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Agrarian Reform in South Africa: Who? What? How?

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1. INTRODUCTION

Among Ruth First's early writings was a pamphlet published by New Age in Johannesburg in 1959 - *Exposure: The Farm Labour Scandal*. In exile in London in 1964 she wrote the Preface to Govan Mbeki's *South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt*, in the publication of which she played a key part. Mbeki was by then serving a life sentence on Robben Island. His book was a pioneering and prescient indictment of the evolving bantustan system of grand apartheid, that notably included accounts of rural 'resistance and rebellion', above all the 1960 Pondo revolt in the Transkei. Ruth First's last book, published posthumously in 1983, was *Black Gold. The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant*. Presenting the results of collective research conducted by the Centre of African Studies, Eduardo Mondlane University, and enriched by Alpheus Manghezi's interviews and Moira Forjaz's photographs, this work investigated many issues also central to the agrarian question in South Africa, not least the economic and social processes, and contradictions, of labour exporting rural areas.

Evidently Ruth First would have made characteristically incisive interventions in the emerging debate over land and agrarian reform in the South African conditions of today. In this area, as in others, we can only note again what we lost with her murder ten years ago.

Conditions today are, of course, different, and no doubt confound most predictions and scenarios current in 1982. First, there is 'the process of reform through negotiations' noted by the organizers of this colloquium in their background paper, the effects of which include 'directing the struggle against the apartheid system into the very institutions that constitute that system'.

Second, and apart from the limits and dangers of the current negotiation process, the demise of socialism in Eastern Europe forces serious rethinking about radical social transformation on those committed to it, in a world where imperialism is at its most triumphalist since the peak of the colonial era. While long regarded as problematic in various experiences of socialist construction (Saith, 1985), the agrarian question and issues of agrarian strategy need reassessment as much as any other area of concern, an observation reinforced by the painful contemporary history of Mozambique (Raikes, 1984; O'Meara, 1991).

Third, South African capitalism has changed as it moved from its own version of the postwar long boom into deepening recession from the mid-1970s on (Gelb, 1991). The latter period has encompassed both increased differentiation of the black working class in terms of hierarchies of skill, employment, and income, and unprecedented unemployment and poverty. The pressures of continuing urbanization, the collapse of local government, and the acute scarcity of the minimal necessities of existence in the townships, make their own contribution to social conflict and violence and the problems of transition (Morris and Hindson, 1992). If these are the realities confronting 'the radical

organs of civil society in (the) . . . urban areas' (colloquium background paper), what of the rural areas? As so often, there is much less reliable knowledge of the countryside, and especially of current processes of change.

2. AGRARIAN REFORM: THE CONTEXT

The land question in South Africa has a number of distinctive features which bear on the prospects and character of agrarian reform in the transition to a post-apartheid society. Above all else, the land question - concerning the distribution, ownership, control and uses of land - has been a fundamental dimension of 'racial capitalism' in South Africa throughout its history. This is true of all land and its uses, rural and urban, but this paper concentrates on rural land and its uses in agriculture (livestock, forestry etc. as well as arable farming).

The distribution, ownership, control and uses of land are a cornerstone not only of economic exploitation, but of the inextricably linked social forms and political mechanisms of national, class and gender oppression. Despite the abolition of some of the most historic and notorious legislation concerning land and residence rights, notably the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 and the Group Areas Act, the apartheid structures of landed property and power remain intact: approximately 87% of land is under white ownership, 13% under black 'ownership' through a bewildering variety of tenure arrangements.

White agriculture comprises about 59,000 farm units, occupying 85.7m ha of land of which 10.6m ha are under crops (more than half being basic food crops), and generates about 90% of gross farm income. In the postwar period, it has been subject to concentration of capital manifested in declining numbers of farm units, increasing average farm size, growth of land and farms owned by corporate capital, and uneven distribution of income: in the mid-1980s 6% of farms earned about 40% of total income in the sector (Levin and Weiner in SAERT, 1991). At the same time, there is an accumulation crisis in that capital stock has increased little, if at all, during the past two decades in conditions of low profitability, low levels of liquidity, and steadily increasing debt. de Klerk (in Gelb, 1991) argues that these are structural features, reflecting uneconomically high rates of investment in the past as a result of state support to white farming, negative real interest rates over extended periods, and bank lending policies, exacerbated by cyclical factors like the droughts of 1982-5 and currently and their impact on grain farmers in the summer rainfall regions.

