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Groundwork for Political Negotiation in South Africa

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The fundamental political division in South Africa is between the emerging Establishment — which will include a merger of current Establishment and the Intrasystemic Opposition — and the Extrasystemic Opposition. Genuine negotiation between these two groups should be promoted. Negotiation should be seen as complementary to coercion and should not be confused with consultation. Coercion is required to promote greater symmetry of power which is needed for a lasting settlement. Violence is a destructive form of coercion but does not rule out negotiation. Negotiation is severely inhibited by ideological commitment on both sides: the siege and boycott mentalities. A case is made for third-party intervention, especially the facilitation of communication by unofficial diplomats, and the establishment of a national mediation service for community and political conflict in South Africa.

Meaningful and successful negotiation in South Africa requires two analytical tasks: the identification of issues and parties and of the major obstacles to negotiation. In my view conflict in South Africa has shifted significantly and this has led to major new political divisions and alliances. I do not be-



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lieve apartheid is any more the dominant issue. While I would not say that an attack on apartheid is beating a dead horse, it certainly is a short-sighted approach.

From apartheid to a market-oriented economy

The preoccupation with the policy of apartheid on both sides of the divide has tended to obscure objective analyses and understanding of the major issues underlying the conflict in South Africa. Because conflict in South Africa has been conceptualised primarily in terms of race, we may ourselves tend to fall into the trap of seeing race as the root cause of that conflict. The danger of such an oversimplification is that one would then seek a remedy in terms of one narrow solution, i.e. the elimination of racial discrimination.

The character of conflict in South Africa is chang-

ing. There is a shift in the prevailing white ideology. This shift represents a move away from socio-cultural thinking and towards economic perceptions of the social structure; from an ideology of racial and cultural priority to more practical, economic considerations. While I interpret this as a shift from ideological to more pragmatic considerations, it appears that the economy, like race, soon becomes the object of ideological interpretation. Ideological divisions then cut across divisions between rich and poor, white and black.

Though material resources play an important role they are not the only factors that generate conflict. In all communities ideologies exist that cut across the structural features of society. These ideologies may be concerned with issues such as race or class and may be shared by members of varying racial groups and social classes. When ideological commitment transcends the structural conditions of race or class membership, the basic conflict will be between the protagonists of the opposing ideologies and not between the races or the classes. Goals, interests and values can acquire ideological meaning that will motivate people to act independently of their objective structural conditions of existence.

Some ideologies are defensive, serving mainly to rationalise or justify a satisfying order. For example, ideologies of management have sought to justify the subordination of large masses of men to the discipline of factory work and to the authority of employers.

Other ideologies, such as socialism, are critical of the status quo in most western societies and are oriented towards the future. They attempt to formulate alternative perspectives for group life.

When politics is guided by pragmatic considerations instead of traditional apartheid ideology, discrimination is no longer seen as an end in itself. It is a means by which economic and political goals can be achieved. Apartheid policy is now being assessed in pragmatic, instrumental terms: the question is, will it deliver the goods?

This pragmatic approach has enabled the current nationalist leadership to question the function and use of apartheid in a way that was not possible in the Verwoerdian era of Afrikaner thinking. Apartheid and racial discrimination have become 'negotiable'. In such a situation the dividing lines need not necessarily be racial ones, as they were traditionally conceived. Discrimination against some black groups may be more efficacious than

against all. The National Party's pragmatic wing believes that if whites hope to retain a share in political and economic control in the long run, they will have to share power with other population groups. In the new dispensation of the tricameral parliament, racial discrimination is relaxed sufficiently to encourage a large number of coloured people and Indian leaders to attempt to make the new scheme work.

New interest groups are being created which cut across the black-white divide. New alliances are developing. But so, of course, are new divisions. Blacks, as well as whites, are divided.

The rearrangement of priorities in the National Party has paved the way for considerations other than racial purity to provide the major unifying and motivating forces of the emerging mixed establishment and, similarly, of the emerging mixed opposition.

While there is no clearly formulated ideology on either side of the new political divide in South Africa there are indications that conflicting themes are emerging on opposite sides.

Race, obviously, will remain an important distinguishing factor between the major opposing groups in South Africa while power is still largely concentrated in white hands. But the establishment is gradually acquiring certain conspicuous features and espousing certain values which will largely determine the basis on which new alignments and coalitions can be formed, many of them across the colour line.

Sam Nolutshungu (1983: 2, 17, 109) gives a perceptive picture of what he calls 'the reformist position in the emerging establishment':

While the various groups do not contain a central theory, they share certain themes:

- liberal notions of society and social change;
- a general commitment to preserve the basic capitalist order, with private though hardly free enterprise;
- an antipathy to revolution;
- a continued process of deracialisation leading to the outward forms of multiracial rule.

