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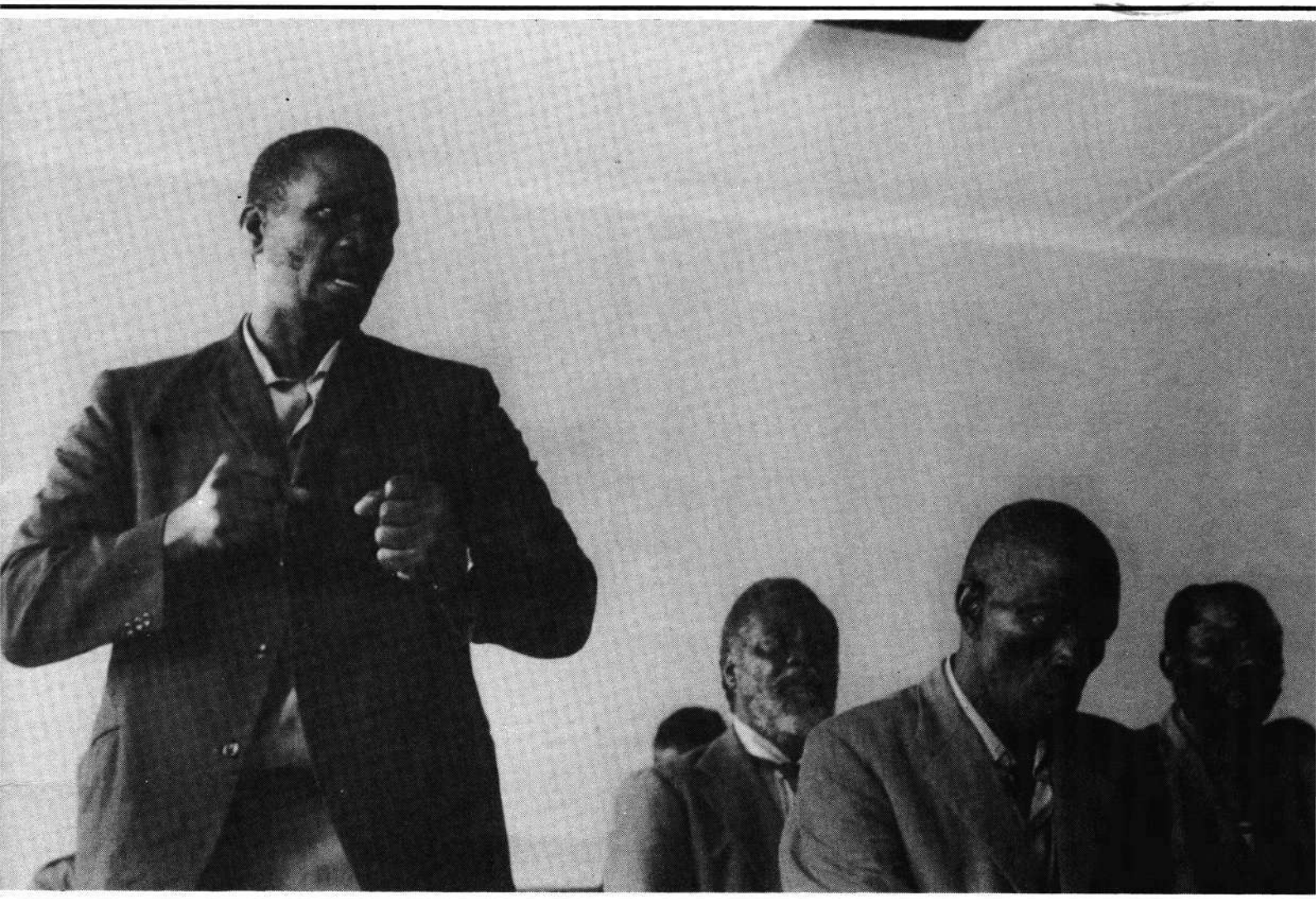

Farmers Association Meeting, Mpukonyoni

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SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Articles printed in **Reality** do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Editorial Board

Note: Because the arrival of some of the articles for this issue was delayed, and it will therefore reach subscribers late, we are making it into a double issue: Volume 20 Nos 2 and 3, for March and May, 1988.

We also very much regret that rising costs have forced us to increase our subscription rates, after having kept them at their present rate for four years, a period during which there has been a severe escalation in our costs. The new rates are to be found on page 25.

Editorial Board.

EDITORIALS

1. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE LATEST CRACKDOWN

The main body of this issue of REALITY is devoted to a series of articles on changes which have taken place at the local government level in South Africa in our recent years of upheaval, and how things might develop in that area in the future.

When on February 24th the State President set about, once again, banning some of his principal opponents — organisations and individuals — the question had to be faced again, as it has so often in 40 years of Nationalist rule, "What do we do now?" That question had to be asked after Sharpeville, after Soweto in 1976, after the banning of the Black Consciousness groups in 1977, and after the declaration of each of the two recent States of Emergency.