Concerning the bantustans, one calculation is that only 44% of their population can be considered 'rural' with access to some land (see below), of whom the great majority are female headed households engaged in marginalised subsistence farming. A much quoted 'guestimate' (impossible to assess) is that there are only about 3,000 black 'commercial farmers', by which is meant, pre-

sumably, capitalist farmers rather than petty commodity producers. African farmers are engaged in different types of commodity production: some are contract farmers in schemes promoted by public capital (DBSA = Development Bank of Southern Africa, bantustan governments) and private capital (notably sugar out-growers in KwaZulu); some development of petty commodity production is also funded by wage remittances; some farmers have been able to accumulate in crop and livestock production through privileged access to bantustan political structures (Levin and Weiner, and Dolny, in SAERT, 1991).

These empirical contours of land distribution and agrarian structure, however broad and sketchy, suggest that bantustan residence should not be conflated with rural residence, nor the latter with agricultural employment or self-employment. This is further illustrated by data on the distribution of African population in 1980 presented by Hindson (in Gelb, 1991, p.237, from research by Graff):

	← Number	← %	Bantustans %
<u>Non-bantustan</u>			
Total	9 916 700	46	
Urban	5 606 700	26	
Rural	4 310 000	20	
<u>Bantustans</u>			
Total	11 818 310	54	
Urban	1 809 151	8	15
Peri-urban	1 747 934	8	15
Semi-urban	3 011 602	14	26
Rural	5 249 623	24	44
<u>South Africa</u>			
Total	21 735 010	100	
Urban	12 175 387	56	
Rural	9 559 623	44	

Concentration of capital and mechanisation in white farming have resulted in declining (full-time) agricultural wage employment. Official labour statistics give 868,000 workers in commercial agriculture in 1985, or 11% of 'formal' employment (outside the bantustans), of whom 80% were African and 12% Coloured (Hindson in Gelb, 1991, p.229). Stressing the unreliability of available statistics, Dolny (in SAERT, 1991, p.224) estimates 1.2m permanent workers in commercial agriculture, and a further 1.8m seasonal and casual workers. Many of the latter are migrant workers and 'commuters' from the bantustans, especially women and children subject to appalling conditions of work and pay (Marcus,

1989). van Zyl and van Rooyen (in de Klerk, 1991, p.178) give 13.6% of total economically active population (EAP) employed in agriculture, divided roughly equally between white farming and the bantustans.

These observations suggest that while the land question is critical to 'racial capitalism', at the same time - and paradoxically - agriculture has a much smaller place in the South African economy than in other countries where agrarian reform has been an essential issue in national democratic struggle. Agriculture contributed 5.3% of GDP in 1988, although a larger share of employment, and 3.6% of the value of exports in 1987 (although this omits some processed agricultural commodities). This picture is somewhat qualified by the estimated total impact of agriculture on the economy of 12.4% of GDP and 24.4% of employment (van Zyl and van Rooyen in de Klerk, 1991).

In short, the centrality of the land question (and the nature of agrarian capitalism) is not equivalent to the 'peasant question', nor its resolution to distribution of 'land to the tiller', as more typically in national democratic struggles elsewhere (and echoed in the ANC Freedom Charter of 1956). Again, South Africa presents somewhat distinctive issues concerning the social character, interests, demands and political organisation of oppressed classes and groups, not least in relation to their differentiation, how 'contradictions amongst the people' are generated and reproduced, and how they might be resolved. The growing differentiation of the black working class was referred to earlier, and bears on the prospects - or otherwise - of relatively secure urban residence. This also connects with the ubiquitous gender differentiation of the working class and reserve army of labour which acquires specific features from the workings of 'racial capitalism', not least in relation to its systems of labour migration (and their changes over time).