The conflict in the economic sphere is moving from the structural level (claims to scarce resources) to the level of values and ideologies. Fanatical commitment to these ideologies may reduce the chances of a negotiated settlement. The espousal of the free enterprise system has become a distinguishing feature of a wide range of interest groups that constitute what I regard as the emerging es-

establishment. The rejection of capitalism and the espousal of some form of socialism, often referred to as African socialism, has characterised a wide range of groups that I define as the opposition operating outside the existing socio-economic system in South Africa.

The emerging free market ideology provides the basis for the co-option or integration of black interest groups into the establishment.

As the ideology of free enterprise was taking shape in the white establishment and among those interest groups that increasingly tended to line up with the government, so the ideology of 'socialism' was, inevitably, taking shape as the dominant ideology of opposition groups, albeit in many forms. Some opposition groups are merely sympathetic to socialism while others are committed to it.

Political divisions and alliances in flux

The politics of pragmatism have had the effect of redefining the battle lines in the South African political struggle. The essential values and motivating forces that are holding together the major political configurations are changing and the change process is leading to new alignments. The changing priorities of the National Party are providing new rallying forces in the emerging mixed establishment. As the nature of the establishment changes, the nature of the traditional opposition groups is changing too, and new opposition groups are emerging. Opposition groups that used to rally automatically around anti-apartheid issues are increasingly basing their policies more on socio-economic issues. They are also tending to challenge the legitimacy of the very system within which parliamentary (and most legal) politics are conducted. Because the current socio-economic system has been and continues to be accepted relatively uncritically by both establishment and current parliamentary opposition, the opposition within parliament has become less relevant and often tends to merge with the establishment in defence against the onslaught upon the socio-economic system.

This state of flux in South African politics can best be understood by distinguishing between three major alliances or configurations of interest groups.

(a) The establishment alliance.

Race will always be a divisive factor in South Africa but whereas the establishment used to be exclusively white and motivated by the traditional wish

to maintain white purity, this is much less so today. It is now more motivated by a business ideology, that of a free market, and efficiency. On this basis, coalitions can be established across the colour barrier. The establishment is gradually incorporating blacks that share these values and is increasingly catering for the interests of blacks who have a commitment to, and vested interest in, the protection of the prevailing socio-economic system. The establishment alliance includes the National Party and to an increasing extent the coloured and Indian parties participating in the new constitutional dispensation. In a peripheral sense it also includes African bodies such as Community Councils operating under government auspices.

(b) The alliance of opposition groups within the socio-economic system i.e. intra-systemic opposition including parliamentary and extraparliamentary groups.

This alliance includes parliamentary opposition and other groups such as business sectors and trade unions which have opposed the government on race issues but are willing to co-operate within the broad socio-economic system of a market oriented economy. As state policy shifts and the government removes race discrimination and takes a more consistent stand in favour of free enterprise this group finds itself increasingly in sympathy with the party in power.

The intrasystemic opposition groups want political change, but at the same time they seek to avoid any dislocation of productivity, and want to maintain the nature of the economic system.

To an extent this alliance includes the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), big business, and the coloured and Indian parties and African councils mentioned above. It also includes the Kwazulu Legislative Assembly, Inkatha and the United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA). Seen from within the current political system, they constitute the opposition to the ruling National Party. But seen in the light of the capitalist-socialist struggle in South Africa, they are becoming part of the establishment. The current failure of the Nationalist Government to come to terms with the leaders of Inkatha and of the KwaNatal Indaba should not distract observers from the obvious potential for cooperation between establishment leaders and Inkatha leaders. Inkatha has consistently taken a firm stand in favour of a market-economy and a pragmatic approach, and is willing to compromise in order to

accommodate white needs in a multiracial government (De Kock, 1986: 114). The success of the Indaba between the KwaZulu government and the Natal Provincial Administration is a hopeful example of interracial cooperation between white and black and between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties.

(c) The alliance of opposition groups operating outside the current socio-economic and political framework i.e. the extra-systemic opposition.

These groups fall outside the framework in two respects:

- (i) They are excluded from and/or refuse to participate in the current political structures created by the Government, such as Parliament, the President's Council, Community Councils and homeland governments.
- (ii) They reject the predominantly capitalist socio-economic system and favour a socialised and controlled economy, industrial democracy or related systems. This category includes organisations such as the United Democratic Front (UDF), the congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), the National Forum, the Azanian peoples' organisation (Azapo), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the African National Congress (ANC).

