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POLITICAL RESEARCH DISCUSSION GROUP
Research Section - RPMC UK
Participation Debate
June 1988

Political Research
Discussion Group

RFMC
London

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Participation Debate

Discussion based on an analysis of recent articles in Work in Progress, Transformation and the Weekly Mail discussing the question of participation in government-created structures.

RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

1. The analysis, as an individual contribution to the debate, and if strengthened in the ways noted in the discussion, would make an effective contribution
2. There is a need for strong articles in movement publications on the topic, specifically on the reasons for boycotting the October elections
3. Discussion within the movement on some of the more theoretical questions raised by the debate is needed, particularly on the relation between central state power and subordinate structures, and the conditions for effective participation

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4. Mark Swilling 'THE POLITICS OF NEGOTIATION' Work in Progress, Double Edition Issues 50 and 51
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Record of discussion: Participation Debate

- The question of non-participation needs more discussion - if there was substantial participation in government-created structures, if the mass of the people felt that the movement was not making progress outside of the structures, then the position would have to be assessed. We should work for an outright boycott of the October elections, but we must see what happens. We should be sensitive to measure, and even if the low figure of 20 percent which the regime is aiming at were achieved, we must carefully assess the significance of it. We should immediately establish machinery for measuring and assessing what happens in the election.

The principal criterion is what the people want, how they regard the institutions and what they see can be achieved outside the institutions.

With reference to the paper, there was a historical inaccuracy on p.6 paragraph 4 (beginning 'It is sometimes argued....' In fact the ANC never officially supported participation in parliament and provincial structures at the time referred to - it had had a boycott policy virtually since the time of the miners' strike (although some members did participate, contrary to the policy and the communist party had a different policy and participated) - it was in fact also a time when the ANC enjoyed rising mass support and was not in need of the platform which participation might supply).

- Any participation at this stage would help legitimize what the regime has so far failed to find legitimacy for. The position adopted in the articles by Friedman and others was a very defeatist one, whether it is coming from the left or the right.

- Those arguing for participation are putting two points: that the Mass Democratic Movement has been immobilised and that the ANC is powerless (?). These points are rightly dealt with in the critique, but it falls short by not saying what should be done. The opportunity should be taken to put the position of the broad front, and the need to unite the many forces presently opposed to the regime. For example, even all the bantustan leaders have refused to give their support to the National Council; there is a whole range of positions within the MDM; and within the white community there are forces withdrawing from participation.

- To agree to participate now would be a retrograde step, given the hollowness of the institutions in

question. That is the crucial point. Participation now would push the policies of the regime forward.

There are problems with the way the argument is developed in the critique. It is largely trapped within the problematic of those it is attacking. It disarms us for the future, for example, in the way in which it suggests that the reversal of the Labour Party's intention to transform the Tricameral parliament (the party itself being transformed as a result of participation) is an inevitable consequence of participation by any organisation in any institution. The conditions of participation, the nature of the institution, are all-important and we should have an eye to these facts.

The same arguments were deployed in the case of the debate over the registration of Trade unions, and proved false. Participation with Bantu Education likewise has not led to co-option, but rather to revolutionary appropriation where conditions were suitable.

The paper correctly identifies the structure of the argument of those it is attacking, noting that they proceed from the premiss that the movement is in retreat to the conclusion that participation is the correct tactic. The critique demolishes the pessimistic premiss, but by implication accepts the validity of the inference. In fact there may be conditions under which retreat demands boycott. It is only by connecting the conditions of participation with the character of the institutions that one gets the correct conclusion.

- In putting forward a policy of boycott you must also put forward an alternative form of action to participation. The article doesn't do this forcefully or clearly enough. There is room for the implementation of the movement's policies and we must fight for this, and we must show what can be achieved.

- We must show the space for going and working amongst the people, explaining why the boycott is correct. The people have recognised that the Tricameral Parliament is a failure and can deliver nothing. If it could deliver and had delivered we would be having to reassess the question of participation.

- The critique has raised important issues and made some good points. But it needs to be developed further

The legitimacy question, which is central, has not been developed, and the concrete application of the arguments to the October election is essential and urgent - that is what the debate about participation means at this moment. These two themes need developing and

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connecting - the nature of the local authorities, their relation to central state power and the NSMS need highlighting.

Everyone arguing for participation is arguing for space. We must demonstrate that no space can be gained that way, that on the contrary it leads into a cul-de-sac.

On another occasion, thought is needed on the question of how we determine what are the conditions under which we would have to participate.

The NDM and others are arguing from the position of participants. They say that their investigations have shown that if the ANC moves and gives the word, sympathetic forces could take control of the local government structures in all the main urban centres and run the system.

- On the theoretical question, one can demonstrate by comparative studies and analysis - for example in the case of Italy - that without central state power one cannot, by controlling subordinate structures, deliver what the people want.

- The discussion shows the need for ongoing interventions and a whole series of articles and papers, from critique of incorrect positions to statements of correct positions and analysis.

- The paper raises a number of important issues, but the problem is that some of these questions, including the general questions about the conditions for effective participation and the limits on what is achievable short of control of central state power, cannot, should not now be addressed as they would be a diversion. The central point to be made now is the point about illegitimacy

- A parallel need at the present is to document and expose the crisis in which the regime is trapped. It has been forced on to the terrain of elections because it has failed to secure legitimacy for its dummy institutions or even to get them securely established. It needs elections too to try to secure legitimacy in the face of international pressures. It faces economic problems, the upgrading programme being managed by the NSMS is in trouble,

- Any move to participation now would undermine the shift in the United States towards the possibility of a better position on South Africa; it would undermine the move of the church towards civil disobedience; it would demobilise the masses more.

An intervention in the debate about participation

From the middle of 1987 certain voices have been raised advocating participation in the political structures of the regime, particularly community councils and the segregated tri-cameral parliament. While support for this position is not new, and has been canvassed by bantustan leaders and certain groupings within Coloured and Indian political parties, what is new is that this line of argument no longer comes only from the right but from a number of writers on the left. This position has been advanced with different degrees of tentativeness by Swilling, Lodge and Sarakinsky, writing in WIP and by Friedman, writing in the Weekly Mail and in Transformation. We would like to respond to these interventions and the general spirit which they represent of "new realism" with its stress on accommodating and attempting to transform apartheid institutions.

The argument emerges from a certain characterisation of the present conjuncture. According to this analysis the present period is one of retreat for the mass democratic movement. In the face of the repression of the regime there is a danger of wiping out the gains made in the period of intense mass resistance (1983-86). According to Friedman, Swilling, Sarakinsky and Lodge this new period requires a new strategy. All four criticise the boycott of the regime's political structures on the grounds that this is a tactic that has mistakenly been elevated to the status of a strategy obliterating an area for manoeuvre.

Friedman uses his interpretation of the history of the development of the black trade union movement to argue by analogy that the rest of the mass democratic movement must use the structures the regime concedes, however limited, in order to secure advantages for the masses and transform those structures. Sarakinsky has a somewhat similar formulation arguing that "national and community based organisations" can only negotiate with the regime from a position of strength if they have made a "strategic intervention in state structures". He considers that if these organisations attempt to negotiate with the regime "without an institutionalised or any other power base" they would be negotiating on the state's terrain. In this version of the argument the participation in the political structures of the regime enables the mass democratic movement both to transform those structures into instruments of empowerment rather than repression and co-option, and to force concessions from the regime. Lodge is the most tentative of all four advocates of this position. He calls, simply, for the issue to be opened up for discussion. But having detected very little viability in alternative strategies, his call for opening up the debate on election participation, in effect, carries considerable weight. Because his characterisation of the gains of 1983-6 stress psychological advances and a culture of resistance being created he stresses the advantages of participation being the platform it would provide for the mass democratic movement and the "legal shelter" this would entail. He considers debate around this issue helpful as a contribution to dispassionate analysis because it will move the mass democratic movement away from positions which

he terms "moral and emotive".

In rebutting these arguments we locate three major areas of weakness in the advocacy of participation: firstly, the writers' conception of the current conjuncture; secondly, their notion of the space available for transformation through participation; and thirdly the question of the tactical advantages to be gained from such a major shift.

1. A different characterisation of the conjuncture

The characterisation of the present conjuncture as an extremely bleak moment for the forces of liberation used by all four writers with the partial exception of Friedman is at best one-sided and does not bear careful analysis. Although the forces of liberation are under attack and have suffered some dislocation they still retain the strategic initiative. It is the regime rather than the revolutionary forces that is in crisis. Alone among the four Friedman does concede the regime's current strategic dislocation, the ad hoc and often contradictory character of its initiatives, and the significant structural constraints upon it.

The regime is unable for a variety of political and economic reasons we will discuss below to extinguish the mass democratic movement or the ANC's political and military units underground. In addition it remains unable to carry through successfully any one of the strategies of restructuring it had intended on the basis of a successful repression of opposition. Strategies like bantustan independence, the tri-cameral parliament, community councils, the national council, the creation of a black middle class, have all had their supporters, but in implementation have opened up fields of struggle in which forces of resistance have been mobilised. Despite the brutality of the states of emergency, the widescale detentions, and the size of the co-optive carrots offered after the big stick a revolutionary climate persists. Organisations continue to grow and to mobilise in opposition to the regime. Existing components of the mass democratic movement are building up their membership and new organisations are emerging, particularly in rural and bantustan areas. New sites of struggle are emerging within religious organisations and professional bodies, where the forces of opposition are articulate and coherent. The armed struggle continues at a higher level than previously with no indication of a lessening of mass support for this strategy.

The regime has been unable to implement a "solution" based on wholesale repression, the so-called "Chile option", for a number of reasons. Firstly these have to do with the structure of the economy and the recognition by both the domestic and foreign-owned corporate sector that the strength of the forces of resistance make an internationally acceptable reformist "solution" imperative. Secondly there is the politically weak base of the regime with white consensus a thing of the past, and the need for constant balancing acts. Thirdly there is the failure of the attempts to co-opt the black middle strata, a

policy which began in the mid-1970s and which has still not succeeded - in part because of the paltry benefits offered and in part because of the successful mobilisation of significant sectors of this class by the UDF. Fourthly there is the extent of international pressure for reform, rather than repression, from important allies like the USA, the UK and Western Europe, who recognise the extent of resistance, in striking contrast to the very different international signals given to Pinochet. Finally there is the economic impasse in which the regime finds itself, the low growth rate and the difficulties it has encountered in financing its reformism, difficulties that would be further compounded and not "solved" by massive economic dislocation that would be tantamount to a new form of repression on the scale of that of the 1970s.

The wide range of constraints on the regime are not sufficiently acknowledged by any of the writers with the exception of Friedman. Lodge suggests that the gains of the 1983-6 period were made because of the regime's weakness, which is somehow transmuted into strength after 1986. The regime's weakness is structural and long-term and has persisted since 1986. Moreover the gains made in 1983 were not only because of the weakness of the regime but because of a growing organisational strength and coherence of the liberatory forces that had developed over nearly a decade, the escalation of the armed struggle, the changed regional situation. In addition international factors like the world recession, the rise in the gold price and the emergence of a new "cold war" between the USA and the USSR increased the pressures on the Botha regime to come into the fold of the western bloc with an acceptable dismantling of certain features of apartheid.

Opponents of this analysis of the present conjuncture often point to specific examples where the regime has, seemingly, been successful in extinguishing mass struggle, like Alexandra or Crossroads. It is certainly true that the regime has successfully disrupted mass organisations and introduced some "up-grading" in a number of places. But its relative successes have most often been in high-profile specifically targetted townships. The regime does not have the resources to carry through broad up-grading countrywide that has any chance of gaining substantial support. It is doubtful whether the regime's successes amount to little more than containment which still leaves it without long-term structures of support. Its attempt at fundamental structural change through the tri-cameral parliament remains a signal failure with the majority of Coloureds and Indians, despite the material gains they might have secured.