In the case of Lesotho, for example, analyses of rural areas by Murray (1981) and Ferguson (1990, Chs 4, 5) illuminate how social categories are constituted as the combined effect of male labour migration, gender relations, and conditions of access to land and cattle through 'customary' allocation (kinship and political structures). Both writers also show how these categories 'translate' into biography and experience. However, such social categories and experiences do not translate into 'social forces' in any automatic or straightforward way (see further section 3).

This has strategic implications for the land question and agrarian reform in South Africa. On the one hand, there is a long history of (mostly local) contestation - both overt and hidden, in both white rural areas and bantustans - of racist land policies and practices, such as that in the Transkei analysed by Govan Mbeki (see also Bundy, 1984). On the other hand, political organisation and representation of oppressed classes and groups in the countryside (beyond the local level) is almost non-existent. This has potentially serious effects for perceptions and theorisation of land and agrarian reform by the national demo-

cratic movement, which in turn affect the formulation and practice of any agrarian strategy. In fact, at present there is no political strategy on the agrarian question. (By contrast, and without suggesting that progress will be smooth or straightforward, debate of urban and industrial strategies draws on the accumulated political experience, weight and perspectives of the trade unions, especially those in COSATU, civic associations and ANC urban structures).

The development of a viable strategy (a coherent set of objectives and means of achieving them) is inseparable from the process of, first, identifying potential social forces, and then, in a political-organisational sense, constituting them as social forces whose mobilisation, engagement and representation are necessary conditions of any democratic resolution of the land question. Some of the key issues in the development of an agrarian strategy capable of meeting the needs of national democratic struggle can be reviewed by asking

- who? (identifying, and constituting, in a political-organisational sense, the appropriate social forces)
- what? (strategic objectives and framework)
- how? (the means of realising strategic objectives, of translating them into specific and effective practices).

3. WHO? AGRARIAN REFORM AND SOCIAL FORCES

In 1980 there were still over 4.3 million Africans resident in white rural areas, 20.6% of the African population compared with 34.9% in 1950 before the onset of mass forced removals (Platzky and Walker, 1985, pp 18, 31). However, 'depopulation accelerated in the 1980s; the black population of white farms declined by one million between 1980 and 1985 alone. A total of 1.6 million blacks left rural white South Africa during this short period, which is the highest rate of black outmigration ever recorded' (Pickles and Weiner, 1991, p 18).

Claassens (eg. in Murray and O'Regan, 1990) has consistently argued the tenacious attachment of Africans to land they regard as rightfully theirs, and that black farming in some white areas (eg. southeastern Transvaal), through labour tenancy and 'squating', has been much more widespread and persistent than is usually recognised. It survived the postwar transition to wage labour in the restructuring of white agriculture, when labour tenancy was made illegal (its statutory prohibition was repealed in 1986 - Budlender and Latsky in de Klerk, 1991, p 126).

Anecdotal evidence from various areas indicates that black access to land, and with it some growth in petty and even capitalist commodity production, is probably increasing. This can take the form of people moving across bantustan borders to occupy Trust (state) or otherwise unused land (including abandoned white

farms?), and of the spread of tenancy, sharecropping and other rental arrangements between white landowners and 'squatters', workers, and aspiring or expanding farmers (for example, there are said to be 600 or so black commercial grain farmers in the Western Transvaal/Bophutatswana border areas, renting in land from white farmers hit by debt and drought - and political demoralisation/'realism'?). Despite the fragmentary, limited and imprecise nature of such reports, the possibility of spontaneous and self-generated land (re)settlement and commercial expansion by black farmers in some white areas at least, and that these processes may have accelerated in the past few years, is significant.

The population of the bantustans is estimated at over twelve million, having increased from about 40% of total African population in 1950 to about 54% in 1980. This was a result of 'grand apartheid', in which at least three and a half million Africans were forcibly relocated to the bantustans between 1960-1983, of whom 1.1 million were removed from white farming areas (Platzky and Walker, 1985, p 10). Those forcibly relocated to the bantustans are least likely to have any access to land, many of them occupying vast 'resettlement' camps. Potentially arable land per person in the bantustans is less than 0.2 ha (Levin and Weiner in SAERT, 1991), and as noted earlier farming provides a significant source of income for only a small minority of the bantustan population.