They see the basic issues not so much in racial but in socio-economic terms. They seek fundamental change in the socio-economic system along broadly socialist lines. They regard the PFP, Inkatha and similar organisations as part of the capitalist establishment.

This third group has emerged as a major political movement in South Africa, opposing the emerging regrouped 'establishment' described above.

To sum up, the major emerging political division is not between whites and blacks but between those who adhere to or propagate the free enterprise ideology and the proponents of a broadly socialist or hard-line Marxist approach. The extent to which future policies, practices and strategies will conform to these ideologies, however, will remain to be seen. The Government, while claiming to be a major proponent of free enterprise, is often accused of merely paying lip-service to this system. The ANC, on the other hand, while being,

'formally committed to socialism', is 'hardly doctrinaire' about it (Lodge, 1985: 84).

The Freedom Charter, the manifesto of the ANC and of the UDF, calls for a socialisation and a radical redistribution of wealth but these goals could be met by a system of social democracy in which state-controlled organisations coexist with private enterprise (Hund, 1988: 217 - 228).

The emerging fundamental divide in our society is no more between white and black, between government and parliamentary opposition. Neither is it between parliamentary and extraparliamentary groups. It is of course true that there are serious divisions between these groups that have been traditional opponents. Inkatha, the major extraparliamentary intrasystemic opposition group feel they are making no progress in their relations with the government. But in a more fundamental way in the long term the division between Inkatha and the UDF resembles a greater political divide than between Inkatha and the government.

In our search for the constructive accommodation of conflict in South Africa, our primary task should be to assess the prospects of communication, dialogue, negotiation and comparatively peaceful settlement of differences between the two major emerging groups: the expanding establishment and the extrasystemic opposition operating outside the prevailing socio-economic system.

Problems and obstacles to negotiation

As the spiral of violence increases and polarisation intensifies, South Africa appears to many observers and protagonists to present a classic case of irreconcilable differences leading inevitably to cataclysmic confrontation. In this climate, words like negotiation, mediation and conciliation are treated in many circles as dirty words or, at best, as irrelevant and inappropriate.

Yet, in spite of numerous and formidable obstacles, there remain valid grounds for positive and constructive attitudes towards prospects for an eventual negotiated settlement in South Africa.

I want to single out some of the major problems. These include the tendency to lean towards either utopian or fatalistic approaches to conflict resolution. These contrasting approaches relate to the false contrasts made between utopian High Roads based on negotiation and fatalistic Low Roads based on coercion.

Current research on resolution of conflict is characterised by a relatively positive approach based on the belief that the resolution or, at least, constructive accommodation of conflict is more likely than has been traditionally assumed.

The traditional negative or pessimistic approach stemmed largely from recognition of natural human aggression and the scarcity of finite material resources such as possessions and territory. Competition for resources was believed to rule out real resolution of conflict.

False contrasts and misperceptions

This pessimistic school of thought is largely based on two fundamental assumptions. The first is that the drive to dominate is universal in mankind. This belief is based on the views of Hobbes and Machiavelli and has been reinforced by Calvinist theology. Life is an eternal struggle between those on top and those struggling to get to the top. We cannot have peace, but we can have order — as long as those on top manipulate through threats or use coercion to maintain their position and impose their order upon others.

The epitomising slogan is: if you want peace, prepare for war. This approach is reflected in a statement by Robert S McNamara, former Secretary of Defence for the USA. 'Security depends upon assuming a worst possible case, and having the ability to cope with it.'

The second assumption is that conflict arises from incompatible interests built into structures. This interpretation has been reinforced by Marxist analysis. Not only do policies exploit but so do structures.

This perception often leads to the conclusion that conflict must be sharpened to undermine and destroy the exploitative structures. Any other course would be playing the game of the ruling elite by making people 'happy slaves'.

At the other extreme is the 'Utopian blueprint school' which envisages a warless future achieved by the adoption of legal or constitutional blueprints for general disarmament or world government. This approach 'requires a heroic faith in the politically naive slogan that what is desirable is indeed possible' (Falk and Kim, 1980:4).

Constructive and destructive ways of communication between conflicting groups lie along a continuum of behaviour patterns. They range between coercion (including violence) and cooperative behaviour, such as negotiation. Neither coercion nor

negotiation constitute distinct categories of behaviour and in practice distinctions between them often become blurred.