2. What is the space available for transformation through participation?

In the first place we must be careful to avoid a confusion that is common to many of these writers. There is often a tendency to confuse exploitation of space that is opened up by restructuring

initiated by the regime and actual participation within the new structures. Exploitation of space opened up for progressive forces may, or may not involve actual participation. The UDF, for instance, represented a very skilful and imaginative exploitation of the space opened up in the 1983-4 period, but this exploitation took the form of rejecting participation.

While we do not reject the possibility that participation can transform certain spaces that exist on the political terrain, the nature of the space available for transformation at the present moment must be examined carefully. Lodge points to the history of the Labour Party using political institutions it is opposed to to advocate a policy of change. Not only is the history of this, in the case of the Labour Party, unhappy, as he suggests, it is also a demonstration of how the institutions in which the Labour Party participated, particularly the tri-cameral parliament forced a change in the Labour Party, rather than in the institutions. The Labour Party has compromised and left behind the anti-apartheid stance it adopted in the late 1970s. The apartheid laws it is committed to changing through its participation in the House of Representatives hinge around the Group Areas Act, residential, social and educational segregation. Given the extensive repression, exploitation, and denial of political and civil rights which are the hallmark of apartheid this very narrow policy objective of the Labour Party can hardly be termed a policy for change. The Labour Party, partly through its participation in the tri-cameral parliament, has come to represent the narrow material interests of a section of the middle class and not any broader anti-apartheid constituency. It has been encouraged to retreat, not advance through participation.

In Friedman's argument the space available for transformation is similar to that used successfully by the trade unions. But there is a fundamental difference between the relationship of unions to bosses that was transformed by the utilisation of this "space", and the relationships of government entailed in participation in community councils or the tri-cameral parliament. While a union can represent the demands of the workers to bosses it need not be implicated in the management of the company and the exploitation of its own members. Progressive trade unions, in principle, do not collaborate with bosses in the management of the company, although the bosses constantly endeavour to tempt unions into this role, as is currently happening with the share offer schemes and the SAMCOR community trust. However, were the UDF to participate in community councils, it would not simply represent the views of the masses in this forum, it would also be implicated in the setting of rents, the allocation of housing, the actions of township police; it would be implicated in the very repression and racism it is dedicated to opposing.

It may be argued that the rationale for participation in these structures is to sabotage them, as the Labour Party claims it did in the CRC in the late 1970s. However, as the history of the uprisings from 1983 and the rent boycott show, there are other ways to sabotage these structures that do not lay the mass

democratic movement open to charges of selling out, or selectively sabotaging the system, as was said of the Labour Party, when executive members of the CRC accepted the perks of office, like motor cars and salaries, while claiming they were destroying the system.

Lodge believes that participation provides a space that itself provides a platform to advance the cause of the forces of liberation. This may be the case if the structures in which the mass democratic movement participated had some legitimacy, or if this legitimacy was still a matter of dispute. But the political structures of the regime have had no mass legitimacy since the late 1940s. There has been a long history, nearly 40 years, of non-participation and bitter struggles were waged in Pondoland and what was to be Lebowa when participation in bantustan structures was enforced. The ANC, once it became a mass-based movement through the defiance campaign explicitly refused to participate in the Native Representative Council or the other limited platforms that were available for participation. Given this long history of challenge to the legitimacy of the spaces that are available participation would be a backward step for the liberatory forces. While it might provide a platform for leadership, that platform would itself lead to their rejection by the masses.

In the view of all four writers the rejection of participation is a "kneejerk" boycott, an emotive position arrived at without reflection or analysis. In fact this is a position that is deeply rooted in the history and nature of black opposition to apartheid. Because the space available offers no real political gains to the masses, they have rejected them. This rejection is rational, based on a correct assessment of the political realities, and not blind acceptance of a hollow moral position.

This "emotive" characterisation of the position on participation also represents a cynical condemnation of the principle of non-racialism that informs the opposition to participation. Non-racialism is a principle that has been secured through intense struggles, and is an enormous victory in the face of the racism that infects every aspect of apartheid society. The strategy of non-participation must be measured in terms of this principle, which is not an abstract, but one of the goals for which we are struggling and a weapon of unity in that struggle.

The mass democratic movement must continue to lead the rejection of participation and not fall behind it or confuse it for a "platform". The forces of resistance do not lack a platform at present, despite controls on the press. The culture of liberation is deeply entrenched, and this culture is given organisational form in a myriad of anti-apartheid organisations and associations which the regime has not, and we believe cannot, destroy.

3. What are the tactical advantages of participation?

We have argued so far that neither the present conjuncture nor the nature of the political institutions in which the liberatory

forces would have to participate warrant the conclusion that this new strategy should be adopted. However, even were we to consider that a new strategy was appropriate, what are the tactical advantages this would bring?

Given the dislocation that is currently being experienced by the mass democratic movement, with so many leaders in detention, and so many organisations struggling to survive in difficult semi-underground conditions, could a major about-turn in policy realistically be debated and democratically adopted? No. Rather such debate would increase the confusion and dislocation. The major challenge for the mass democratic movement at the moment is to deepen the unity between its different constituencies and improve the operation of its structures. A tactical participation in the tri-cameral parliament, the national council, or community councils would divert attention away from these objectives and indeed make them unachievable. The regime, ever anxious to exploit divisions among the liberatory forces, would seek to destabilise the mass democratic movement even further on the basis of phony interventions in this debate. It is the regime that would benefit from the divisions that would open up on this question.

Other dangers could flow from this tactic. Participation always brings the possibility of reformist solutions being forced on a revolutionary organisation. This tendency might be exacerbated through participation in the present repressive period as the leaders "inside" the regime's institutions are cut off from their base in the mass democratic movement and the popular structures that constitute that movement are continually subject to destabilisation.

It is sometimes argued that the ANC has supported the tactic of participation in apartheid political structures and should do so again. However that participation in parliament and provincial councils took place in the 1940s, when the ANC lacked extensive mass support and needed a platform. The current situation, where the ANC enjoys mass support countrywide, is very different. In addition the regime to day is far more repressive than that of the 1940s and the tasks entailed in participation much more closely enmeshed in that repression.

At present the tactic of negotiation is being widely discussed. In some analyses the tactic of participation has been conflated with the tactic of negotiation, although quite separate processes are entailed. For example in the Eastern Cape after the consumer boycott community-based organisations entered into negotiations with chambers of commerce. The jmc's sabotaged this negotiation and put participation in its place. Despite this Sarakinsky sees participation as a necessary component of negotiation. But while negotiation is a tactic that can be chosen at an appropriate moment, to engage in participation now, which is not an appropriate moment, will not assist in the struggle to press the regime to the utmost so that negotiations take place at a moment of maximum advantage for the oppressed. It will indeed concede to the regime everything its reformist strategy has

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failed to achieved without any substantial tactical advantage for the opposition and without any of the objectives of liberation having been won.

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THE STRUGGLE WITHIN THE STRUGGLE: South African resistance strategies

Steven Friedman

The past few years have seen dramatic and unprecedented resistance to the South African government's apartheid policies by predominantly black opposition groups. But, while the scale of resistance is not in doubt, the nature of the challenge which it poses to white rule is the subject of heated debate. Some see it as a new and unprecedented threat to the apartheid order. Others see it merely as a repetition, albeit more dramatic, of earlier conflicts in which resistance grew sharply and then abated in the face of repression.

The present turmoil is, however, both a repetition of the old and yet something entirely new. The difference between this and previous waves of resistance lies less in its scale than in the nature of the tactics adopted by resistance groups. But the adoption of new modes of pursuing change is by no means uniform. Many tactics and strategies which appear new are merely more dramatic attempts to revive an earlier resistance tradition. The two approaches, the old and the new, exist side by side, often within the same organisations. At times they are complementary, but often they are in conflict. Where a battle between them rages, it could determine the immediate fate of internal anti-apartheid resistance.

MOBILISATION OR ORGANISATION: PROTEST OR POWER

The present wave of resistance is not, of course, the first to confront either white rule or the present National Party government. Previous waves were either crushed or ran out of steam. That the present one is more dramatic than its predecessors does not necessarily guarantee it any greater success. A resistance movement which repeats the weaknesses of earlier ones on a larger scale is unlikely to meet a different fate from them. The test of the present turmoil is not so much its scale but rather whether it has enabled resistance groups to build a more effective power base from which to challenge white rule.

Before the early 1980s black resistance relied on mobilisation rather than organisation, on rallying protest rather than wielding power. Successful resistance movements were often able to mobilise large numbers of people around specific issues or behind charismatic leaders but they did not weld this following into an organised and disciplined movement which could press for change. Numbers are no automatic guarantee of strength and

these movements were crushed when the government acted against their relatively small group of leaders. The failure to yield gains reinforced their followers' perception of their own powerlessness and their demise was followed by periods of relative quiescence.

A new approach began to emerge in the mid-1970s with the growth of the trade union movement, whose strategy was based on building tight grassroots and democratic organisation. It assumed that the collective strength of its members was a more effective guarantee of power than a charismatic leadership. The number of members a union had was less important than the degree of muscle they could wield and the unions eschewed mass mobilisation and high-profile campaigns in order to build a disciplined power base which could withstand repression and back demands for change with organised strength.

A key element in this strategy was the view that organisation was likely to endure only if it could be shown to deliver real gains to the powerless. The winning of short-term concessions which fell short of workers' ultimate demands was seen not as an unacceptable compromise but as a source of power since it enabled union members to experience the benefits of collective action and thus to develop confidence and skills which would enable them to fight more ambitious battles. Since these gains could be won only through negotiation, bargaining became a key weapon in the unions' attempt to wield collective power.

In the early 1980s, a renaissance among opposition groups prompted the formation of a host of grassroots civic, youth and student organisations. In 1983 these coalesced into two national movements, the United Democratic Front and the National Forum Committee. Many of these organisations were initially little more than small groups of activists and many favoured random mobilisation rather than patient organisation. But, as the new grassroots organisations began to take root in the townships many activists too began to seek ways of building an enduring power base through organisation around immediate, attainable goals.

It is this change, rather than the scale of township violence or the attendance of masses of residents at funerals, which differentiates the present wave of resistance from its predecessors. The key test is: has the ferment prompted more effective organisation among resistance groups?

AN OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESISTANCE TRENDS

Several features distinguish the current turmoil from previous waves of post-war resistance. It has, firstly, been marked by much higher levels of violence and counter-violence. The township 'comrades', chiefly the unemployed youth, have sought to neutralise state control of the townships by

attacking, and in some cases killing, local councillors and police who are seen to be enforcing apartheid on the state's behalf. This violence has not been restricted to these 'collaborators'. Activists have used it against other township residents to mobilise them by coercion as well as to secure the dominance of particular organisations and the past two years have been marked by violent clashes between members of rival anti-apartheid groups. The security forces responded by occupying the townships and violently attempting to crush resistance, while conservative black 'vigilantes' have been mobilised to attack activists.

The past two years have also seen unprecedented levels of mobilisation, as evidenced by large crowds at 'political' funerals and by repeated work boycotts by township residents which have been far more widely supported than their predecessors. Mass resistance tactics which were attempted with limited success in previous waves of unrest, such as consumer and school boycotts, have been revived and implemented far more effectively than in the past. In a growing number of townships, rent boycotts have emerged as a new and powerful weapon of resistance.

A further difference from the last wave of resistance - the pupil unrest of 1976 - has been the overt identification by activists with the banned African National Congress and in some cases with the Communist Party. This has given a powerful symbolic focus to the resistance and has been seen as a sign of growing black militancy. The ANC's symbolic influence on resistance politics is illustrated by the fact that even Inkatha, which has been locked in a bitter battle with the present ANC leadership, refuses to negotiate with the government until Nelson Mandela is released. A recently formed alliance of black town councillors - the United Municipalities of South Africa - has taken a similar stance. This has highlighted the ANC's indispensability to any national political settlement and heightened pressure for its unbanning.