One particular group, numerically insignificant but of great symbolic weight in the struggle against apartheid land laws, consists of those African individuals and communities with freehold rights to land within areas designated for white ownership by the 1913 Land Act and subsequent legislation, that is, those who not only occupied but owned land in the so-called 'black spots'. Most have been forcibly removed, or incorporated in bantustans by the redrawing of boundaries, since the 1960s; some have succeeded in holding on to their land in white South Africa by determined resistance to removal.

These various groupings provide an initial starting point for identifying (potential) social forces with an interest in access to land and agricultural production, and are standard reference points in current discussions of agrarian reform. At the same time, they are evidently groupings of different kinds, specified with greater or lesser precision by criteria of residence, access to land and types of access, class position, and historical experience. For example, permanent farmworkers would seem to be the most determinate category of those indicated, 'bantustan residents' the most amorphous and inclusive.

Looking deeper into these initial groupings is, inevitably, to start to reveal the complexities simultaneously internal to each grouping and marking its location within the political economy of 'racial capitalism'. All the groupings are constituted within national oppression, and confront its effects in various ways. Some are also subject to class divisions, and all of them to

gender divisions: 'sometimes the heroic battles that rural people have fought have created romantic visions of a group of valiant peasants fighting for a just and free future. The reality is often different . . . some of the strongest people resisting removal at KwaNgema are people who are the masters of labour tenants themselves. The more secure the land, the more profitable the production of their free labourers. Often the labour tenants who take militant stands in court are patriarchs whose income depends on the extraction of labour from their wives and children' (Claassens in Murray and O'Regan, 1990, p 62).

Some 'blackspot' landowners are capitalist farmers; some 'squatters' are land accumulators and themselves employ wage workers. The (unpaid) labour of wives (and children) is often incorporated in the obligations of male farmworkers and labour tenants; independently recruited female (and child) casual workers are subject to the greatest insecurity and worst conditions and payment in the notorious labour regimes of white agriculture in South Africa (Marcus, 1989). Class differentiation in the bantustans was referred to earlier; while bantustan farming is largely a female occupation, it is very difficult for women to gain access to, or control over, land in their own right.

The implication of such diversity and differentiation is that there are different kinds and degrees of interest in, and aspirations to, access to land for

- (i) farming as a primary source of livelihood,
- (ii) farming as a secondary or supplementary source of income,
- (iii) 'garden' residences (including for retirement).

The second and third types of demand for land are likely to be augmented by the aspirations of urban residents. Some critical questions, then, are

- who wants land, and for what kinds of purposes?
- do they have claims to specific land? (eg. those removed from 'black spots' and white areas, labour tenants)
- on what conditions might they (re)occupy land?
- how are (possibly conflicting) demands for land to be evaluated and implemented?

Seeking to answer these questions provides a basis for mobilisation in white rural areas and the bantustans, that is, for constituting social forces in the sense used above. Demands for land, whether arising from historically and geographically specific cases of dispossession (as forced removals) and/or from aspirations to farming as a source of livelihood and security, are the initial, and in national democratic terms the broadest, basis for political agitation, organisation and education. To what extent this process can also incorporate issues generated by class and gender differentiation can not be prejudged or simply legislated, and is likely to be very uneven. However, any opportunities to place struggles around these issues on the agenda of reform should be encouraged, not least building new or enlarged sites of struggle against prevailing forms of chiefly and patriarchal control in the bantustans (on which, again, Mbeki's analysis of the Transkei remains most relevant).

The organisational forms for articulating demands, channelling political energies, and developing political capacity in the countryside likewise can not be determined by any simple 'model'. The formation of ANC rural branches in itself would not satisfy the kinds of political tasks indicated (which should also include connecting demands for land with organisation of agricultural production - see further below). Land Commissions have been established recently in some areas by the ANC but I have not seen any reports of their activities to date; much would be gained from assessing the experience of the Rural Action Committees, formed as support organisations for struggles against forced removals from white farming areas and now grouped in the National Land Committee. As far as farmworkers are concerned, unionisation remains a major priority.