Pressures are required to bring about change in South Africa. Negotiation should be seen as complementing pressure in the communication process between conflicting parties. By improving the quality of communication and understanding, negotiation will ensure more rational and effective pressures and more orderly change, so reducing the likelihood of destructive violence. Pressures on the South African government should be seen as part of the communication process, and should be constructive and conditional, rather than punitive (Van der Merwe and Williams, 1987).

This approach cuts across the false but popular notion that negotiation and coercion are contradictory and mutually exclusive. To present to the public the impression that we have to choose between negotiation and coercion — the one leading to peace and justice and the other to domination and doom — is misleading. In fact, negotiation that lacks coercive power is unlikely to achieve any meaningful change in political relations. Coercion is part of the negotiation and bargaining process. The actual outcome is normally some kind of compromise between the two.

Negotiation and coercion are complementary

The case for negotiation for the 'High Road' has been made persuasively by Clem Sunter in numerous presentations and in his well-documented book, *The World and South Africa in the 1990s* (1986).

The High Road is the outcome of joint negotiation and synergy, 'whereby the final product is a great deal better than the separate parties to the process originally conceived.' The goal is a 'genuine democracy', where government is a 'servant of the people,' where power is decentralised because 'everybody is around the negotiating table' and all want a 'measure of regional and local autonomy.' He adds: 'There will be natural checks and balances' (1986 : 105 -106). This sounds like Utopia.

In the Low Road scenario a big and centralised government co-opts instead of negotiates with opposition groups. Conflicts and sanctions increase and the country becomes an isolated military fortress. The end game is the 'Waste Land' (1986 : 106).

This is a prophecy of doom. The real life scenario which I envisage is one in which interplay of negotiation and coercion — with doubtless some measure of excessive violence — will set us on a Middle Road.

The Middle Road will be the grand realistic compromise.

Negotiation is an essential part of the democratic interaction of pressures in politics. It counteracts authoritarian polarisation of politics which is exploited 'by both white ruler and black revolutionary to their own advantage' (Degenaar, 1987 : 6).

We do not have a *choice* between negotiation and coercion. We must strive to achieve a *balance* between them. Neither the pessimistic nor the Utopian model is adequate. Imaginative pragmatism will find creative approaches to specific situations (Van der Merwe, 1987).

Negotiation should not be confused with consultation

Negotiation is a problem-solving process in which individuals or groups voluntarily discuss their differences and attempt to reach a joint decision about their mutual concerns. Negotiation is the principal way of mutually redefining an old relationship that is not operating satisfactorily or of establishing a new relationship where none existed before. The problem-solving approach seeks win-win solutions through negotiation in contrast to the traditional adversarial win-lose approach.

But negotiation also includes a bargaining relationship in which coercion is used to influence the behaviour of the adversary. Bargaining refers to the process of making substantive, procedural or psychological trade-offs to reach an acceptable settlement. While communication is in its generic sense a 'neutral' word, it acquired a negative meaning among trade unions in the early 1970s when management used the word to describe a specific system of communication (liaison committees) manipulated by managers to control emerging unions.

Communication was seen as a means to prevent negotiation. The word negotiation was not even mentioned in the original Black Labour Relations Regulation Act of 1953. Liaison committees were therefore channels whereby management communicated *to* rather than *with* workers. No wonder there was widespread rejection of these committees by the emerging trade unions.

Just as 'communication' has acquired a negative meaning in industrial relations, 'negotiation' has acquired a negative meaning in political relations. This has happened because the government has been using the term 'negotiation' to describe its strategies of consultation and co-option. Consultation implies no cost to the dominant party because it largely controls the process and sets the agenda. Furthermore, recent consultations have not been conducted with legitimate representatives of the black people, but with individuals, either appointed by the government or elected by processes which were not considered legitimate by the masses.

Social and psychological obstacles

I have already referred to the tendency to be pessimistic and negative about conflict. This tendency is exacerbated by a number of factors located in the social structure and in human nature.

Human aggressiveness and violence constitute major sources of conflict and obstacles to promoting peaceful relations. People tend to 'react' and behave in an emotional, irrational way and a high proportion of behaviour is unreasoned, unthinking and highly subjective.

One reason for the perpetuation of apartheid is suggested by Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance : that people tend to adjust their beliefs and attitudes to harmonise with their actions.

Because apartheid has been imposed by law for the past forty years, pressure for self-consistency leads to a continuation of conflict. Past actions have to be justified to oneself and to others.

Conflict tends to be self-perpetuating. When it becomes institutionalised — part of certain institutions and structures — members of those institutions develop a vested interest in perpetuating that conflict. Decision-makers are thus unable to terminate conflict even if they wish to do so. Conflict takes on an integrative function, often for both parties.