However the violence has remained largely restricted to the townships and has not directly threatened white rule - virtually all its victims have been black. It has often done as much to dislocate black communities as to threaten the authorities. The inter-organisational violence has impaired organisation and the emergence of right-wing vigilante groups has shown that the violence of the marginalised can be used to impose state control as well as to erode it. Some townships were rendered 'ungovernable' but recent evidence suggests that 'ungovernability' has been largely 'rolled back' during the current state of emergency. The 1986 emergency has demonstrated again that the South African government is still able to contain any attempt to overthrow it by force.

The emergency has also highlighted the vulnerability of mass mobilisa-

tion. Severe clamps on funerals and other mass meetings have succeeded in closing this avenue off to activists, while attempts to call stay-aways in recent months have received only limited support. The consumer boycotts have collapsed in the wake of the emergency. Pupil militancy appears to have continued but here, too, mobilisation seems to have waned. Only the rent boycott appears to have proved relatively immune to repression, partly because township residents often simply do not have the money to pay their rent arrears.

Equally importantly, these tactics too cannot of themselves produce change; at most they can create a climate in which it is more likely. Short-term mobilisation is likely to pose an enduring threat to white rule only if it creates a space in which long-term organisation can emerge. Boycotts, stay-aways and similar actions are often the products of organisation, but many have been imposed by small groups of activists without thoroughly consulting their constituents. Besides prompting a backlash by some sections of black society - as evidenced by the emergence of the vigilantes - this makes them far more vulnerable in the face of tough security action.

Identification with the ANC is an equally ambiguous phenomenon. While the banned movement's symbolic appeal is clearly immense, it is not matched by a corresponding degree of internal organisation. - ANC leaders themselves acknowledge that they are not in control of many of the activists who invoke its name. Purely symbolic support for an organisation which does not operate effectively within the country can, and has been, a recipe for passivity as well as militancy by prompting powerless communities to rely on the banned movement rather than their own efforts to achieve change. Indeed, in some areas, resistance politicians have invoked these symbols against groups who have sought to organise independently for change. In this sense the symbolic strength of the exile movement has often weakened attempts to build grassroots power within the country.

The present unrest has, however, also led to a less dramatic, but perhaps more significant, increase in organisation. In scores of townships, civic and youth organisations have established roots in their communities and begun to build a more lasting power base. In the Eastern Cape and parts of the Transvaal, activists have formed street and area committees which, consciously or unconsciously, imitate the shop steward structures which the unions have built in the factories. In several cases, these local structures have attempted to turn 'ungovernability' into a more enduring source of power by taking over key township functions which were once administered by the state such as refuse removal, the development of parks and, in some cases, crime prevention. 'People's courts' attempted to take over the

administration of justice and, responding to the school boycotts, 'people's education' emerged - an attempt to channel often unfocused pupil militancy into an enduring attempt to build an alternative education system.

An equally significant development has been the attempt to use local negotiation as a source of community power. This is particularly significant since a rejection of negotiation has been a key element in recent resistance tradition. In the earlier stages of the unrest, prominent activists had rejected negotiation and insisted on an immediate transfer of power to the majority - a demand which was clearly unattainable. However, in the militant Eastern Cape, activists increasingly turned to negotiation with local business leaders or government officials in an attempt to win lasting gains out of the consumer boycotts or the ungovernability of the townships. An oft-cited example is the small East Cape town of Port Alfred, whose civic association acquired effective control over township education and development through negotiation with local business and the authorities. The past year also saw a significant attempt to negotiate at national level - the National Education Crisis Committee's contact with the Department of Education and Training. Because the NECC represented a wide range of militant opposition groups, this attempt to make limited gains through negotiation backed by organisation represented a significant departure from traditional resistance strategies.

These trends were limited to a few areas and were often ambiguous. While some street committees appear to have enjoyed the support of residents, others seemed to have been imposed on them. While some 'people's courts' seemed to enjoy a high degree of legitimacy among residents, others were allegedly used to impose the will of small groups of unelected activists. The attempts at negotiation were limited by resistance by some activists and, in many cases, by the authorities' refusal to talk. In the absence of free political activity in the townships, there were also distinct limits to the ability of negotiators to seek a mandate from their constituents and this meant that negotiation was not necessarily backed by grassroots organisation. The NECC's negotiations with the government were hampered both by its inability to effectively control pupil action - an indication of the extent to which key opposition groups were unable to control random militancy - and the government's own retreat from negotiation which intensified after the 1986 emergency. But these embryonic attempts are nevertheless significant, for all indicated a qualitative increase in organised resistance rather than sporadic mobilisation.

It is significant that these developments occurred locally rather than nationally, accurately reflecting the present state of resistance and black organisation. While there has undoubtedly been a qualitative increase in

organisation, this has not yet translated into the building of an effective national power base.

THE KEY ORGANISATIONS - STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The movement which is often seen as the dominant force in resistance politics - and which has been the prime victim of arbitrary security action - is the United Democratic Front which owes its influence to two factors. Firstly, it is seen by both its supporters and opponents as the heir to the ANC tradition which, as we have noted, has a powerful symbolic appeal. It has successfully used the media and the symbols of the Congress tradition to project itself as the standard bearer of the nationalist movement and this has given it substantial domestic and international influence.

Secondly, while many of its national leadership have sought to perpetuate the high-profile protest politics of the earlier Congress tradition, it has also built an extensive network of civic, student and youth organisations which have usually been at the forefront of militant township resistance. Besides its support in key urban areas, it put down organised roots in many small towns which were politically dormant for decades. It is the dominant organisation in the Eastern Cape and some parts of the Transvaal and has scores of affiliates in the other provinces as well.

However, the UDF's organisation is often far weaker than it seems. Its national leadership is often not in control of events on the ground. Despite gains over the past three years, it is a long way from becoming a disciplined and organised national movement which could pose a direct threat to white rule. The current emergency has severely limited the UDF's ability to mobilise township residents and has also severely hampered its grassroots organisation. In most of Natal it is hardly a presence at all and in the Western Cape it vies for supremacy with several rivals. Its grassroots organisation is also often uneven. In some areas, its affiliates are well-organised and have deep roots in the townships - in others they are still little more than handfuls of activists.

The UDF's reliance on mobilisation and protest often conflicts with organisational requirements, and resources which could be devoted to organisation have been dissipated in attempts to mobilise dramatic local and regional campaigns. In some areas this has sapped the resources of its grassroots affiliates - they have been diverted into high-profile protest action which has prevented them from building organised strength. In others the tactics of some militant youth in UDF affiliates, relying on force rather than organisation to mobilise protest, have sparked violent reaction from vigilantes which have resulted in severe setbacks. Crossroads is the

most dramatic, but by no means the only, example.

A second strain in resistance politics is represented by the National Forum Committee. It is an alliance between two groupings who reject the tradition to which the UDF is heir: the black consciousness movement which was particularly influential in the 1970s and left-wing Western Cape groups who stress a rigid policy of non-collaboration. The two are united in their opposition to the ANC's Freedom Charter and both adopt a rigid stance of 'non-collaboration' which includes a rejection of tactical alliances with liberals and of negotiation as a strategy for change.

The NF has pockets of organised support in the Western Cape, the Northern Transvaal and some other areas. However, both black consciousness and the 'non-collaboration' tradition have always relied far more on the support of small groups of intellectuals than on a mass following. While they have been sharply critical of some UDF strategies, arguing that they substitute mobilisation for organisation and seek to create a euphoria which over-estimates the ability of unorganised resistance to produce change, they have proved far less adept at translating theory into practice by building their own organised base. The NF is thus organisationally the weakest of the national groupings.

However, the NF does have an influence in resistance politics which exceeds its numerical support. Individual supporters hold key positions in trade unions, churches, educational and sports bodies and are able to exert influence over their direction. Because the NF's Western Cape affiliates, in particular, have an ideological coherence which the UDF lacks, they are sometimes able to influence the agenda of resistance movements even if they have little organised support. In the Western Cape, for example, the 'non-collaborationist' tradition is particularly deep-rooted. Many activists received their political education from its adherents and they have retained at least some allegiance to it even where they have gone on to ally themselves with groups such as the UDF. Some NF activists suggest that they don't need an organised base since many of their ideas, such as their rejection of a national convention, have been adopted by their rivals. This claim, while overstated, is not entirely inaccurate.

Both the UDF and NF are, of course, hostile to the third movement which lays claim to an organised national base, Inkatha. Hostility between Inkatha and both the UDF and the present ANC leadership has been particularly intense, spilling over into violence which has claimed scores of lives. Inkatha is particularly critical of 'protest politics' and of mass mobilisation without an organised base. It insists that blacks do not have the muscle to overthrow the government and argues that only patient organisation can produce change. It also stresses the virtues of negotiation and

has devoted much of its resources to attempts to wean whites away from apartheid. This, it argues, is more likely to erode white supremacy than confrontation.

Superficially there seem to be marked similarities between its approach and that which the unions developed - but they are illusory. The key difference is that, despite its rhetoric, Inkatha has not attempted to use the organised power of its members to press for change. While it endorses non-violent action such as strikes and consumer boycotts, it has rarely attempted to organise them and when it has, it has had very limited success. Inkatha's claim to command an organised mass following is therefore, at most, unproven and there is little evidence to suggest that it would be able to wield effective grassroots power should it choose to do so. Indeed, its strategy seems to rely on negotiation as a substitute for organised resistance rather than as a complement to it.

As the unrest has grown, Inkatha has sought to project itself to key white interest groups as the most effective vehicle of moderate black opinion; as the only group which is willing and able to protect free enterprise and liberal democratic values. Inkatha thereby hopes to erode apartheid by forming alliances with key sectors of white society such as business and some opposition parties which can then formulate non-racial alternatives to both apartheid and socialism and win increasing white acceptance for these alternatives. This approach is, of course, presently typified by its attempt to negotiate a regional multi-racial legislative alternative to apartheid in Natal. Inkatha would be almost certain to dominate this structure, which would give it a significantly enhanced power base and might also create momentum for similar experiments elsewhere.

Two factors, however, limit the likely success of this strategy. The first is the fact that Inkatha, despite its claims to a national base, does not have significant influence outside Natal. There are also severe doubts about Inkatha's claims to command an organised 'moderate' constituency even in its Natal stronghold. While its national leaders project themselves as sophisticated and articulate spokesmen for a conservative brand of liberalism, its local leadership have a different agenda. At the grassroots, its Natal structures are controlled by local councillors and small traders who seek to use it as a vehicle to impose control and to protect their fiefdoms by dispensing patronage. They have increasingly sought to entrench their position through violence and Inkatha may well have no more control over their actions than the UDF has over the 'comrades'. Authority imposed in this way has as much potential to generate continued conflict as to ensure stability and this may well limit Inkatha's ability to deliver on its

promise to ensure orderly change. In its attempt to project itself as a moderate alternative, Inkatha has also expended much effort in quelling militant action. Particularly in times of heightened resistance activity, this impairs its credibility by enabling its opponents to brand it as an ally of the status quo.

One other movement clearly has a claim to an organised national base - the trade unions. In the early 1980s they were clearly the best organised and most effective opposition movement, which repeatedly showed an ability to win gains through organisation which far exceeded that of any of the political movements. They have also had an impact on community resistance as organised workers have attempted to inject the strategies and principles of grassroots organisation into township politics. Their organised base and workplace bargaining rights make them far more resilient than most of the political movements, a point which has been demonstrated in the present state of emergency. Although union activity has been severely hampered, they have continued to act in the workplace and wield influence.

However, the union movement's ability to determine the direction of resistance politics is severely limited by several factors. Firstly, unions are not in themselves appropriate bodies to lead a fight for political change. Their structures are anchored in the workplace and cannot simply be expanded into the wider community. Since they bring together workers with a variety of political allegiances, united only in a common desire for workplace rights, they lack the ideological coherence which a political party requires. Unions can influence the direction of political resistance, but cannot lead it.

