ensured that the authorities were forced to reveal some information. Secondly, the failure of the international community to enforce sanctions rigorously gave the South African government reason to behave in a relatively restrained fashion; and refrain from the tactics remembered from Argentina and Chile in the 1970s which would have disrupted communication totally.

In the opinion of the editors of **Work in Progress** ". . . any government which has as much to hide as South Africa's rulers must fear all but the most tame sections of the media" and ". . . is justified in fearing what a competent media might publish"[12]. It is the task of South African democrats to uncover and disseminate as much information about the way the country is run as possible. A deeper understanding of power structures and relationships is fundamental to the debate about the planning of a future in which people have greater control over their destinies. Experience of life under a State of Emergency has shown that within a deeply entrenched culture of resistance in South Africa is an important group which has as a priority the maintenance of channels of communication. So draconian were the implications of the State of Emergency that the numbers of people committed to the right to know grew considerably and their skills and tactics expanded commensurately. It is thus possible that out of the challenge of severe repression might emerge stronger foundations for a policy of freedom of information in a post-apartheid South Africa. □

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————————————————————————— by Yusuf Bhamjee ——

ACCESSIBLE POLITICS

Chris Heymans and Gerhard Totemeyer (eds): **Government by the People: The Politics of Local Government in South Africa.** Juta, 1988.

Given the municipal elections and the implementation of the new local government structures that are under way, this is a most welcome book. It is timely, useful and also, the first of its kind.

A wide range of people, representing a cross-section of the ideological spectrum have contributed to this book. The usefulness of the text lies in the fact that the politics of local government in South Africa has been made accessible to a wider reading public. It is written in a fairly simple style – a book which is not only of interest for the specialist alone but can be read by the average practitioner of local government as well as people involved in community organisations.

The articles are broadly divided into three themes:-
    (a) The relevance of local government;
    (b) Local government and the politics of "reform" and
       "restructuring" in South Africa; and
    (c) Future trends

The general feeling amongst people who write about local government and certinly amongst those whose work appears in this publication, is that Central Government is seeking to make reforms at local government level – there is a belief that this process will be a building block towards more fundamental changes at the national level.

Local government reforms can be perceived to take place at least partly in response to struggles waged by civic and community organisations. Local government is a site of struggle, and changes at this level may affect policies at a national level. Changes brought about by struggles from below rather than concessions granted from above make it possible for local government to function as a forum for change – that will lead towards more fundamental national changes.

This review will discuss the book under consideration chapter by chapter.

Tötemeyer (Chapter 1) elucidates our understanding of local government by introducing key concepts like legitimacy and authority, conflict and instability, ability and viability of local government. He then discusses local autonomy and decentralisation, the relationship between central and local government, ethnicity and integration, politics and administration. Within the South African context – both in terms of central government and local government – politics and administration are inextricably linked. Blacks view politics and administration as part of the oppressive machinery of apartheid. This promotes conflict and instability. Tötemeyer therefore argues that fundamental structural changes are necessary "for a government in search of survival".

Focusing on Sommer's theories of the best strategy which could be used to promote social and political integration in a diverse society, Tötemeyer suggests that government finances should be better spent in promoting interaction between diverse groups. He does not however specify how.

Hanekom (Chapter 2) defines and describes the characteristics of local government before going on to cite the factors responsible for the development of local government.

Hanekom makes the point that local government in South Africa does not enjoy the autonomy that it should; rather, it operates within the parameters laid down by central government. However, instead of developing this argument to expose the top-down control characteristic of the South African government, he discusses local government in a general context, thereby understating the importance of this point.

He also addresses the relevance of local government in a democratic society, putting forward a convincing argument in favour of local government – "as a community-sensitive agent of social and economic progress". However the democratic content of his argument would only be realised in a future South Africa.

Bekker (Chapter 3) offers "a prognosis for effective devolution in the light of contemporary local government reform in South Africa."

Arguments in favour of devolution are convincing and his examination of the complexities of devolution in terms of a revenue base, legitimacy, macro-economic and fiscal principles is enlightening.

Robert Cameron (Chapter 5) galvanizes the argument that local government restructuring has led to greater centralisation. This he does simply by rejecting the notion that the RSCs are extensions of local authorities. Instead he shows that the RSCs in effect exercise top-down control via the Provincial Administrators who are directly appointed by and accountable to the Minister of Constitutional Development.

Hence Cameron states that: "The government's intention to devolve powers to local authorities is countered by its determination to keep control of the reform process." Cameron therefore concludes, "They (government) make a mockery of democracy."

Pierre du Toit (Chapter 6) examines in greater detail the pivotal role of the Administrator and the RSCs in general. He firmly concludes, "To believe that the RSC Act is not racially discriminatory is nothing less than fiction."

In discussing power relations both within and outside of RSCs, he concludes that they (RSCs) have failed to take "South Africa out of the deadlock of racial ideology."

Solomon (Chapter 7) provides an excellent account of financial and fiscal aspects of local government. He looks at the effectiveness of the RSCs as redistributive agents of wealth, which are required by statute to sell bulk services to local authorities. Legally, he argues, the RSC is not a local authority. He declares the RSCs are disastrous in terms of taxes and levies, subsidies and borrowing. Solomon does not view RSCs as financially viable bodies. The RSC system lacks internal safeguards or checks and balances, and they do not enjoy legitimacy. He concludes that, "Local autonomy is a useful policy principle in South Africa, regardless of who implements it. It is clear however that the RSC initiative is not fostering local autonomy, but political hegemony. As such, it can only succedd if supported by active force."