Whatever their formal designation, it is evident that developing political organisations in the countryside requires a great deal of flexibility in relation to the diversity of conditions and experiences of different social categories, the specific demands articulated in different localities and by different groups, and the dialectic of unity and conflict generated by contradictions amongst the people. Such contradictions should not be feared or suppressed in the name of mechanistic conceptions of 'unity': they are a vital part of constructing social forces capable of shaping the resolution of the land question, just as Aninka Claassens (in de Klerk, 1991) suggests that the diversity of rural situations and experiences presents particular opportunities to the challenges of political organisation.

There is scope for a variety of organisational forms, in relation to the diversity of emphasis, interests and demands that would emerge. Mobilising the ideas and political energies of oppressed groups in the countryside is the indispensable condition of carrying struggle forward, a process the national democratic movement can do much to stimulate, support and inform. In turn this requires greater commitment of intellectual, material and political resources to struggle on the land question.

4. WHAT? STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES ON AGRARIAN REFORM

It is in the interests of all those subject to national oppression in South Africa that the control of land (de facto as well as de jure) by the white minority is broken. A variety of rather broad proposals for land and agrarian reform is now being canvassed (see the edited collections of Pickles and Weiner 1991, de Klerk 1991, SAERT 1991), that reflect a range of political positions, embody different strategic perspectives and objectives, and suggest a variety of policy measures and instruments. Some of the latter are reviewed in the next section but, first, what are strategic issues for the national democratic struggle in the current conjuncture?

First, as noted, different classes and groups experience national

oppression in different ways, which affects how social forces might be constituted around agrarian reform.

Second, the constitution of social forces in the countryside, in the sense defined above, is an essential condition of any democratic agrarian reform, and entails the effective organisation of farm workers, and of those with aspirations to farming - existing 'squatters', tenants and black farmers, and the dispossessed of the bantustans.

Third, any simplistic 'models' or schemes of comprehensive land expropriation and redistribution, and state organised and controlled agricultural production, are untenable on a number of different grounds. These include (a) the lessons of projects of socialist agrarian transition and their contradictions, from Soviet collectivization to the recent experiences of Nicaragua and Mozambique, (b) the specific constraints of reforming apartheid through negotiation, (c) the necessity to avoid disruption of food supplies and/or rampant inflation of staple food prices, given that South Africa is virtually self-sufficient in staple food production at current aggregate levels of consumption (and normally a surplus maize producer).

Fourth, assuming that democratic social forces in the countryside can be constituted and organised, and that their energies are directed 'into the very institutions that constitute (the apartheid) system', these institutions have their own contradictions and 'pressure points' in the agrarian sector. On one hand there is the economic vulnerability of agriculture, manifested in the massive debt burden of many white farmers (de Klerk in Gelb 1991); on the other hand there is growing recognition in sections of the capitalist class and the state (including economic institutions like the DBSA) of the undesirability of continuing to support white farming at current levels of direct and indirect subsidy (which have been reduced from the 1980s up to the present drought). The argument from economic or more specifically market 'rationality' is combined with a reassessment, whether from conviction or opportunism, of the capacities of (some?) black farmers, breaking with the customary denigration of African farming ability. (This ideological current is worth comparing with the positions of the World Bank, and some of their contradictions in practice, in the era of structural adjustment policies in Africa - Bernstein 1989; Gibbon 1992.)

In short, there are some 'openings' within apartheid institutions concerned with land and farming, although these should not be exaggerated. Careful analysis is needed of the forces internal to apartheid that generate such openings and that can widen or narrow them, not least in response to more or less effective pressure from democratic social forces. Some 'market-based options for agrarian reform' that are being canvassed (de Klerk 1990, and see further below) are not necessarily incompatible with national democratic transition, its tasks and limits, as understood theoretically (Levin and Neocosmos 1989; Neocosmos 1989), and which in practice are shaped (and likewise expanded or

contracted) by the conditions and outcomes of political struggle.

