democratic process and land tenure by the traditional patriarchal system is important. Radical feminists from the pacifist school would, however, disagree strongly with her argument that more women should be allowed in the military. Within the Kenyan context, however, this argument rings true.

THE third part of the book deals with democracy and national development. Oyugi, Meddi Mugenyi and Chege make interesting, if somewhat problematic contributions, arguing that where democracy preceded the imperative of development, societies tended to degenerate into the "development of underdevelopment" (perhaps a notion derived from Dahl's What after the Revolution? See the chapter on "the democratic Leviathan"). Mugenyi opts for minimalist democracy combined with development, an argument which will be criticised strongly by democracy-first supporters, be they political scien-

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tists or laypeople.

Subsequent chapters deal with African economic crises, with Kenya and Tanzania serving as case studies in the relation between economic progress and democracy. The observation that "examples from some African countries are a clear demonstration that in Africa totalitarianism does not lead to development-oriented discipline, but rather to chaos and poverty" contains a lesson for South Africans, whether they be totalitarian from the right, left or centre.

Democratic Theory and Practice is a highly relevant contribution to the debate on democracy, transformation and development. The insightful, bold and self-critical approach of the contributors should be complimented. Definite reading for political animals!

Ian Liebenberg is Idasa's Director of Research.