

## The struggle against apartheid



IN the 1970s and 1980s, the root cause of most problems in South Africa was apartheid – a system based on racist and unjust socio-economic systems inherited from colonial times. Social action groups were a way for people in the church to organise themselves at a local level to work on the problems of their own areas.

Training in setting up and effectively running social action groups was a key method and strategy used by Diakonia as the struggle intensified in the '80s. Inevitably, this work attracted the close attention of the security forces. Diakonia offices were raided several times. Three Diakonia staff as well as several council members and close supporters were themselves detained.

Staff got used to having their phones tapped, their mail intercepted and being followed. It became part of the price to be paid for working for justice.

## A radical way of working

THE main task of Diakonia has always been to enable people in the churches to get involved in issues of injustice and human rights violations.

When people are suffering, the churches often respond well to the immediate need – many local

churches run soup kitchens, collect blankets in winter, and pack food parcels for the poor and those affected by HIV and Aids.

But the challenge of Diakonia is deeper. It has tried to empower people to think through the root causes of the

problems that so many suffer, and to address those causes. It has required that the question “Why?” be asked, if necessary over and over again.

It has helped the churches to really link their actions with the faith they proclaim Sunday after Sunday.

## Prophetic Diakonia



At the press conference launching Diakonia's Worker Sunday to the media were (from left) Diakonia director, Paddy Kearney; trade unionist, Willis Mchunu; Fr Martin Moore-Corry from Ntuzuma; and Labour programme organiser, Nomabelu Mvambo.

POLITICAL unrest intensified between 1976 and 1983. Detentions without trial and particularly deaths in detention were escalating and were a major cause for concern. The church opposed the inhumane laws and vehemently voiced their opposition. Diakonia provided counselling for the families of the political detainees.

Diakonia also became involved, for example, in supporting those

struggling with housing issues and the threat of forced removals.

Churches in the Pinetown region became involved in protest against the forced removal of people from St Wendolin's, starting a petition for church people to sign, holding services, and taking part in the marches and meetings that culminated in the threat of removal being lifted.

Diakonia staff also worked with

other allies in support of the right of the people of Clairwood not to be moved.

They published an illustrated pamphlet describing the situation and encouraging churches to offer support to the ultimately successful effort to resist removal.

Worker rights, the mobilisation of the trade unions, strikes, consumer boycotts and dismissal of workers were other areas where the struggle for justice was intensified.

The first Sunday of May was dedicated to the workers of South Africa who produced the wealth of this country.

Special services were held and workers came in their droves. Diakonia published a pamphlet on worker rights in isiZulu and English.

The political instability which surfaced in the mid 1980s caused the government to declare a State of Emergency. A crisis fund was established to support the families of political detainees and those affected by political violence. During the second half of the '80s, an enormous amount of crisis work was carried out.

As Nelson Mandela's release became imminent, the focus shifted to the promotion of democracy and dealing with political violence by pastoral visits, organising funerals and peace services.



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