The single most strategic objective of democratic transition, as noted, remains to break the de facto, as well as de jure, white domination of land ownership and farming central to 'racial capitalism'. At the same time, the immediate and comprehensive expropriation of white farms is neither politically feasible nor necessary to the tasks of the current stage of struggle. Accordingly, 'targeting' the weakest and least 'efficient' sectors of white farming for land redistribution provides a terrain on which there is an apparent partial convergence of conservative and liberal reform proposals with national democratic objectives. Conservative reform can accommodate the 'sacrifice' of the least efficient (and most indebted) white farmers, and the allocation of state land to black farmers, in its strategic objective of saving the greater part of white commercial agriculture. Liberal reform is prepared to go further to realize its strategic conception of a 'deracialised' agriculture balanced between efficiency and equity, in which the 'freedom of the market' is available to all viable farmers regardless of colour or type of commercial enterprise (both capitalist and petty commodity production).

The fifth point, then, is that contradictions within apartheid institutions both provide opportunities to national democratic initiatives on the agrarian question and present dangers to them. The dangers are that such initiatives are limited to state sponsored reform, not least the promotion of selective 'market-based options' which disregard popular aspiration and block popular actions on land, with effects known from experience elsewhere (Zimbabwe being a relevant comparative case, see Weiner 1989). Indeed, discourses that centre on 'market' and 'state', constituting farmers as individual economic actors on one hand, and possibly as political 'interest groups' (farmers' lobbies) on the other hand, implicitly dissolve the concepts of social forces and collective action emphasized earlier. This danger is particularly marked when specific measures of legal, institutional or policy reform that provide a point of partial convergence of conservative, liberal and national democratic positions, are formulated and implemented in a technocratic and statist manner, isolated from the engagement of social forces and wider strategic perspectives that give real content to national democratic transition.

This is why the question 'who?' has preceded those of 'what?' and 'how?': to be clear that constituting democratic social forces as agents of agrarian reform, however constrained such reform might be initially, involves a very different politics than seeking policies 'on behalf of' those dispossessed and oppressed by apartheid. This can be illustrated by reviewing briefly some of the specific reform measures advanced in current conditions of transition.

5. HOW? INITIATING AGRARIAN REFORM

Michael de Klerk (1990, and in de Klerk 1991) provides a systematic overview of 'market-based' options for land reform, that is, 'which involve the retention of private, though not necessarily individual initiative as the basis of agricultural production, whatever the structure of ownership, and which rely on adjustments to and the augmentation of existing market processes by the state to right past wrongs' (1990, p 55). He distinguishes four types of market-based options:

- (i) the free market approach, removing apartheid legal restrictions on the purchase, ownership and rental of land in white farming areas
- (ii) various 'affirmative action' approaches that include allocating state land to African farmers, providing them with support services, and abolishing measures that have privileged white commercial farmers
- (iii) limited state expropriation of white farms, with market-based or limited compensation
- (iv) nationalisation by means of a land tax.

He also indicates the implications of each type of option for (a) 'equity' (effects for access to land), (b) 'efficiency' (effects for production), and (c) costs to the state (the 'budget constraint').

How can selective land expropriation (for redistribution) be implemented? Various proposals include the following direct (i and ii) and indirect (iii - v) measures:

- (i) selective state purchase with compensation below prevailing (and inflated) market prices of land (de Klerk's third option; Dolny in SAERT, 1991)
- (ii) foreclosing the most heavily indebted white farms
- (iii) land taxation (de Klerk's fourth option)
- (iv) abolishing state support that has privileged white farming (a component of de Klerk's second option)
- (v) radically altering the conditions and pay of agricultural workers through unionisation supported by legislative action.