Since the present turmoil began, union ability to exert an independent influence on resistance has also been limited. In a period of heightened mobilisation, their key strength - the insistence on acting only with a mandate from members - has also proved a weakness since it has forced them to react to events more slowly than the activist groups. Nor is there much scope for the democratic consultation on which mandate politics relies in townships whose residents have been denied the right to meet openly.

Union stress on mandate and negotiation implies a very different style to that which dominated previous resistance. This new style is of relatively recent vintage - most union members have been organised for a few years at most - and it has not had sufficient time to generate a political culture which could effectively challenge, or remould, the resistance tradition with its powerful symbolic appeal. Unions thus find themselves under considerable pressure to aid political mobilisation rather than organisation and to surrender their control over political action to nationalist movements which command the symbols of resistance. Organised workers

who attempt to maintain the style which the unions have evolved are vulnerable to charges that they are 'betraying the struggle'. It seems that some members are reluctant to criticise the strategies of community activists because, as one COSATU unionist suggested to me, 'they say you are against Mandela and nobody wants to be accused of that'. Where unions have attempted to maintain an independent stance, they have often been outflanked by community groups. They have either lost influence or been forced to move closer to the traditional mobilisation style of resistance.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the development of COSATU, the largest union federation, whose national leadership has moved increasingly closer to the UDF and to mobilisation politics. This initially led to a decline in both democratic practices and organisational effectiveness within COSATU, although there are now signs of a reversal of this trend. It also played some role in prompting the formation of two rival groupings, allied to Inkatha and the black consciousness movement.

The unions' influence - and that of the style which they pioneered - has certainly not been eclipsed. In COSATU, as in the UDF, there is still substantial support for grassroots organisation and for the strategies which this implies. Tensions between the two approaches are likely to persist and the outcome may well be a style which falls somewhere between the two. However, there is little prospect that the union movement will emerge as the dominant focus of national resistance.

What of the exiled ANC? The powerful symbolic support for the ANC tradition, besides exerting influence over the direction of resistance politics, also rules out the prospect of a political settlement which excludes the banned movement. However, this symbolic support is not matched by internal organisation. Nor does the ANC's guerilla war pose a threat to state power and, for a variety of reasons which lie outside the scope of this paper, it is unlikely to do so. Symbolic support is no guarantee of power since symbols can be appropriated by a variety of actors - Inkatha regularly invokes the ANC tradition, despite its hostility to its current leadership. The ANC is no better able to force change than any of the internal groups - indeed, it is less able to do so, a reality which its leadership has acknowledged by increasingly stressing the primacy of internal resistance.

Thus, although all of the national movements have an influence on resistance politics, attempts to dismiss particular groups as 'irrelevant' or to identify a single one as the sole, or even the dominant, vehicle of black aspirations, are misleading. For internal resistance has not yet reached the stage where any of the movements are able to offer an organised national challenge to apartheid despite the ferment of the past two years.

THE IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS FOR ORGANISED RESISTANCE

The climate for organised resistance appears to be extremely hostile at present. The present state of emergency has weakened organisation and the authorities have used it to 'roll back' some of the gains which resistance made before it was declared. Forced removals in areas such as Brits and Ultenhage which were successfully resisted before the emergency are now again threatened or have already been implemented; the authorities now seem determined to use force rather than concessions to reimpose control over black schools; and the emergency has also snuffed out most attempts at local negotiation. Shortly before the emergency, the government appeared to be moving closer to an acceptance of local negotiation. Only days before it was declared, a senior official travelled to the Eastern Cape and offered to negotiate an ambitious township upgrading scheme with key UDF activists. The state now appears to have decided that negotiation can only take place on its terms and after grassroots organisation has been severely weakened. In many areas, particularly in smaller towns where organisation had begun to flourish, severe repression does appear to have succeeded in crippling resistance.

The present climate is not conducive to structured organisation for it has sharply limited the scope for open and democratic activity. Organisation needs space within which to operate - the trade unions' experience indicates that the freedom to hold meetings and to consult members is a crucial precondition for democratic organisation. The current state of emergency has therefore strengthened the hand of activists who favour random militancy at the expense of those who advocate strategic, organised and democratic resistance.

However, while the emergency has weakened resistance, it has not eliminated it. The education crisis and rent boycotts persist. Even if the authorities did smash resistance now, several structural factors suggest that it would re-emerge relatively quickly. A key motor to the present turmoil has been economic decline and the resultant pressure on black living standards. This prompted the rent protests which sparked the unrest and continues to fuel the current rent boycotts. It also created the 'comrades', unemployed youth whose militancy has fuelled the turmoil. There is no sign that the economy, within the constraints of present government policy, is capable of a broad recovery which would eliminate this source of unrest. The implications for future stability are particularly awesome if we consider that tens of thousands of politicised youth have now opted out of the school system and that there is no prospect of their being absorbed into the economy. The problem is compounded by the economy's increasing reliance on black manpower and on the failure of influx control to keep the

black poor out of the cities. It is becoming increasingly difficult to solve the problem by banishing the poor and the jobless to remote rural areas and this will ensure that black poverty will increasingly manifest itself in the cities, where it is both more visible and more of a threat to stability.

This suggests that the present emergency will not succeed in smashing resistance organisation to be followed by a decade of quiescence as the 1960 emergency did. Repression can, at most, offer the authorities only a short term solution and they will be forced to make further concessions to black aspirations in an attempt to ensure urban stability. Despite the severity of the emergency, there is evidence that the government recognises that it will have to supplement repression with further concessions.

It is unlikely to be able to do this without creating new space for resistance. Despite its weaknesses, the mobilisation of the past year has had one major success. It has severely undermined the legitimacy of reforms imposed by the government. While the authorities can impede change by force, they can no longer initiate it on their terms alone. To name but one example, the proposed regional services councils are unlikely to achieve significant legitimacy, regardless of the state of organised resistance. This means that any attempt to achieve stability in urban areas is doomed unless it offers black communities greater control over their destiny and thus presents them with new opportunities to wield power, albeit in limited areas. Since stability cannot be achieved without change, these opportunities are almost certain to emerge.

There is also a strong likelihood that this resistance will be more organised. Just as the emergency has not smashed all resistance, it has also not smashed all organisation. The trade unions continue to operate in the factories; in some areas, there is also evidence that grassroots community organisation has survived, albeit in weakened form. Both are likely to survive the current wave of repression and grow once space is again created for them to operate.

The outcome is, however, by no means automatic. In communities which have been denied any experience of democracy, and whose powerlessness militates against attempts to secure change through collective organised muscle, the appeals of mobilisation politics and of charismatic but denagogic leadership remain strong. Despite the advances organisation has made, the mobilisation tradition remains strong, perhaps dominant - as witnessed by the partial capitulation of the union movement to more traditional forms of resistance. The temptations of substituting anger for power, militancy for strategic resistance, remain powerful.

But recent events have emphasised that mobilisation and confrontation

alone cannot secure change and that resistance can only mount an effective challenge to apartheid if it is organised and if it seeks to build a power base by making incremental gains. The trend towards negotiation in the period immediately prior to the emergency suggests that community activists are becoming increasingly aware of this and that, despite the enduring influence of protest politics, this strategy has by no means been eclipsed and that its influence may well have increased. It will, of course, only begin to take root when freer political activity gives it the necessary space to emerge. While the prospects are at present bleak, the growing structural pressure on apartheid may force the authorities to concede that space sooner rather than later, whatever their current intentions. If it does, the prospects of an effective challenge to exclusive white rule will depend on the extent to which resistance movements, and those who support change, use the opportunities presented to them to build democratic grassroots organisation within the country and to develop the strategies which could nurture it.

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THE COMING SOUTH AFRICAN GENERAL ELECTION AND THE FAR-RIGHT FACTOR

(Southern Africa Dossier, Centro de Estudos Africanos, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane - Maputo, Republica Popular de Mocambique)

The decision by P W Botha to call a general election for the white chamber of South Africa's racially segregated tri-cameral parliament on May 6 has focused attention on the white political scene in that country. At one level the election will be an irrelevance and an anachronism. It will be another occasion on which only the white minority will be consulted about the government of the country. Yet, it will take place at a time of near universal recognition that racist minority rule is doomed. Moreover, it is a foregone conclusion that Botha's Nationalist Party will emerge as election victor with a comfortable majority in parliament. At the same time, however, the election promises to provide important insights into secondary contradictions within the dominant classes. The election will undoubtedly reveal much about the present state of the relations between different social forces within the white community and also something about the strategy the Botha regime intends to follow in the face not only of the deepening crisis of the apartheid system and state in general, but also of the manifest failure of its own 'Total Strategy'. In particular, since Botha has chosen to define the election principally in terms of a contest between his regime and the far right, the election will bring into focus the question of the far right. It can be expected to reveal much of importance about the nature and strategy of the various organisations which occupy the extreme reactionary pole of white politics and also provide an important index of their strength, not only in electoral, but also in broader political, ideological and even military terms.

Botha's decision to go for an election at this time has, in fact, relatively little to do with substantial decisions about policy or strategy. When he originally hinted at the possibility of an election (during the Nationalist Party Federal Congress in August 1986), Botha tried to give the impression to the international community and domestic monopoly capital that a major objective would be to obtain a mandate for 'further constitutional development'. That facade has now been dropped and one of the certainties is that the Botha regime will not be going into the election seeking support from the white electorate for any substantial new 'reform' initiative.

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TOWARDS NEGOTIATION

DOUBLE EDITION: ISSUES 50 AND 51



Left: ANC president Oliver Tambo. Right: South African State President P.W. Botha. Will they meet across a negotiating table in the future?

The politics of negotiation

'Have hope brother, despair is for the defeated' - Oswald Mtshali

Dramatic new departures in white politics, pioneered by the Five Freedoms Forum and the newly-formed National Democratic Movement, point to political realignments concerned with negotiations over South Africa's future.

Recent statements by government and black political leaders have renewed the debate over negotiations. Cynics argue this is all for the sake of an international audience. They depict South Africa as spiralling into a black hole of aimless violence, where the mili-

Negotiations over South Africa's political future are not currently on the cards. But, according to MARK SWILLING, ways of creating a 'climate of negotiation' are being discussed in influential circles.

tarised state can only save itself by smashing black opposition movements. These are presented as weak, unrealistic, increasingly radical organisations

led by utopian leaders deluded by visions of armed seizure of power.

This view ignores the complexities of changing power relations within the state, capital and liberation movements. The central focus of these conflicts is how 'a climate of negotiation' can be created.

Recently the deputy minister of constitutional development and planning, Stoffel van der Merwe, suggested there was a need for talks between the United Democratic Front and government

representatives. Others in the state have put out feelers to the banned African National Congress. These developments confirm what senior officials in reformist circles have said off the record since the all-white May election.

These officials believe the state has painted itself into a corner. On the one hand government realises the severity of its crisis of legitimacy. The only solution to this involves a new constitutional dispensation, paving the way for full parliamentary representation in a 'united South Africa'. This was the central reformist idea in the National Party's election manifesto.

On the other hand, military strategists around PW Botha have taken a hard line on the extra-parliamentary opposition. They activated the national security management system (NSMS) with its 11 regional joint management centres (JMCs). This security apparatus also includes 60 sub-JMCs at sub-regional level and 350 mini-JMCs at local level.

This complex system of militarised rule effectively eliminates all channels for negotiation with opposition leaders and organisations enjoying popular legitimacy. A JMC strategy report leaked to the press in 1986 instructed local officials not to 'negotiate with revolutionary organisations'.

The national council has failed to attract even moderate support. The special cabinet committee on black affairs (appointed around January 1984) has been unable to produce workable solutions. Both these failures underline the dilemma which faces the state.