Different people arrived at different answers, some turning to the "armed struggle", some to apathetic capitulation, some to new forms of organisation, some to trying to use the "system" to subvert its basic apartheid intentions.

There is at least the suggestion in some of the articles which follow that there may be new opportunities to be found in the emerging local government structures to start working against apartheid there. A muted debate has been going on in even more radical extra-parliamentary opposition circles lately over the relative merits of boycott and participation in some of the new institutions the Government is creating. In the Parliamentary field the Progressive Federal Party has now accepted the possibility that it might contest Coloured and Indian seats in the tri-cameral Parliament in future. This was condemned as the worst kind of opportunism by some elements in the UDF but others might think differently, at least at the local government level.

It will be interesting to see how this debate develops. Its outcome could decide the direction in which the extra-parliamentary opposition moves in what promises to be another very difficult period ahead.

Mr Botha's new measures will no more bring opposition to apartheid to an end than did the ones his government has tried before, but they will make his opponents examine their choices once again.□

Cover Picture by Paul Weinberg

2. THE BOP SHOW

Any hopes Bophuthatswana might have had of anyone ever taking its claims to independence seriously must have vanished with its government's rescue by South African forces from February's farcical coup.

Add that farce to the pantomime which has been going on in the Transkei for the past year and it would seem to be a good time for a sensible government to be beating a tactical retreat from the policies which spawned both places. Unfortunately that isn't the kind of government we have here. President Mangope hadn't been rescued a week and Dr Gerrit Viljoen, Minister of Development Aid, and commonly believed to be one of South Africa's **more** sensible Ministers, was announcing the addition of more land to KwaNdebele, a place whose pretensions to viability of any sort are non-existent. And this follows soon after the incorporation of Botshabelo into the "homeland" of QwaQwa. What was previously one resettlement camp, at QwaQwa, has now become two. Situated 330 kilometres apart, they are all that QwaQwa is.

That there has to be a redistribution of land between white and black in South Africa, there can be no question. The criteria on which that redistribution takes place should be fairness and future productivity, not the discredited fantasies of Dr Verwoerd.□

3. BOTHAS ECONOMICS

The State President's announcement at the opening of Parliament of his economic plans for our future — a new tax system, privatisation of some of the most important state enterprises, and a freeze on civil services wages — was greeted with everything from applause to outrage.

On one count, at least, he deserves credit, and that is his decision to peg the salaries of government employees. It took some courage to do this when the people concerned probably provide the Conservative Party with one of its most fertile recruiting grounds. What a pity that Mr Botha didn't have the courage to challenge the same people by making an announcement in the same speech of some real political reforms, instead of pandering to them a few weeks later by placing new muzzles on the extra-parliamentary forces with whom he will one day have to negotiate. He must surely know that our economic problems will only be properly resolved when the political ones start to be properly addressed.□

4. DOING THEIR DAMNEDEST

The South African Government seems to have been overtaken by a galloping madness.

What other explanation can their be for its army's continuing presence deep in Angola; for the mass banning of many of its most vigorous opponents; for its proclaimed intention to emasculate most others by cutting off their access to overseas funds; for its blasting with water-cannon the peaceful attempt by leading churchmen to present it with a petition; or, finally, for its petulant challenge to the United Nations, in the face of all this provocation, to "do its damnedest" about it?

Each of these crass actions presents a grave threat to our prospects for a relatively peaceful resolution of our problems, but the UN challenge could prove to be the most lunatic of all. It can only isolate South Africa even further from the world, make its increasingly half-hearted friends even less anxious to seem friendly, and make the possibility of outside mediation in helping to resolve our growing crisis even less likely than the Government's aborting of the Eminent Persons mission has already done.

The United Nations has no need to 'do its damnedest' to destroy South Africa. Our own Government is doing the job for it.□

SPECIAL SERIES ON LOCAL POLITICS

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by Alison Todes

DEVELOPMENTAL IMPLICATIONS OF SINGLE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The development of the 'apartheid city' – characterised by extensive separation of races, income groups and activities in space – has imposed significant problems of inequalities between areas, and has aggravated the position of the poor. These problems are reinforced and exacerbated by the existing system of local government – its fragmentation and the push for relatively small, racially exclusive primary local authorities. While regional and metropolitan local government is being created through the institution of Regional Services Councils, the fragmented structure of local government below this level remains and is even being reinforced by current state policy. Local government in this form perpetuates previous inequalities and is unable to rise to the challenge of the present time: the need to effect redistribution between areas, and to institute developmental policies.