Measures (i) and (ii) would release land for redistribution immediately. Measures (iii), (iv) and (v) would contribute indirectly to releasing land by 'squeezing' the least profitable and (in market terms) most vulnerable white farms currently sustained only by state support and savage exploitation of la-

bour. One concern about all these measures except (i) is that they are likely to release land of generally lower quality; only (i) - in effect, selective nationalisation - is not subject to this limitation. Here it is also worth noting Levin and Weiner's observation (in SAERT 1991) that a number of more profitable and (privately) 'efficient' farm enterprises are producing timber, sugar cane and livestock on medium and high potential land that it would be (socially) more efficient to convert to arable farming.

These various measures, of course, focus on white owned land and different types of farms, and how a process of selective expropriation, by direct and indirect means, may proceed. To develop a coherent strategic framework for agrarian reform, they have to be connected with (a) who will want land and for what purposes, (b) what forms of (re)settlement and production might replace existing white commercial agriculture (or some of its particular sub-sectors), (c) what the prospects of agriculture are (in terms of production, employment etc.) in a future post-apartheid economy more generally.

The first of these connections (a) is the most critical in the current stage of struggle, as indicated in Section 3 in relation to the social forces that may be constituted through demands for land. One grouping that provides an immediate basis for political-organisational work comprises those with claims to particular lands in white farming areas. In fact the ANC Constitutional Guidelines of 1988 prioritise the resettlement or return of blacks dispossessed through forced removal in recent decades. It would be most useful to investigate what types of white farms now occupying those lands would have to be expropriated to satisfy the historic claims of those removed from them.

Another immediate basis for political work is unionisation of farmworkers and organisation of their struggles, actual and potential, over conditions of work and pay, and legal rights. Many farmworkers might not want land for individual farming, but their needs and demands constitute another strategic weapon against the agrarian structures of 'racial capitalism'. Among the measures that may be used to 'squeeze' white farming, worker organisation is politically the most important, whatever useful support legislative and policy reform might provide.

Concerning (b), forms of agricultural production and their social organisation that might (incrementally) replace the domination of white farming, there is a healthy pluralism on the part of more thoughtful radical elements in the ANC. That is, they recognise that a new system of production can not be simply 'blueprinted', legislated or imposed, and that it can accommodate different forms of organisation generated by particular conditions, demands and processes of struggle. Such forms include various types of individualised production (capitalist and petty commodity production), of producer and worker cooperatives, and state farms. Certainly the national democratic movement (and subsequent state) can try to encourage cooperative forms of production by various

means, but a wide range of experience suggests that it should not try to impose them.

The important point is that it is possible to elaborate a positive conception of 'pluralism' on the basis outlined (variety of specific conditions and experiences, the uneven course of political struggles around national and class contradictions, and contradictions amongst the people), rather than a residual or vacuous pluralism of *laissez-faire*. As with everything else, the substance of this positive 'pluralism' will be determined, above all, by political struggles with their inevitably local characteristics as well as location within the general process of national democratic transition. (This double aspect is illuminated to great effect by Lodge 1983).

If letting a hundred flowers bloom is a particularly appropriate metaphor in this context, what about weed growth? Any positive conception of 'pluralism' has to define, hence delimit, the terrain on which a variety of forms of production might flourish (and compete). Here the strategic objectives of national democratic transition can be contrasted with those of conservative and liberal reform, even allowing for convergence on specific reform measures. In the framework of conservative reform, legislative change to 'deracialise' the land market keeps white commercial agriculture virtually intact. The framework of liberal reform goes further, as noted, but is premised on several key underlying (and limiting) assumptions: that black farming is 'added on' to the existing 'efficient' core of white agriculture, reformed agriculture consists of individualised commercial farming (albeit 'deracialised'), individualised commercial farming is constituted on the basis of private freehold tenure.

The national democratic transition has to confront more fundamentally the land distribution and agrarian structure created by 'racial capitalism'. Here there is a very strong case for regulation of the land market, if not some form of land nationalisation, as particularly appropriate to national democratic transition, not least in the South African context. On one hand, regulation is compatible with a variety of forms of production, and can rationalise the conditions of capitalist farming (Levin and Weiner, p 106). On the other hand, it is the most effective means of both undermining white domination of agriculture and controlling forms of land accumulation (including for speculative purposes) that may develop in future.

