

How a constructive idea spread

By Bremer Hofmeyr

TWO SOUTH AFRICANS were talking about the crisis throughout this continent. The one had been the head of the Nasionale Jeugbond in Pretoria University. The other was an African leader whom the police at one time called the most dangerous man on the Witwatersrand.

These two men believe that Black and White South Africans can give something to each other and that together they can give something to Africa and the world.

They talked about Johannesburg's south-western townships. The African said, "We are better educated than any other equivalent African group on this continent. We ought to give something to our country and all Africa."

Most want peace

They decided to take a film, "The Crowning Experience" through the south-western townships and to go to the homes of the people and invite them personally. At 7.30 every Sunday morning for many months they gathered their friends and went visiting. Some people came from Pretoria to take part.

They visited 17,000 homes. The contact with this vast cross-section of families made one thing clear. While every African is convinced that his people have a grievance, most still want, if possible, to bring change by sane, uniting and peaceful means.

There is still something that can be appealed to with a constructive approach and a real will to tackle together the things that are wrong. Otherwise, while thousands may be locked up, other thousands will rise to take their place.

Thirty-seven showings of "The Crowning Experience" were given in Orlando East, Orlando West, Dube, Moroka, Phiri, Dhlamini, Mapeita, Tladi, Mofolo, Chiawelo, Senaokane, Jabavu and Zola.

A group of Africans who saw the film took up the battle for the uniting of the country. They called an assembly of Moral Rearmament for four days over Easter in the African townships. People from all over the country took part. The Africans presented a play, "The Dictator's Slippers." It was topical. The central character was a political prisoner.

One of the groups who saw it at the conference came from Stellenbosch University. They invited the cast to go to Stellenbosch and undertook to make the preparations. They secured the Town Hall for a performance. The African cast got a week's leave from their jobs and motored down. The Deputy Mayor welcomed the men from Johannesburg from the platform before a large audience.

One of the cast, who is Editor of "World," spoke after the play: "I believe you White people in South Africa have too small a sense of your destiny. Africa needs your skills. I believe if we in South Africa make it our national aim to give what is needed to the whole African continent, then our greatest days lie ahead."

"To me this play shows two things. First, that dictatorship and violence, however well-organized and however well-intentioned, can never succeed. But neither can democracy be effective unless those who speak in its name are fired by what the prisoner in this play called, 'The will for what is right.'"

Courage

Next morning a theological student said: "We congratulate you on your courage in coming to Stellenbosch."

The play was presented in Johannesburg. The Mayor said at the opening performance: "I hope this play will go all over our country and all over Africa. I once saw a play 'The Forgotten Factor' which brought the answer to industrial strife. But today we have far greater divisions to heal."

The play has been to Pretoria and Cape Town. The cast have spoken with several national leaders.

Discussing the play, one of the men responsible for the security of our country said: "You believe that Black South Africans and White South Africans can find each other as allies to give something to this continent? That is the boldest conception I have yet heard. I am right with it."