Poto (Chapter 8) in a novel way looks at the financial and political viabilities of Black Local Authorities – perceived as serving the interest of the government, they lack credibility and legitimacy. Thus their future is bleak.

Poto suggests that the South African government begins negotiations with representative leaders and that the government should attempt to depoliticise local government in order for BLAs to play an effective role in local government structure.

Humphries (Chapter 9) postulates that while BLAs focus on own affairs, the RSCs were partly introduced to effect Black participation at the general affairs level, indirectly linking the Black community to central government. To legitimise this, attempts were made to improve the living conditions of urban Blacks via the redistribution of the revenue clause of the RSCs. Linked to this exercise, is the security strategy, effectively introduced with the collapse of Black authorities nationally. The common assumption shared by both constitutional and security officials is that local authorities lack legitimacy due to insufficient infrastructural resources and not any political opposition to the local authorities.

Humphries argues that the States of Emergency have been delcared to ensure the survival of local authorities in the face of political opposition, rather than to ensure broad national security.

In conclusion, Humphries questions both the chances of the policies of the National Party towards local authorities succeeding and future government policies towards BLAs. He predicts that RSCs will have difficulty in generating enough funds to "affect the political standing of local authorities single-handedly."

Seegers (Chapter 10) focuses on the development of the National Security Management System (NSMS), using a "civil-military" approach. She traces the creation of the State Security Council, Total National Strategy and the

Total Onslaught Strategy. She argues that Joint Management Centres (JMCs) can fill in the administrative gaps in local government – which collapsed especially in Black and Coloured areas. She maintains that even in White areas, the JMCs can be used to address problems created by the RSCs. In conclusion, Seegers states that "As long as the security establishment does not qualify its service to the state, it is condemned to play a role of quasi-police and quasi-government."

Atkinson and Heymans (Chapter 11) cite their concerns on the expectations of practitioners about the government's reform process and practitioner's views about developments towards non-racial institutions at a local level.

They do recognise that civic and other township groupings demand single, non-racial local authorities.

Their concluding remarks are that local government is a possible arena for political accommodation since extra-institutional opposition groups and many White participants are open to suggestions other than government ones.

David Dewar (Chapter 12) identifies three relevant characteristics of urban development in the future – urban growth, poverty and unemployment, and levels of income inequality. To address these issues meaningfully he calls for marked changes in city management practices.

He points out that local government needs to be decentralised and rebuilding should begin at the local level with people directly affected by decisions controlling such decisions. He tends to isolate the changes needed in urban centres from the overall political changes needed in South Africa. Aside from mentioning the Group Areas Act, he does not discuss any Apartheid policies which impede the proper operation of city planning and urbanisation strategies.

This chapter would have been much more appropriate if it were written in the context of South Africa's apartheid policies, and had taken into account the effects of increased rural-urban migration, and the poverty/under-development of rural areas.

Watson (Chapter 13) makes the point that non-racialism is only the first step in the move towards a democratic system of government.

It is suggested that functions of local authority be widely defined and decentralisation be carried out as far as possible. Watson criticises amalgamation, saying that it reduces democracy as it increases bureaucracy of administration. Watson's concluding remark is that the

system of representation, the powers allocated to central government, the local finance system and the structure of local government must change in order to solve South Africa's developmental problems.

Swilling (Chapter 14) traces the development of local government in South Africa under the Apartheid regime – community councils, BLAs and RSCs. After laying the foundations of non-racial municipalities. he discusses the significance of the Freedom Charter to local government. Swilling concludes that "The future of the South African political crisis will depend to a large extent on what happens at the local level." The Black majority is now demanding the right to determine its own future.

Atkinson (Chapter 15) discusses the necessity for local government restructuring, the importance of shared political values, the importance of negotiations and finally proposals for the resuscitation of local initiatives. However she argues strongly for a need to create the climate for negotiations at both local and national levels.

Local government negotiations are likened to negotiations at the national level. It is incumbent on central government to create the climate for negotiations – as "Effective negotiations cannot take place from a position of a monopoly of white power. Such a monopoly will only breed suspicion, resentment and radicalism."

Reviewing the chapters together, it emerges clearly that there is too much overlap and repetition, especially when dealing with the RSCs. A certain degree of repetition is understandable in view of the fact that different authors wrote each chapter, but the extent could have been reduced.

The major weakness of the book is the absence of the voice of the extra-parliamentary opposition.

The term "restructuring" is used loosely to lend credibility to the State's reform initiatives which in practice, are not designed to discard, but to further entrench, apartheid. Restructuring is the state's method or reproducing Apartheid and strengthening the inequalities embedded in the system rather than transforming society to a more just and equitable system.

While the authors recognise this, they continue using the term in the above context, creating a degree of confusion. In the context of their arguments, perhaps a more appropriate term ought to have been "reproducing/-entrenching Apartheid."

For all this, the book is a very useful read and is warmly recommended. □