Finally, concerning (c), the prospects and macroeconomic role of a reformed agriculture in South Africa, it is necessary to guard against welfarist and 'poverty alleviation' notions of agrarian reform, especially as a means of soaking up unemployment. These would reproduce the 'dualism' of apartheid agriculture in the form of a 'productive' core of (mostly white) commercial farming, and an extensive fringe of small (black) farming, the principal function of which is to siphon off urban unemployment rather than developing its own productive capacities. The problem of unemployment can only be confronted adequately within a comprehensive

economic strategy, encompassing linkages between agriculture and industry, and with marked improvement of the material conditions of the majority, through both individual and social consumption, as its strategic objective (Transformation 12, 1990). While the prospects for expansion of agricultural exports are highly limited by world market conditions (de Klerk in Gelb 1991 pp 215-6), there is significant scope (given increasing incomes and shifts in income distribution) for increased production of a range of foods for the domestic market (van Zyl and van Rooyen in de Klerk 1991 pp 199-201).

6 CONCLUSIONS

This paper has tried to outline some strategic issues for discussion of agrarian reform in South Africa, subject to some evident limitations. These include the incomplete and imprecise state of knowledge of social and economic structures in the countryside, of current processes of change in different rural areas, and of contradictions within the white farming bloc and apartheid institutions. The paper also has many loose ends reflecting (apart from the author's shortcomings) the large gaps in our knowledge, the relative infancy of analysis of agrarian reform in a negotiated transition from apartheid, and the highly uncertain and fluid circumstances of the present conjuncture noted by the organizers of the colloquium. And, of course, statistics about the African population of South Africa (size, distribution, employment, etc.) have to be treated with great caution; problems with them include systematic obscurities and distortions generated by the mechanisms of apartheid itself.

The central conviction of the paper is that the most important issues are political, and that the course of political struggle will determine what sorts of reforms will be gained (or not) during the present phase of transition, in the countryside as in the cities. This necessarily includes struggle inside the ANC. Clearly one problem that has dominated much of the process since February 2 1990 (the unbanning of the ANC) has been the relative success of the apartheid regime in trying to limit the preoccupations and energies of the ANC leadership to constitutional issues and talks (at the same time attacking the ANC base through continuing state sponsored terrorism). This discloses the danger that the convention of delimiting what is achievable by assessments of the 'balance of forces' has, in practice, often been restricted to the balance of forces on the site of constitutional reform. On the other hand, many activists in the national democratic movement recognise that the strength of the ANC's negotiating position in the constitutional process depends critically on the political vitality and effectiveness of the mass base, on developing its most democratic tendencies and capacities. This applies a fortiori to the countryside, given its much lower levels of political organisation and representation in the movement, and how this is reflected in/reproduced by the positions of those urban cadres who may underestimate the importance of agrarian reform.

Careful assessment of the balance of forces, and the limits it imposes, is necessary to any political realism. Unfortunately, 'realism' is too easily fetishised to restrict vision of such limits, which can only be tested by pushing against them. Again, this applies a fortiori to struggle in the South African countryside, of which there is so little precise knowledge. This provides an exemplary case for 'learning by doing' through commitment to identifying and constituting effective social forces around demands for land. What is known about the great variety of conditions and experiences in the rural areas, and what may be speculated about demands for land and the potential of suppressed or 'hidden' political energies and capacities, can be viewed as much as political opportunities as constraints. Land and agrarian reform are processes not events, and processes that require adequate time horizons. What is achieved in any stage of the process both encapsulates experience, knowledge and capacity that has been acquired and informs the conditions of struggle in subsequent stages.

The kind of political process envisaged allows for the inevitable unevenness and gradual building of capacity of democratically waged struggles, and should provide safeguards against temptations to rely on legislative change as a primary lever of reform, or to provide blueprints of a technicist and economic kind like those emanating from the DBSA but which also appeal to certain elements in the national democratic coalition of forces. As Saul (1991) suggests, engaging with possibilities of reform - even in the constrained conditions of a negotiated transition - is not necessarily to succumb to reformism.

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