State reformers resurface

Recent government attempts to talk to the UDF, ANC, National Education Crisis Committee and several local civics, are the result of the re-emergence of a reformist position within the state which was effectively marginalised in April-May 1986. Until then, political initiative within the state was in the hands of an influential group of advanced reformers. They were found mainly in Heunis' department of constitutional development and planning, but also in manpower, finance, foreign affairs and the National Party itself.

This group pioneered key policy shifts: the inclusion of Africans in the regional services councils (RSCs); scrapping of pass laws; dropping of mixed marriages and political interference laws; and discussion of 'regional-federal' options, which are clearly present in proposals that the national council should be elected by constituencies defined in terms of the nine regional development boundaries. *See 80 p*

The Heunis empire emerged after the 1985 cabinet reshuffle that destroyed Piet Koornhof's department of co-operation and development. The department of constitutional development gained control of almost every aspect of black life. While constitutional planners pioneered domestic reforms, foreign affairs was exploring the possibility of national negotiations during the Commonwealth's Eminent Persons Group (EPG) mission.

But the reformists lost the initiative to the militarists in

early 1986. In April a rift appeared between the statements of PW Botha and Magnus Malan, and the calls of Heunis and his group. Botha and Malan spoke about 'city-states' and 'independence' for bantustans, and defended the detention/imprisonment of political leaders. The reformists were proceeding with the inclusion of black local authorities into RSCs, backpeddling on independence and undoing influx control. They supported negotiations between senior government officials and UDF leaders in places like Port Elizabeth, Oudtshoorn, Worcester, Cradock, Uitenhage, Port Alfred and St Wendolins (Pinetown).

Some sources say this rift was the result of a clash in the cabinet after PW Botha refused to accept criticisms from officials in Heunis' department.

The final break between reformers and militarists came after the state security council decided to bomb frontline state capitals to destroy the EPG initiative.

It is significant that PW Botha currently says the ANC's 'renunciation' of violence is a pre-condition for talks. Before the EPG mission collapsed government conceded that 'suspension' of violence would be sufficient. The EPG indicated the ANC would accept this. PW Botha and the generals suddenly realised the chips were down - they had to make a choice about negotiations.

The choice they made activated a sophisticated counter-revolutionary strategy. Its objectives were clearly expressed in a May 1986 speech by current law and order min-

ister, Adriaan Vlok: 'bomb the enemy in its bases'; 're-establish law and order', ie mass detentions; 'bring government down to the people', ie RSCs; 'redistribute resources from white areas to upgrade black areas'.

A national state of emergency followed, and the national security management system was activated at local and regional level. The security police, and sections of the military, promised the state security council that township protest, 'alternative structures' and ANC support could be eliminated by applying enough force in a relatively short space of time. This was the basis for sometime security policeman Craig Williamson's remark in a June 1986 BBC interview that the South American 'rugby stadium' option could work in South Africa.

This strategy aimed to restore the state's 'position of strength' and refute Zwelakhe Sisulu's March 1986 claim at an NECC conference that 'the state had lost the initiative to the people'.

The militarists in the NSMS argued that negotiations could only be considered if the state regained this 'position of strength'. Still reeling from the international and domestic consequences of the Rubicon I and Rubicon

II fiascos, it was not surprising that Botha found the alternative of armed procrastination attractive.

The rise of the 'securocrats'

The decision to abort the EPG mission and regain the initiative was taken largely by an inner power elite dominated by what Professor Willie Breytenbach calls the 'securocrats' - powerful security personnel who co-ordinate key state apparatuses. As Frederick van Zyl Slabbert said, they govern in an 'extra-parliamentary' manner and use parliament to both legalise and legitimise their actions.

The rise of the securocrats has led some observers to refer to current state strategy as the 'Brazilian Option'. Some key securocrats believe Brazil's militarily-managed 20-year reform programme (1964-1986) is a model of how to restructure political institutions without capitulating or losing power.

This 'option' is not purely coercive. In March 1986, Mike Hough of Pretoria University's Strategic Studies Institute, described state strategy far more clearly than his fellow political scientist, Stoffel van der Merwe, has been able to do. 'Reform and unrest are not totally contradictory situ-

ations', said Hough. 'Reform creates rising expectations and counteraction by those who do not want reform, but revolution. Hopefully the longer-term effects of credible and meaningful reform will lessen revolutionary and unrest potential, as will economic recovery. In the interim, the maintenance of law and order, within limits, is crucial. Reform alone will not cause the ANC to disappear'.



This was the logic Willie Breytenbach referred to when, with deep scepticism, he said that 'where once there could be no security without reform, now there can be no reform without security'.

Militarist strength, and marginalisation of the reformers depended on the success of the repressive component of the strategy.

Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok: 'Bomb the enemy in its bases... Re-establish law and order...'

But legal non-violent extra-parliamentary opposition survived and the state of emergency was re-declared. This indicated that repression had not been as effective and decisive as the securocrats had hoped. It critically weakened their overall strategic objective and opened the way for disagreements, divisions and even contradictions within the state and between state and capital.

Informed sources in both the private and public sectors claim that General Johan Coetzee was ousted as commissioner of police precisely because he pointed out the limitations of emergency rule. Coetzee, also a political scientist with a post-graduate degree on South African Trotskyism, is a more sophisticated political theorist than younger idealists like van der Merwe, Hough and the eager securocrats in the secretariat of the state security council. There is evidence to suggest Coetzee argued that the mounting costs of repression were unjustified given the low-level returns.

A key reason limiting the Brazilian option in South Africa is its failure to attract the support of monopoly capital. In Brazil the ideology of militarised reform was accepted by the national bourgeoisie, international capital and some co-opted elites in the non-capitalist classes.

In South Africa, coercive co-option has produced some black petty-bourgeois elites who believe it is in their interest to 'participate' in parliament and local authorities. But monopoly and international capital remain deeply sceptical over whether reform from above will succeed.

This is why business has generally not supported the 1986-87 state of emergency after its previous support for the 1985-86 emergency. But this could change. Capital's involvement in RSCs, housing construction and economic recovery could mean it adopts a 'supportive ideology' by default.

The private sector has shown support for the 'positive development work' of JMCs in places like Alexandra and Mamelodi, and support for the state's 'success' in bringing an end to 'township violence'. These attitudes may point to the militarisation of capitalist ideology. This is the context in which NSMS officials are holding country-wide seminars with senior management personnel at present.

Models or open-ended negotiation?

It is too early to predict the 'failure' of the Brazilian option. But given the limited success of repression, it appears reformers in the state have begun to re-assert their position.

In the pre-EPG period the debate amongst reformers was over different constitutional 'models' (federalism versus confederalism versus federal/confederalism versus co-federalism). The debate is now between 'models' and negotiation 'processes' which would be more open-ended. Three examples of this tendency can be mentioned.

Firstly, the need for negotiation processes is a key concern in the newly formed special committee of the council for the co-ordination of local government affairs. This committee's brief was shaped by Heunis' recent

speech to the Urban Councils Association of South Africa (UCASA) conference where he called for the formulation of a 'uniform local government law'. He probably meant a single law implemented through different locally-determined systems, rather than a uniform system imposed on all areas irrespective of local power relations. This committee met for the first time in August.

Secondly, the press failed to note the significance of Heunis' skilful stalling tactics which placed the National Council Bill in a select committee until next year, despite PW Botha's insistence that the bill should go through parliament this session.

Heunis's scheme was an attempt to head-off the disastrous political consequences of major extra-parliamentary protests against the national council, and prepare the way for more open-ended negotiation processes.

Thirdly, in a number of areas in Natal, Eastern Cape and Transvaal, government officials have again initiated talks with local civics around urban upgrading programmes.

The reformers will not necessarily regain the initiative within the state. Conflict between them and the securocrats remains intense with each pushing for different 'solutions' to the crisis. This was most evident in different campaign speeches during the white election.

For the militarist camp (Botha, Malan, Vlok), the priorities of reform were: first to re-establish law and order; second, economic recovery; third, socio-economic upgrading of black townships

('Operation Oilspot'); and fourth, constitutional solutions to the problem of political rights.

For the reformers (especially Viljoen, de Beer and Heunis), law and order can only be re-established if the problem of political rights is resolved first.

These different solutions depend on different diagnoses of the problem. The militarists assume 'communist agitators' and 'socio-economic' grievances underlie black unrest, while the reformers accept that lack of political rights is an important cause of black resistance.

The survival of internal opposition

The liberation movement's capacity to strike direct blows against the state has been severely weakened since the national state of emergency. But it has nevertheless strengthened and consolidated its political and organisational structures. Internally this was reflected in:

- * the formation of the South African Youth Congress despite the difficulties of underground organisation;
- * the defence of COSATU despite security force attempts to provoke it into premature counter-reaction after the COSATU House bombing;
- * the holding of several key trade union congresses that consoli-

dated industrial union power and committed the unions to a strong political stand;

- * the UDF's ability to hold a secret national conference to review and consolidate its position;

- * the 5 and 6 May national stayaway protest against the white elections. This was arguably the largest and most successful two-day stayaway in South Africa's history, where the Rand and some Natal townships equalled the Eastern Cape's full-scale support;

- * the persistence, spread and organisational consolidation of rent boycotts in all the key Transvaal and Eastern Cape centres;

- * massive escalation in strike levels throughout 1986 and into 1987. The SATS strike was a clear example of how industrial conflict has been irreversibly politicised;

- * the reigning-in of militant youth squads, which were becoming increasingly uncontrollable during the first months of 1986;

- * the ending of the three-year schools boycott as a result of NECC initiatives.

Local-level grassroots organisations were badly hit by repression. In many small Eastern Cape and Transvaal townships, 'alternative structures' have been smashed. Places once renowned for their

street committees and people's courts - like Port Alfred, Alexandra and Mamelodi - suffered waves of detentions, vigilante action and, more recently, treason and sedition trials.



From the seizure of power to a negotiated settlement

International rejection of the South African state's internal policies greatly strengthened the ANC's position with Western governments. The ANC is more than ever before entrenched as 'the factor' in the various international foreign policy formulae. This has led the ANC to clarify and refine its commitment to a negotiated settlement rather than an 'armed seizure of power'.

Although the ANC's position in the West is not as solid as it would like, there are indications that the Soviet

Leader of the reformist lobby
Chris Heunis

Union's new foreign policy will strengthen this.

In line with the 27th Party Congress resolution to stabilise world security by 'defusing conflict situations', the Soviets are keen to demilitarise Southern Africa, pressurise the West into more comprehensive sanctions coupled to firmer recognition of the ANC, and find a negotiated settlement to the 'national liberation' (as opposed to the socialist) struggle. The Soviets see defusing conflict with the West as the only way they can re-direct scarce resources into much-needed economic development programmes and gain access to Western technology.

There is a debate within the USSR Academy of Sciences - a key foreign policy think-tank - over Gleb Starushenko's proposal that whites should be offered 'group rights' guarantees to hasten the negotiation process. But all agree that military escalation is not the solution. International diplomatic alliances, therefore, become crucial.

A more important reason for the ANC shift in emphasis from 'armed seizure of power' to 'negotiated settlement' is the fragile economic and military position of the frontline states.

There is evidence that these states are not prepared to host an ANC movement engaged in a full-scale battle with the economic and military might of the South African state. South African destabilisation strategies have already reduced most of Mozambique and Angola to socio-political wastelands, Zambia has economic prob-

lems with parts of the countryside not much better than Mozambique, and Zimbabwe is very reluctant to sacrifice its economic surplus for the sake of the South African struggle.

The internal stability and survival of present frontline governments may depend on a speedy negotiated settlement of the South African problem. This is something the ANC cannot ignore.

Towards a climate of negotiation

South African trade union and political organisations have not only survived one of the most brutal periods of repression in recent times, but have been able to strengthen political and organisational structures. Externally, the ANC has consolidated and clarified its position on a negotiated settlement. The strength of the internal movements will greatly assist the ANC's negotiating hand.