Senior members of military establishments are reluctant to see the end of war because this may end their careers. Protest and liberation movements within South Africa and abroad have also become 'institutionalised' in recent years and now offer career prospects.

In my mediation efforts on an international level my role as mediator has invariably been more warmly acknowledged by South African leaders

of liberation movements in exile than by spokesmen of anti-apartheid and boycott movements of other nationalities. The latter seem to leave no room for a negotiated settlement. I have come to the reluctant conclusion that some of these advocates have a vested interest in perpetuating the conflict, while the South African leaders in exile are interested in exploring honourable settlements that would enable them to return home.

These exacerbating factors are further reinforced by unreliable and impoverished communication. This is especially true for relations between the establishment and opposition groups operating outside the system. They have to rely on espionage and other circuitous means of obtaining information. Errors and misinformation reinforce pre-existing attitudes and expectations.

Intense polarisation makes it increasingly difficult for opponents to understand one another or even to communicate. Unless a middle ground can be occupied by a third party intervener to facilitate communication, opponents become increasingly entrenched in mutual distrust, fear and hostility.

Asymmetry of bargaining power

A legitimate reason for scepticism about negotiation in South Africa is asymmetry of bargaining power between parties to conflict. Where great power disparity exists there is a danger that negotiation will be used by the more powerful party to co-opt or otherwise manipulate the weaker party, or to defuse the situation before the weaker party has mustered sufficient power or resources to seriously challenge the status quo.

Scarcely a day goes by that South African government-controlled media do not make reference to the desirability of negotiation as a means to resolving the national dilemma. Yet as long as negotiation is seen as likely to work to the advantage of the party with the most power, it will be regarded with suspicion by the weaker group, who fear that the process will be used to smooth over deep structural injustices in our society. Less powerful parties thus hesitate to call for mediation and negotiation, choosing rather to pursue goals such as social change and empowerment. Radical leaders prefer to channel the energies of the oppressed community into community building intended to increase their bargaining power.

An essential component in successful negotiation is balance of power: in a situation where both

parties hold power, each party is able to exert pressures and inflict cost on the other. However, if one party is excessively weak and unable to impose substantial costs, it cannot have any meaningful impact on the opponent's behaviour and on the outcome of the process.

Violence

The ever-increasing spiral of violence and polarisation is another reason for viewing the current South African situation as unfavourable to a negotiated settlement. Violence committed by both government and opposition, both physically and in the form of structural or institutional violence, poses a major stumbling block to negotiations.

While violence is usually abhorred in public rhetoric, all politicians and virtually the entire Christian church believe that violence in its most destructive form, warfare, can be justified under certain conditions. The theology of a just war dates back to the early history of almost all Christian churches. And its relevance to the current South African situation has been emphasised by the Kairos Theologians (1985) who stated: 'There is a long and consistent Christian tradition about the use of physical force to defend oneself against aggressors and tyrants. In other words, there are circumstances when physical force may be used'.

South African church leaders, including Nobel Peace Laureate Desmond Tutu, do not opt for a pacifist stand and it is therefore most unlikely that any political leaders will support pacifism. Like religious leaders, they will not in principle renounce it. They will reserve the right to use violence as a last resort.

If they are in power they will use it to maintain law and order to suppress protest, rebellion, armed revolution or invasion by foreign power. If they are in opposition and believe that all normal channels of protest have been closed and that the government is completely intransigent, they will inevitably resort to violence, believing that justice is on their side.

Depending on the political and moral convictions of the clergy, they will rally behind either those in authority or those in rebellion, arguing that God is on their side.

The term violence has very broad implications and is by no means the exclusive province of disgruntled minorities or those out of power. Governments use violence consistently to achieve their

goals, through psychological, institutional and structural means (Kaunda, 1980: 41, 127). Institutional violence, for example, involves the use of physical force by agents of the state, such as police and troops. Structural violence can be seen in the systematic denigration and deprivation of certain legally-defined population groups, by structures within the society.

Many regard intensification of the struggle in South Africa as an indication that negotiation is ruled out. Quite the contrary may be true. It is normal for parties in conflict to do their best to increase their bargaining power before negotiations commence. It is also normal for political leaders (both ANC and government) to publicly deny negotiations at such times (Van der Merwe, 1986a).

Ideological commitment : The siege mentality

The extent to which apartheid has become an ideology inhibits rational analysis and handling of political and economic problems. Now that there are signs of the waning of apartheid ideology in the establishment, new ideologies and counter-ideologies are emerging to meet psychological needs.