But both the internal organisations and the ANC still maintain that a 'climate for negotiation' can only be created if all political prisoners and detainees are released, exiles allowed to return to South Africa unconditionally, repressive laws dismantled, organisations unbanned and the right to free association guaranteed.

It remains to be seen how internal and external opposition movement positions will respond to changes in state strategy if reformers regain the initiative. Equally important will be the political strategy and ideological direction of monopoly capital.

The worst scenario involves the continued dominance of securocrats backed by an increasingly submissive and

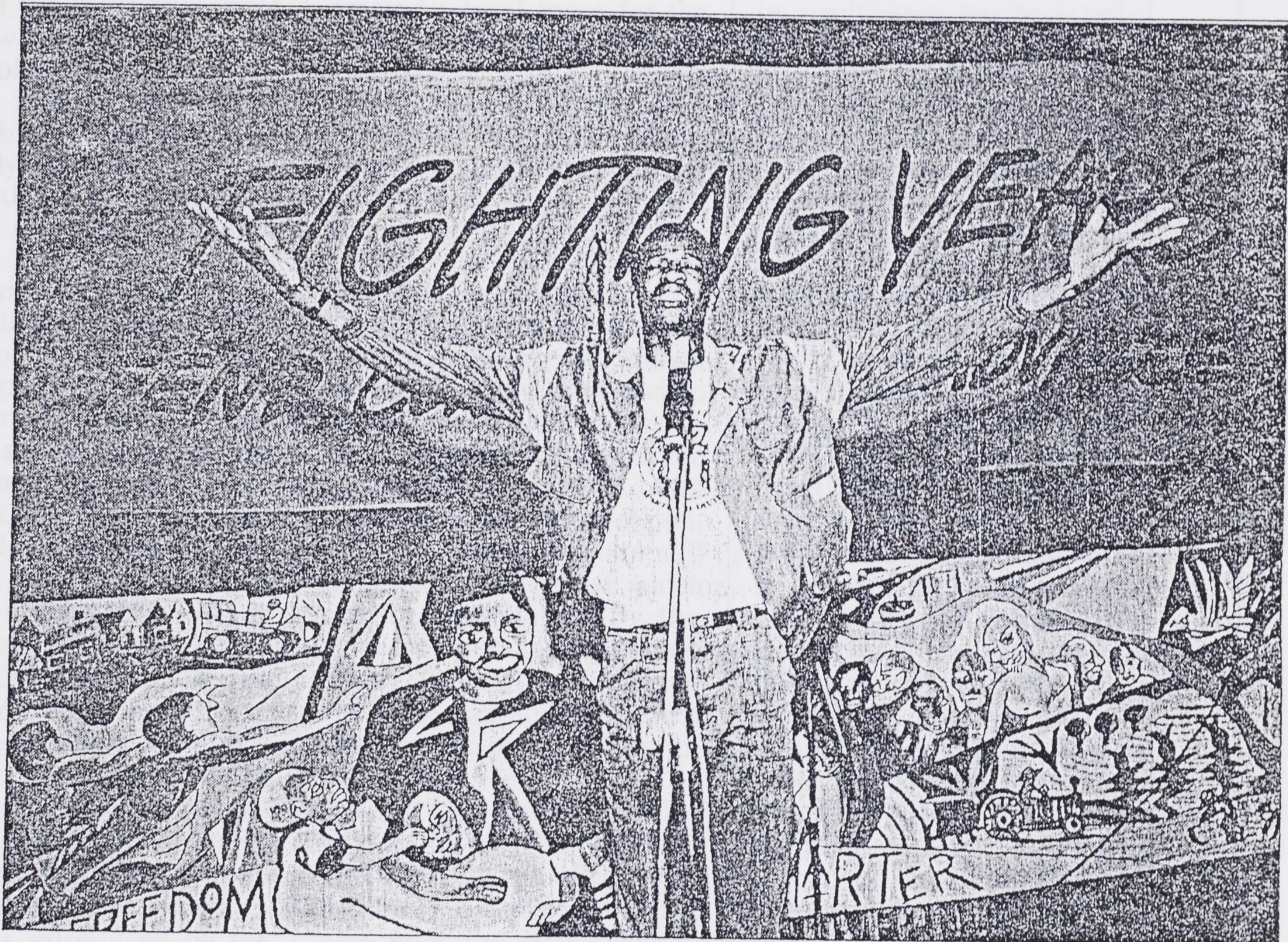
politically impotent capitalist class. The most hopeful includes the demise of the securocrats and the consolidation of the reformers backed by big capital. But there is no chance of this happening before PW Botha's retirement.

The most likely future involves the state lurching from one badly conceived 'option' to another, failing to break the stalemate or unify the capitalist class around a purposive political programme. In the meantime, the repressive screws on black opposition will remain, if not tighten.

The politics of negotiation will become the focus of political conflict. Whether this will involve an attempt at top-down co-option via the national council, or the beginnings of a properly negotiated settlement with popularly recognised opposition leaders, remains to be seen.

How this 'climate of negotiation' is created will affect the way the current stalemate is resolved. The government is unlikely to make any momentous decisions in this regard. But there may be hope in the recent Five Freedoms Forum proposal for the launch of a grassroots movement of white democrats united around the concern for national survival and the demand for a negotiated settlement. This initiative, coupled with the impact the National Democratic Movement is bound to have on Afrikanerdom, might well force white politics across its Rubicon. The pressure of black resistance together with debilitating divisions in the white power bloc may steadily isolate the securocrats.

State power and the politics of resistance



As South Africa moves into another year of emergency rule, TOM LODGE examines some of the strategic options available to resistance movements.

The UDF: a significant actor in current opposition politics

Black resistance in the 1980s has involved the politics of a relatively advanced industrial society. Changes in South Africa's economy in the 1960s and 1970s, and in particular the movement of Africans into the most vital sectors of the industrial workforce during those years, form the two most distinctive features of black South African protest: its strength and its radicalism.

Many of the mass movements in the present conflict are socially and intellectually more substantial and sophisticated than in previous generations of protest.

The vanguard role of youth, the clear presence of class analysis in political discourse, the emphasis on democratic participation, the readiness to challenge the state's legitimacy, and the often violent antipathy between rivals: all are features of modern black politics which set it apart from what has been before.

The sense of impending victory and the consciousness of power which, until recently, was implicit and sometimes explicit in the discourse of radical black leadership, was not really justified.

In contrast to the 1950s, popular organisations during 1984-86 presented the authorities with a much more potent challenge to the working of government and the functioning of the economy. But the balance of power did not involve stalemate, as certain radical analyses would have. For conflict in the 1980s has in part been caused by government efforts to alter the terms of domination; trying to shift from an order based largely on coercion, to one where ideology, consensus, and incorporation could play rather larger roles. White South Africa's probable future prosperity - but not its very survival - hinged upon the success of these efforts.

Changes introduced by the government were not all meaningless. In the case of labour, the 1979 legislation institutionalised trade unions, which are now a vital element in resistance and power. But outside the sphere of labour the government's programme held back from any significant concession of political rights, any division of the essentials of political authority, or any meaningful broadening of the

system of political participation.

Despite their inadequacy, their tendency to raise expectations rather than fulfil them, the government's reforms had positive implications for the development of popular opposition. For the reforms themselves demanded a lessening of official restrictions and controls, and created a legal space for the open mobilisation of resistance to apartheid.

But it was a brief springtime. And like such springs elsewhere, it was followed not by a blossoming into summer, but a particularly harsh winter. Between 1986 and 1987 there was a shift in state strategy. Government's limited tolerance of radical dissent is over: it is replacing, through repression, the short-lived attempt to rule on the basis of legitimation. And when it comes to coercion, the state's resources are still far greater than those which can be marshalled by the forces of popular resistance. There is no stalemate, and the state can still tear apart the body of organised political activity.

What is questionable, though, is whether the psychological effects of doing so will be as durable as was the case after the state's clamp-down at the beginning of the 1960s. The culture of black political radicalism may be much more resilient this time.

The options for resistance politics

The choices which currently face resistance politics are not the same as those faced by the leaders of the 1960s. Their options did not appear to be choices at all: accept-

ance of the massive force and authority of the state, and 'working within the system'; or clandestine organisation linked to the promotion of guerilla warfare.

These are not the only routes now. Guerilla warfare remains important. But it is not the only option in resistance politics. In the last ten years of guerilla insurgency, its significance has been political rather than military. The ANC itself described the first stage of its campaign as 'armed propaganda'. Though there have been strategic developments since then, the main purpose of guerilla attacks remains symbolic and inspirational, to provide political pointers.

It is unlikely that, in the near future, the military struggle will seriously be able to disrupt or threaten the functioning of the government or the economy. The ANC has been restraining its forces, but that restraint has been qualitative rather than quantitative. The ANC could, if it wished to, more effectively terrorise the cities and the suburbs. It could attack targets so far not chosen: schools, public transport, shopping centres; targets selected so as to maximise white casualties. The ANC is strongly opposed to doing this for moral and strategic reasons, but it probably has the resources to undertake such a campaign.

What the ANC cannot do is mount a major military or sabotage offensive which would tie up large numbers of South African soldiers. This would have the same debilitating effects on the South African economy as the war in Zimbabwe did in its final

stages.

But South African conditions are different from those which existed in Zimbabwe. To field and supply a guerilla army of several thousand inside the country's borders would be well beyond the ANC's logistical resources, and would require a completely different regional political economy.

Guerilla warfare will remain just one theme in the struggle. While it will be a major aspect, its importance will remain chiefly psychological. It will signal the ANC's presence. It will provide a medium through which the ANC can exercise its authority, and can enhance its status internationally. But for a long time it is unlikely to accomplish more than this. And even in the long term, the probabilities are against a militarily-based 'seizure of power'. Like most anti-colonial struggles, this one is almost certain to end through talks.

Another option for resistance politics would be to turn back the clock: to forget that the UDF and the popular political movement it commanded existed; forget that open political mobilisation was beginning to alter the political landscape, and retreat into a kind of defeatist syndicalism.

This syndicalist position would argue that political struggle and opposition should be left to the labour movement: to the extent that black people have power, it is grounded in labour relations and the strategic position black workers hold in the economy. An extension of this argument would suggest that this power should be

conserved to protect labour organisation until it can fight the truly decisive battle another day.

This is not a realistic option. Firstly, given the present economic situation and its likely future development, a labour movement left to itself is unlikely to grow much stronger. Secondly, power held in reserve and not actually exercised may not turn out to be as powerful as was thought. Thirdly, the one kind of political challenge the authorities are really well-equipped to deal with is the general strike or general stayaway.

And it is worth remembering that the popular movement which mushroomed so dramatically in the townships in the 1983-86 period actually won victories. It won a succession of local struggles, compelling local representatives of state and capital to recognise black political power and negotiate with it.

The popular movement also won national victories. Analyses of state strategy produced before 1984, contrasted with what appears to be on the agenda today, make this obvious. The UDF was established to oppose, amongst other things, the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill, which aimed at streamlining and tightening up influx control. Today, government policy in that area is wholly disorganised. And the abolition of influx control, despite the 'ifs and buts', represents a momentous victory, a signal advance.

But more than anything else, what has changed since the early 1980s is the question of whether the government

has a strategy. It did then - or appeared to: indeed the left attributed to the state an almost Machiavellian intelligence. Today the state no longer has a coherent strategy. In 1983, the tricameral system was the final blueprint; today it is conceived of by government as merely 'a step in the process'.

Alliance politics and negotiation

It would be a mistake to turn the clock back, and write off the gains achieved by the politics of popular mobilisation. But conditions have changed.

The substructure of local organisation, which provided the UDF with its undertow of such force, is badly fragmented. In certain areas it is considerably demoralised. Where organisation can be repaired it should be. But where the state has concentrated its resources this may not be possible. When the SABC ventures into Alexandra township, then something which existed is now lost.

In place of the open structures constructed in the heyday of people's power, more discreet, clandestine or underground networks may be built. But these are not the only strategic alternatives.

And by its very nature, 'underground' politics is difficult to make democratic. In any case, mobilisation does not depend merely on the presence of committed activists, whether in the open or underground. It requires ideas, causes, issues and victories - both psychological and real.

It may still be possible to reconstruct the resistance movement around bread and

Options for resistance politics

butter preoccupations, the localised subsistence politics so fundamental to the building of 'first level' organisations before the UDF was formed. It is certainly the case that many effective local activists have tended to be absorbed by national structures and have become preoccupied with problems removed from the immediate needs of their constituencies.

But a return to localism would be a retreat. Local issues should not be neglected, for there are many victories to be won. The rent strike still effective in Soweto is a case in point. But local struggles do not effectively challenge the state, and do not rearrange the equation of political power.

Some of these considerations may be influencing the astute move by democratic organisations into alliance politics. The last three years have profoundly shaken up the white community's political culture. Divisions and demoralisations are more evident than they have been for decades.

It may not be possible to persuade more than an active minority of whites to join the camp of liberation politics. But a much larger proportion may have their fears lessened if movements like the UDF actively co-operate with

forces and organisations which, in white political culture, have institutional respectability.

A large proportion of whites may be receptive to the leadership of a broad front around the call for negotiation. Events like the launch of the 'Friends of the UDF' in the plush surrounds of the Carlton Hotel, or the UDF's participation, along with IDASA and PFP notables, in the Five Freedoms Forum conference, make excellent sense.

Reassessing strategy

Once predominantly black democratic organisations begin co-operating across the lines which strategically and ideologically divide parliamentary from extra-parliamentary forces, then sooner or later a fundamental question must be asked about the boycottist position. This has been elevated almost to a point of principle in national democratic politics in the last three decades.

UDF co-president Archie Gumede phrased the problem clumsily when he raised it two months ago. But he was justified in asking whether there should not be a fundamental rethink in strategy.

There are historical precedents for political movements committed to fundamental

change using, when appropriate, existing political institutions, if only for a platform and a legal shelter. There are some South African examples of this too, although they are not very happy ones. The history of the Labour Party demonstrates this well.

The arguments against such a move are strong. It is difficult to carry along a constituency mobilised in opposition to government-created representative bodies.

Then there is the possibility of elected leaders deserting their constituency, playing the system by its own rules. Any move of this kind would have to be debated, and leaders would have to be people of unswerving commitment.

In the end it may be found that the arguments against such a move are too strong. But the debate should take place, and not be cut off by expressions of moral outrage and accusations of treachery. These are difficult times, and the strategic issues which confront the progress of democratic opposition to apartheid are complex. The categories which are required to discuss them are analytical and dispassionate, not moral and emotive.

We congratulate Work In Progress on their 50th issue and their 10th year publishing the magazine. We salute the courageous stance taken by WIP and we are proud to continue our association with the magazine.

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The state of the state and the state of resistance

Militarists currently hold power within the state. But could this give way to a reformist group open to a negotiated settlement of the South African conflict, especially after PW Botha's retirement? IVOR SARAKEYSKY thinks this is unlikely unless state reformists in the state increase in number and develop institutional power bases.

The state's counter-revolutionary strategy has imposed severe constraints on popular community and political organisations. Mark Swilling's *WIP 50* article, 'The politics of negotiation', is important because it raises questions about possible responses to the limitations imposed on the extra-parliamentary opposition by this counter-revolutionary strategy.

Swilling argues that prior to April 1986, reformers within the state had come to the fore in the department of constitutional development and planning. They had 'gained control of almost every aspect of black life' and were attempting to incorporate local authorities into regional services councils (RSCs), move away from the bantustan policies, and dismantle influx control while negotiating with certain community organisations.

After April 1986, according to Swilling, the militarists, represented by the state president, minister of defence and



minister of law and order, replaced the reformers as the dominant bloc within the state. The Eminent Persons Group (EPG) mission collapsed because the militarists, by bombing frontline states and activating the National Security Management System (NSMS), made it clear that they were not prepared to negotiate a settlement to the South and Southern African conflict.

The militarist faction believed that internal and external opposition to apartheid could be controlled or eliminated by coercion.

They put forward a three-stage theory of counter-revolution. This firstly involved the re-establishment of law and order in the townships. The Joint Management Centres (JMCs) and mini-JMCs were to play an important role at the local level in isolating or eliminating activists as well as destroying community structures such as street and area committees.

The second stage, closely related to the first, was to facilitate the socio-economic reconstruction of the townships, removing the causes of unrest and undermining activists by eliminating the real grievances around which they mobilised communities. The RSCs were to play a crucial role in 'creaming off' finances from richer white local authorities for this socio-economic development. At the same time Escom and the department of finance made huge amounts of money available for such projects.

The third stage was simply termed 'constitutional reform'. No details were provided other than the proposed National Statutory Council (NSC).

With the declaration of the second state of emergency, the state began to implement the first stage of its counter-revolutionary strategy. Swilling is ambiguous about the effects this had on extra-parliamentary opposition. At one point he asserts that the liberation movement has 'strengthened and consolidated its political and organisational structures'. But elsewhere he claims that 'local-level grassroots organisations were badly hit by repression'. Nonetheless, there is a broad consensus that state action has severely curtailed the activities of opposition organisations.

Swilling is correct to argue that the militarist response shows they believe the political crisis was caused by socio-economic factors and agitators; while reformers see it being caused by the lack of political rights for blacks. But he is wrong to present an optimistic view of the possibility of open-ended negotiations and the re-emergence of reformers as the dominant force in the state.

Particular policies put forward or implemented in one state institution may conflict with or contradict policy priorities of other institutions. And officials have different views as to how best to cope with issues directly affecting their area of administration. The ambiguities and differences in various state department programmes must be discussed within this broad and general framework.

Militarists in power

For Swilling, April 1986 is the crossroads for state policy, when militarists removed reformers from their dominant position within the state. Having consolidated their position

within the state, they activated their counter-revolutionary strategy.

But this does not account for the dominance which the repressive arm of the state, particularly the military, acquired as a result of state restructuring which began in the late 1970s.

The most important aspect of state restructuring was, with PW Botha's accession to the leadership of the NP, the establishment of the NSMS as well as the consolidation of the military and pro-Botha elements in the state security council, which was established in 1972. All intelligence operations were centralised under military control. By the end of the 1970s the military had emerged as the dominant state institution and played a crucial role in policy formation due to its position on the SSC, and no policy could be implemented without SSC approval.

While the structures for what are now called JMCs were set in place some time ago, they were only activated to deal with the particular form of township resistance which emerged in 1982 as a result of state attempts to impose local authorities on townships.

Security was the backbone of state restructuring which began in the late 1970s, and is still the foundation of state policy.

Swilling implies that before the EPG visit, reformers were as, if not more, influential within the state as the militarists. They were not. But this does not detract from the significance of the constitutional and structural changes which they implemented. However, reformers' activities in the department of constitutional development and planning were, to a large degree, reliant

on the consent of the SSC.

This gives a clearer understanding of why the EPG mission failed. The SSC had decided the state was militarily self-sufficient and could defend itself; sanctions-busting networks had been established and loyal countries such as Taiwan, Israel, Chile and Paraguay could be relied upon for import and export networks as well as technology transfers.

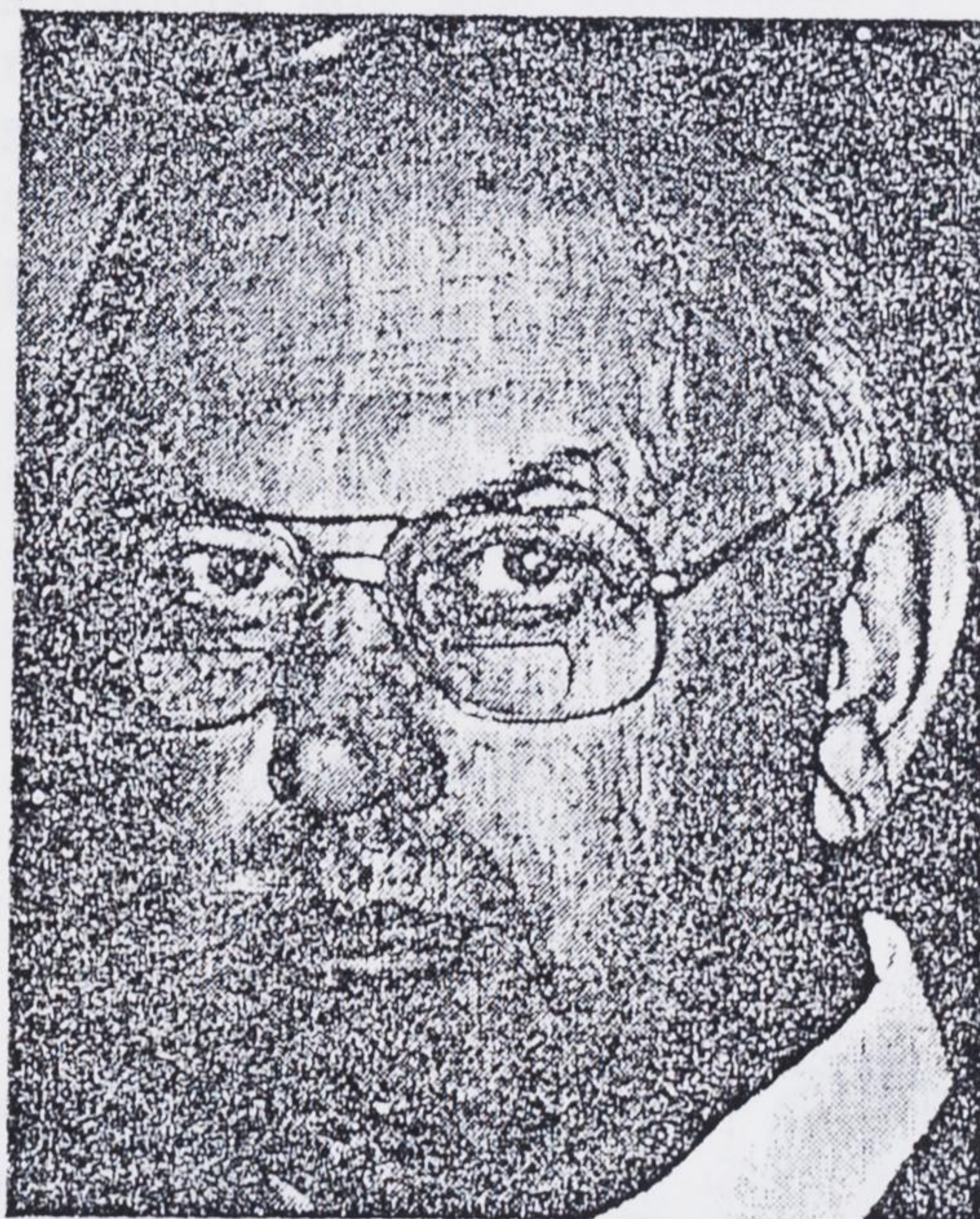
Thus sanctions, if imposed, would hurt. But they would not seriously weaken the state. It was therefore decided to 'go it alone' by implementing policies which would seriously weaken extra-parliamentary opposition while allowing the state to pursue its own course without foreign interference.

With the collapse of the EPG mission, state reform policy became clearer. Reform was mainly understood in terms of socio-economic reconstruction, and can be traced back to the Riekert commission report of 1979. The tri-cameral parliament, local authorities and RSCs were never intended to incorporate the previously-unfranchised into decision making. The President's Council, the power of the state president and the structure of the RSCs show how white dominance has been restructured within the state.