A lessening fear of colour and of blacks is making room for fear of communism and Russian imperialism. These alien forces are seen as constituting a 'total onslaught' on South Africa. 'That South Africa is the prize objective in the Soviet bid to control Southern Africa is an established fact', claimed the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in an editorial on 4 July 1983. This statement is the essence of the perception of the 'total onslaught'. It is seen as a communist-inspired, ideologically motivated struggle, aiming at the overthrow of the constitutional order and its replacement by a communist-oriented and subject black government. The liberation movement is seen as a tool of Communist Russia.

Since the 'total onslaught' was seen to be largely inspired by communist ideology and supported by Russian imperialism, the total strategy was naturally directed against communism. Active support for the western-style market oriented economy became an important factor in the protection of 'civilised' western standards in South Africa.

While the South African government and conservative media continue with their efforts to ex-

cite public opinion against the 'total onslaught' allegedly orchestrated from Moscow, reputable scholars warn against this misperception.

Recognised authorities in relatively conservative establishment-oriented institutions argue convincingly that Soviet policy-making does not emanate from a monolith and that policy concerning southern Africa is largely the preserve of lower levels of the Soviet bureaucracy.

Dr Philip Nel, director of the Institute for Soviet Studies at the University of Stellenbosch, cites several White Papers and Nationalist Cabinet Ministers who argue that Soviet involvement in southern Africa 'is underpinned by a long-term Soviet desire to gain control over southern Africa in order to deny the "capitalist" world this region's mineral resources' (1988 : 34). The 1982 White Paper states that '... the USSR strives to extend its influence to this area by assisting terrorist organisations such as SWAPO and the South African ANC, by creating unrest and exploiting the situation, and by making use of surrogate forces such as the Cubans' (1988 : 34).

Dr Nel argues that there is 'no credible evidence which suggests that Soviet involvement in southern Africa is compelled by a burning desire to control the mineral wealth of the region and especially that of South Africa (1988 : 41).

The communist connection of the ANC is not in doubt. There is an alliance between the ANC and the South African Communist Party dating back several decades. This alliance is reinforced by the continued banning of the ANC and the lack of Western support. It is not the result of a commitment of the ANC to communist principles. The ANC is not a front organisation of the communists, but an ally.

Government spokesmen have on various occasions demanded that the ANC denounce communism and sever their communist links as prerequisites for negotiation. However, the ANC can obviously not be expected to renounce unconditionally its allies of several decades. The government will have to accept these connections and learn to live and compete with them.

The most efficient way of reducing communist influence in the ANC would be to extend the friendship of the West and to unban it, so that it can develop its own independent power base in South Africa where it has the support of millions of non-communists and Christians.

Whether or not to participate in government-created political, economic or social systems, has been a source of intense conflict in South Africa. The issue concerns public functions, sports events, parastatal bodies and forms of local and national government.

Ideological commitment : The boycott mentality

Refusal to participate, withholding support and, especially, developing alternative systems can be powerful strategic tools. However, disagreement about how and when to use these tools remains a serious source of division among opponents of the government.

In South Africa an emotional revulsion against the 'system' has become so dominant that a mentality of 'total boycott' or total 'isolation' has developed in the extraparliamentary opposition. Withdrawal has become a way of life, an end in itself. This boycott mentality, (similar to that which has developed among anti-apartheid activists overseas) has generally led to a refusal to make any meaningful input into the political processes of the country.

Anti-apartheid organisations abroad are characterised by attitudes of despair and cynicism and a judgmental approach. This results in a refusal to do or contribute anything positive or constructive; every action is aimed at destroying the present evil, fighting apartheid, opposing the oppressor and bringing down the government. The primary motivating force is not the search for justice in South Africa but the wish to retaliate, to punish the evil-doer, to take revenge.

Conditional sanctions, strikes, boycotts, and other withholding actions are valuable and efficient strategies in the political struggle. But when a boycott becomes an end in itself, a principle and not a strategy, it no longer constitutes a constructive approach to the accommodation of conflict.

The South African political climate is fraught with obstacles to meaningful and direct communication and negotiation between the government and broadly-based black leadership. There are seemingly irreconcilable differences between the respective positions on power, equality, the pace of change and apartheid, and each side is threatened with a serious erosion of its political base if publicly seen to acknowledge the legitimacy of the other.

Peacemakers are always suspect on both sides

and, unless there is a strong enough support group, most people do not opt for the middle way for fear of falling between two stools. The Reverend Ian Paisley of Northern Ireland has expressed his aversion for the middle group very clearly: 'Bridge-builders and traitors are alike, they both go over to the other side.'