Stellenbosch University academics were important in formulating and popularising a reform initiative. However, Stellenbosch Professor Hennie Kotze recently suggested that from as early as 1981 it is questionable whether the NP was committed to meaningful reform. And as far back as March 1987, another Stellenbosch academic, Sampie Terreblanche, argued that 'the

reform strategy was little more than a public relations exercise to improve the image of apartheid and not endanger the Afrikaner'. More recently, Terreblanche has referred to state policy as 'the government's ill-conceived reform programme' and stated that even this has 'ground to a standstill'.

So the EPG mission collapsed not only because of the reasons outlined above, but also because dominant state institutions had already decided not to relinquish or dilute white dominance of state power.



When PW goes

The military and other repressive apparatuses are the most influential in formulating and implementing state policy. The small number of officials in the reformist camp are on the fringes of, or even marginalised from, institutional power where important decision making takes place.

This view is confirmed by the former editor of *Rapport*, and brother of Transvaal NP leader FW de Klerk, Willem de Klerk. He estimates that there are only 18 radical reformists in the NP caucus, and four in the cabinet, only one of

whom sits on the SSC. De Klerk acknowledges that 'this is not an impressive figure'.

In *WIP 50* Swilling does not examine the institutional structure of the state. Nor does he evaluate the reformers' institutional power (or lack of it). This allows him to claim that with PW Botha's retirement from the presidency, there is a chance of the reformers emerging as a powerful caucus within the state.

No doubt PW Botha's personality has played a significant role in shaping contemporary politics. But irrespective of who is president, the repressive wing of the state will still be influential.

For the reformers to emerge as a significant force, institutional restructuring will be necessary to enable them to pursue and implement their constitutional proposals, which are not yet clear. Alternatively, the reformers could consolidate if the militarists re-thought their policy and opted for constitutional reform. But this option seems very unlikely in the near future.

Another aspect of Swilling's argument which is misleading is his characterisation of the state as split along a single axis: that is, a single tension between militarists and reformers.

This ignores significant differences and tensions within these camps. The recent retirements of Constand Viljoen of the SADF and Johan Coetzee, commissioner of police, are evidence of these tensions. Viljoen was probably to the right of mainstream thinking within the state. And Coetzee was reportedly severely criticised for advocating a policy allowing radical

organisations to continue operating - albeit under strict constraints. Coetzee's thinking seems to reject the banning of organisations, as this forces them underground. His was a strategy of containment, severely hindering organisational consolidation by continually removing leadership. Nonetheless, both Viljoen and Coetzee fall into the 'militarist' camp.

Tensions also exist within the reform camp. This is evident within state departments: for example between minister Chris Heunis and his deputy, Stoffel van der Merwe, who is a strong PW Botha supporter. Van der Merwe, described as a 'radical' in the state by Swilling, is on record as defending the same three-stage theory of counter-revolution set out by Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok.

But in recent interviews, both Heunis and Van der Merwe put forward the same model for constitutional development. Both present a consociational model based on group rights which will, according to them, prevent one group dominating another. Blacks are divided along ethnic and regional lines. This idea seems to be the foundation for future reform - the proposed NSC - and again illustrates the dominant bloc's reluctance to consider real reform seriously.

Swilling is correct to point to the radically different agendas which some members of the reform camp hold. But he does not clarify what he means by reform. This makes it difficult to identify who the real reformers are

and what institutional power they hold.

With the mini-split in the NP, many of the most radical MPs, state functionaries and party ideologues such as the Stellenbosch academics, left the party. The implication is that few *real* reformers remain active within the state, further weakening an already marginalised pressure group.

Swilling discusses the state in terms of reformers and militarists. This obscures the relationship between state institutions such as foreign affairs, finance, the President's Council and the tri-cameral parliament, and the more influential military-oriented institutions and less influential reform-oriented institutions such as the department of constitutional development and planning.

These complex networks are difficult to unravel. But to see the state in terms of reformers and militarists prevents a discussion of other important state institutions and the effects that their different policies have on each other.

been achieved. The Pietermaritzburg townships may be an exception to this: there the state seems to see conflict between Inkatha and the UDF/Cosatu as in its interests. But in general 'law and order' has been re-imposed.

It is unclear whether the state has the economic resources to remove grassroots grievances. Significant socio-economic development has taken place in townships like Alexandra. But the state does have limited resources. Township upgrading will thus only occur in areas which the JMCs have pinpointed as being militant and having strong community organisations.

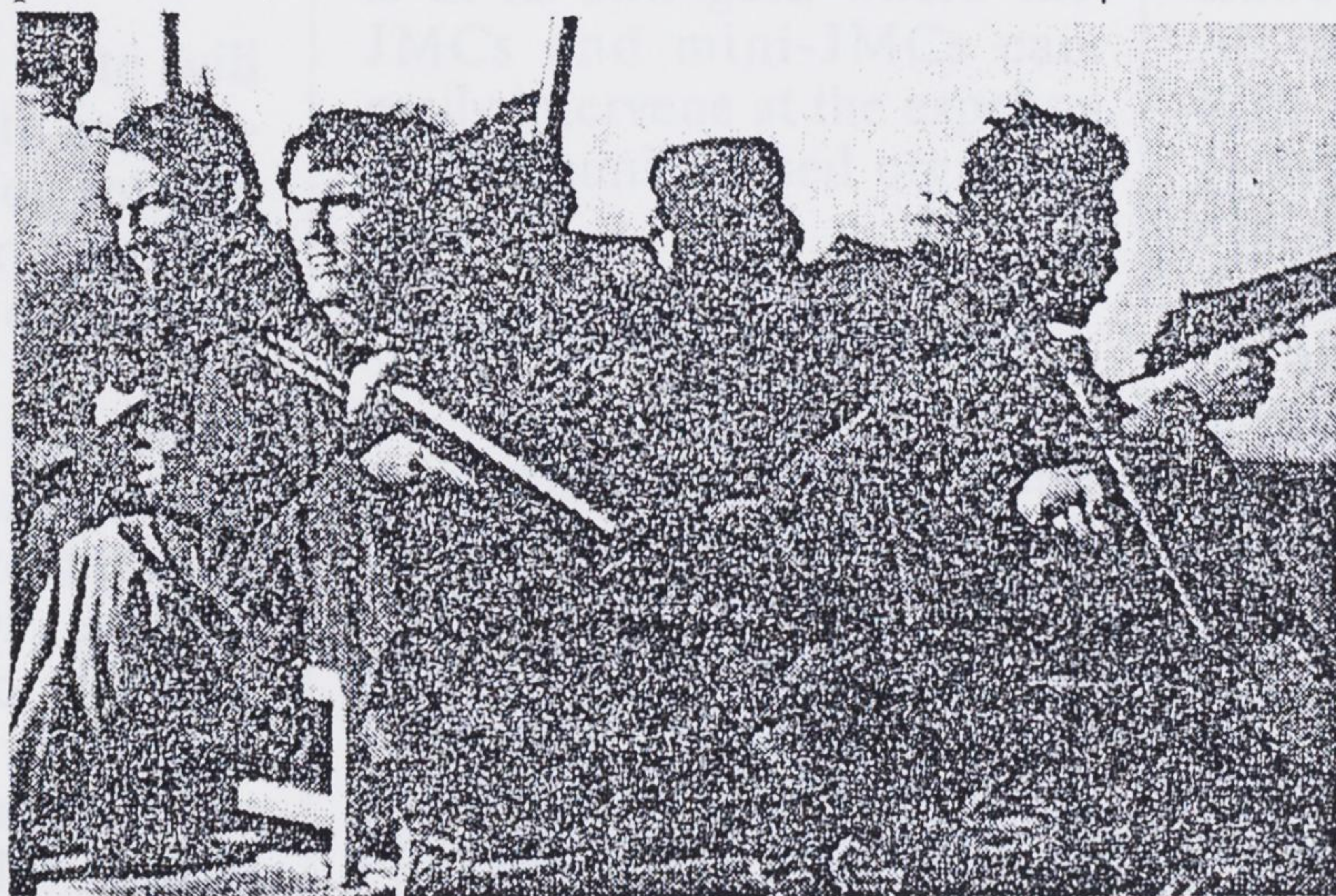
Repression thus still forms the keystone of state policy, and due to economic and political restraints the state does not seem to be moving beyond the first stage of counter-revolution.

The state's free market-oriented privatisation programme to stimulate growth and decrease unemployment is partly an attempt to avoid the glaring political questions it faces. In this way it is

attempting to define political rights in economic free-market terms.

This situation is similar to Chile where a top-heavy regime, protected by a highly repressive state machine, has implemented 'free-market' policies to avoid political questions. It may be significant that the new commissioner of police, General De

Witt, recently visited Chile on a good-will mission and that Pretoria has cordial relations with Santiago.



Law and order has been restored

Three stages of counter-revolution

The first stage in the state's counter-revolution has largely

Seizure of power or negotiations?

Swilling begins his discussion by commenting on those who simply see the state in terms of repression and see social change occurring by a revolutionary seizure of power and smashing of the present state. He says such views are cynical and out of touch.

This may be so, but in terms of liberation movements' revolutionary rhetoric since 1963, this has been the dominant theme in their programmes. That is, until a very recent policy statement made by a high-ranking cadre.

Despite the strong possibility that negotiation has always been on the agenda of the liberation movements, it has only recently been openly discussed. This same senior member of the liberation movement referred to above, is reported to have said as far back as February 1985 that the armed struggle is not aimed at the seizure of the state but to force the ruling group to the negotiating table.

This assumes the state will have to be forced into negotiation, that it will not (at the moment) consider negotiations as an avenue of conflict resolution.

In opposition to this view, Swilling cites the case of Stoffel van der Merwe making overtures to the UDF. Swilling also refers to 'senior officials in reformist circles' who argue for an open-ended negotiation agenda. No doubt this is true, but the real significance of such views within the state can only be measured in terms of the institutional and numerical strength which such officials possess. Swilling does not in any way *demonstrate* the significance of this group and

seems to deduce a general trend in state circles from a few isolated and ambiguous statements.

Swilling also conflates two levels of negotiation, the local and the national. At a national level, there is no strong indication of the state's willingness to negotiate. And in terms of its power and success in containing internal and externally-based opposition, why should it? Negotiations only occur when a previously dominant party sees itself losing or running out of options. Neither applies to the regime at present.

At a local level, negotiations have taken place between community-based organisations and sectors of the local state. But there are limits to what this can achieve. Such negotiations also limit the possibility of a nationally co-ordinated response. Important issues which are specific to a particular area dominate the agenda. And local-level negotiations occur where the state is at its strongest, where the JMCs and mini-JMCs can easily intervene at the expense of community-based organisations.

No negotiations without power

Advocating negotiations while assuming the state's good faith, engages the regime where it is strongest. For the state determines the arena in which the extra-parliamentary opposition operates, and so can use negotiations to achieve its own particular strategic objectives.

There is no reason for the state to negotiate in good faith, unless national and community-based organisations have institutionalised bargaining power through their

strategic intervention in state structures. This could be done by, for example, putting candidates forward for tri-cameral and local authority elections. To negotiate without an institutionalised or any other power-base means negotiations occur directly on the state's terrain.

Even if national or local-level opposition organisations can establish this kind of power-base, there is still no guarantee that the state will negotiate in good faith. But access to institutionalised power, in the form of procedure and legislation, could provide organisations with both an unstable legal institutional foundation and a platform for blocking or hindering the legislative and procedural intentions of dominant groups within the state. This could give opposition groups some bargaining power at a local and national level.

Meaningful social change will only be achieved by a strong, organised and democratic mass-based movement. All means available to help with such consolidation and growth should be carefully explored and debated. This flexibility seems to be emerging and is definitely a positive development.

Sampie Terreblanche has recently commented that reform has been deferred in favour of economic revival. He also suggested that the misguided economic policies announced by State President PW Botha will further delay economic recovery. If this is the case, any constitutional change envisaged by 'reformers' is not on the short-term agenda. This must even further weaken the 'open-ended negotiation' lobby in which Swilling puts so much faith.

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