Many observers believe the situation has deteriorated significantly in 1988, that the government's reform programme has been shelved and that there are virtually no prospects for negotiation between the government and the mass-based opposition groups, including the UDF and the ANC, between the establishment and the extrasystemic opposition.

In situations where direct communication between conflicting parties is absent, it becomes necessary for a third party to intervene to facilitate communication.

The need for intervention

Third-party intervention should not be seen as a distinct category of behaviour but rather as a role assumed at certain times by certain people. It forms part of a wider continuum of behaviour patterns in which the intervener adopts a variety of roles and techniques (Bercovitch, 1984:16).

Intervention can be either neutral or partisan. The purpose of neutral intervention is usually to mediate between conflicting parties, to improve communication and to promote a negotiated settlement.

Partisan intervention could be motivated by a variety of reasons: to advocate the cause of one party or to assist it in the conflict, to protect the status quo, or to assist and empower the weaker party. Strategies of partisan intervention range from repression — the most anti-change or establishment-supporting option — on one hand, to generating conflict (the strongest pro-change option) on the other hand, depending on the opinions, attitudes and convictions of the intervener.

Mediation refers to intervention in a dispute or negotiation by an acceptable, impartial and neutral third party to assist contending parties to reach a mutually acceptable settlement or truce.

Mediation and negotiation are thus closely allied. Mediation is, in a sense, an extension of negotiation because it brings an added dimension, a third party, into the process.

Mediation and negotiation are, however, two fundamentally different activities. The negotiator acts

on behalf of an interest group as an adversary in a conflict situation, while the mediator is a neutral third party intervening between conflicting groups or adversaries. While the negotiator takes a stand on behalf of his group, the mediator is impartial and has no vested interest in the outcome of the dispute.

We often read in the papers about prominent people 'mediating' in community and political conflict. Nearly all of these are examples of partisan intervention. While I encourage and praise such efforts and while there is ample evidence that they often contribute quite significantly towards better understanding and better relations, it is misleading to refer to them as mediation. If these efforts fail, as they sometimes do, the public may argue that we have tried mediation and it did not work.

I therefore accept the morality and sincerity of intervention, including partisan intervention. But the true mediator must be acceptable to *all* parties. Prominent advocates of certain political views or ideologies, whether conservative, liberal or radical, cannot mediate in conflicts between witdoeke and comrades in Cape Town or between Inkatha and the UDF in Natal.

Not all conflict situations call for mediation. Major social and political changes are usually brought about by varying degrees of confrontation. Mediation must not be used to hold back the inevitable process of change.

In political conflict gross asymmetry of power inhibits the negotiation process and is detrimental to a lasting negotiated settlement. In such situations there may be greater need for an activist who helps latent conflict to become manifest, who promotes the process of empowerment as an important pre-condition for negotiation.

If a community has generated the energy to confront authority and demand legitimate change it would be wasteful to defuse the situation before a strong case had been made by the protesting party. It would be counter-productive for the mediator to enter this sort of situation too soon, or at the request of the establishment only, or even if asked to come in by a few faint-hearted members of the community. Under such conditions partisan intervention on behalf of the weaker party is required together with, or even prior to, neutral intervention.

Facilitators must remove blocks and distortions in the communication process so that mutual understanding may develop. Conflicts of interest are exacerbated by subjective phenomena which occur when existing conditions prevent effective communication or accurate assessments of costs and values, and consideration of alternative means and goals.

The mediator or conciliator facilitates exchange, suggests possible solutions, and assists the parties in reaching a voluntary agreement. I make a clear distinction, however, between mediation and facilitation. Facilitation is restricted to the facilitation

The facilitation of communication

of communication between conflicting parties. Unlike the mediator the facilitator does not suggest solutions or help the parties reach agreement and is primarily concerned with technical rather than moral issues: the improvement of communication rather than the promotion of solutions.

The mediator is usually motivated by a concern to reach a peaceful solution, consensus, conciliation or some similar goal. He or she can claim neutrality regarding the stands taken by conflicting parties, but not regarding the outcome of the exercise. For the facilitator, facilitation of communication is an end in itself, in much the same way as one can pursue knowledge for the sake of knowledge or atomic power for the sake of power.

The mediator is relatively more concerned with the use made of new insights gained from reliable communication, while the facilitator is primarily concerned with ensuring that the relevant parties gain accurate information, regardless of what use they make of it.

For these reasons a facilitator may, in situations of extreme polarisation and intense suspicion, be more acceptable to conflicting parties than a mediator. The neutral and almost technical services of the facilitator would appear to be more functional than the assistance of a mediator who is morally committed to peacemaking. I want to argue, therefore, that at this stage in South Africa we should consider facilitation as a first step before attempting mediation between the major contending parties.

In my experience with the South African establishment and the African National Congress (ANC)

in exile, I have always maintained that I served as a facilitator assisting both parties to have meaningful communication and gain reliable information. I did not urge the parties to put the knowledge to good use or to make peace. It was up to them to decide how they would use these insights.

I make a special plea for unofficial diplomacy: something frequently practised by organisations like the World Council of Churches, the International Red Cross and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). One reason for this focus is that this kind of diplomacy may help to pave the way for subsequent official mediation for which the parties are not yet ready. Another reason is that I have been involved in this kind of intervention and am relying heavily on my own experiences.

Any involvement by local or outside governments or official bodies tends to give official status to the communication process between contending parties. This is exactly what the parties want to avoid when they are not ready for mediation.

Such circumstances call for the quiet, informal services of 'unofficial diplomats', individuals without official status, power, or vested interest. Non-official mediators are not employed by or responsible to national governments or inter-governmental organisations. Michael Banks (1987:23) concludes that:

In recent years, reports of private diplomacy (carried out by Quaker representatives, respected businessmen and others), have shown that there are significant benefits to the parties in the conciliating, go-between role that non-political individuals can create for themselves.

While they have no political, economical or military clout, facilitators working as individuals have the freedom to be flexible, to disregard protocol, to suggest unconventional remedies or procedures, to widen or restrict the agenda or change the order of items, to propose partial solutions or package deals, to press the case for constructive initiatives or magnanimous gestures (Bailey, 1985:211).

Such private initiatives may contribute to the alleviation of problems in communication. 'By providing auxiliary channels of communication, by serving as intermediaries between governments, by performing various third-party functions, including negotiating and mediating in conflict situations, and by contributing to a climate in which policy-makers can usefully work, private citizens may augment and facilitate official diplomacy' (Berman and Johnson, 1977:7).

The intent of some of the individuals who initiate private efforts is to prepare the way for inter-governmental action, and often they act with the blessing or at least the knowledge of officials of governments or international organizations. When it suits their purposes, governments may support and use private channels (Berman and Johnson, 1977:7).

Informal intermediaries often pave the way for official mediation and negotiation by carrying proposals, responses, and other messages between the parties, ensuring the flow of accurate and reliable information, interpreting and clarifying positions to minimise misunderstandings, to find ways to begin building trust, and to help to bring to the surface ideas, alternatives and options for resolving differences.

In July 1988 a national association for the analysis, handling and resolution of conflict was formed. Membership is open to all interested in the constructive accommodation of conflict in South Africa, especially in community and political relations. I hope this association will provide a home for the much maligned middle group of facilitators, mediators, bridge-builders and peacemakers in South Africa.

The need for a professional mediation service

There are in South Africa a large number of individuals and groups able to make important contributions as unofficial diplomats. Without training, an organisational infrastructure and professional status, their talents remain undeveloped.

Training in negotiating and mediating skills is essential. While such training is given in industrial relations in South Africa, it has been neglected in political relations. The Centre for Intergroup Studies has recently started a national training programme in negotiating skills for community leaders (sponsored by Shell South Africa, Ltd) and we are planning a series of short courses in mediation in community and political conflict by a team of top American consultants/trainers. Courses for businessmen and trade union leaders will be given in Johannesburg, for professionals and environmentalists in Cape Town, and for community leaders in Natal. In 1989 we will also offer a three-month residential course in mediation.

Modern insights and techniques have been applied successfully by the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSSA) and several other

institutions in industrial relations in recent years, and by the South African Media Council in disputes involving the public media. The time is overdue for the establishment of a national mediation service specifically geared to serve in the fields of community and political conflict. IMSSA and overseas organisations could serve as models. Such a body could identify and train individuals to serve on a panel whose members could be called in by disputing parties to mediate.

Such a mediation service should be highly professional, but should not be divorced from or imposed on the people. Professionalisation should entail training community and political leaders who are recruited from the community itself (Van der Merwe, 1986b). Many religious leaders, academics and businessmen attempt mediation. I have

referred earlier to some of their efforts. A national mediation service would serve to professionalise their services and make them more efficient.

Costs of such services would probably be comparatively low as many religious and community leaders and academics serving on such panels would be willing to mediate for a small fee or without charging any fee.

At the Second National Conference on Negotiation and Mediation in Community and Political Conflict in South Africa in July 1988, I called for the establishment of such a national facilitation and mediation service (Van der Merwe, 1988). The proposal was well received and many suggestions were made about how the idea should be pursued.

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