State policy on local government presently favours relatively small, independent ethnically based primary local authorities. While this policy is rationalized in terms of an ideology of local autonomy and "own affairs", the reality is that the new system is being superimposed on a highly uneven and unequal urban structure. For most local authorities, the most important revenue source for non-trading activities is rates levied on property. Hence, the higher income an area, the larger its number of industrial and commercial concerns, the greater its revenue. As a result of state policy, land use zoning and the urban land market, higher income White areas and industrial and commercial activities tend to be centrally located while Black and particularly new low-income Black areas are on the periphery of the city. Since these areas are predominantly low-income dormitory residential suburbs, autonomy for Black areas inevitably implies extreme financial stringency. It is hardly surprising then that so many African local authorities have been faced by bankruptcy nor that autonomous local authorities have been so fiercely resisted by black communities.

For African areas, 'autonomy' from White local authorities, initially in the form of rule by Administration Boards in the early 1970's, meant a steady decline in the extent and standards of services available as areas lost access to the wider revenue sources of white local authorities and the less visible forms of 'subsidy' inherent in access to shared services. Taking Cape Town as an example, the net effect for African areas is that their expenditure per capita on non-trading services is in the order of a third of that pertaining in the core Cape Town City Council and a tenth of that in predominantly white and highly industrialised Milnerton. In consequence, social and infrastructural services in African areas are inevitably rudimentary or of extremely low standard.

While autonomy for well-heeled areas with a good proportion of non-residential uses means high service standards and an ability to choose services required, the opposite is clearly the case for middle and low-income dormitory areas. For these areas, incorporation into a larger and wealthier local authority with diverse land uses and revenue sources makes sense. Quite apart from savings in terms of economies of scale in management, it is at least possible for lower income areas to pressurize for and benefit from cross-subsidy from higher income areas. A unified form of local government also allows residents in low-income areas to benefit financially from access to rates created partly by their labour (in employment areas) or consumption (in commercial areas). Inevitably, low or lower-middle income suburbs which are part of a larger, more diverse local authority have a higher expenditure per capita and a wider range of services than those which are self-financing. Hence for example, in the Durban area in 1984/5, expenditure per capita in the largely self-financing Development and Services Board Indian area of Shallcross was approximately R56 compared to R84 in the adjacent Southern Indian Local Affairs Committee area of the Durban City Council. The Southern Indian Local Affairs Committee area has been able to benefit from a cross subsidy of the order of R24 per capita from rates generated in other Council areas, while Shallcross has access only to the hidden subsidy involved in limited payment for central Development and Services Board management and engineering services. In consequence, almost all local authority expenditure in Shallcross is directed to very basic utility services (sewerage, water, engineering services etc.).

Only 4% of Shallcross' expenditure is on social and recreational services compared to some 16% in Durban's Southern Indian Local Affairs Committee area. Significantly, Shallcross does still benefit from being part of a larger system (40% of the Development and Services Board's central operations are subsidized by the Natal Provincial Administration), and would lose out were it to become independent as is currently proposed.

The state is, of course, not unaware of the financial problems involved in establishing independent Black local government – as various reports of the late 1970's and early 1980's demonstrate. In theory, improved revenue sources are to become available through the Regional Services Councils and by 'industrialising' black local authorities – either by incorporating adjacent industrial areas in black local authorities, or by developing industrial areas within their boundaries. In practice, however, finance from Regional Services Councils is to be more limited than originally anticipated, and, in any event will be used primarily for new infrastructural development in the most marginal areas. 'Industrialisation' of black local authorities is also likely to yield disappointing results. Local politics and industrialists fears of 'inefficiency' will prevent the incorporation of industrial areas into black local authorities.

This is demonstrated by the recent decision of the Demarcation Board to retain Durban's Prospection industrial area within the white Amanzimtoti local authority rather than incorporating any part of it into the lower-income adjacent Indian Isipingo local authority. Conversely, unfavourable topography and the availability of better located, well serviced industrial land in the vicinity (Pinetown, Queensburgh) will prevent any significant industrialization in Shallcross.

Policy to create racially based autonomous local authorities ignores the extent to which cities are functionally integrated and the limits on the potential of peripherally located areas to develop an industrial base. It is widely recognised that the growth of industrial employment is tapering off in metropolitan areas as a result of a general slow down in economic growth rates and trends towards decentralisation away from metropolitan areas. Trends of this sort limit the extent to which peripherally located areas within the metropoles can benefit from a decentralisation of industry within the city. Even well established peripherally located points within metropolitan areas such as Pinetown within Durban are feeling the effects of competition from highly subsidized industrial decentralization points elsewhere. Given that industrial location within cities is already quite concentrated, and that there will be fewer industries in the future to distribute within them, the industrial rate base of newly autonomous black local authorities is likely to remain limited.

Similar points can be made about commercial uses. At present these uses are highly concentrated in CBD's (which are often the points of highest accessibility). Trends towards deconcentration largely benefit high-income white areas. Fledgling black local authorities cannot expect to benefit to any degree from commercial development.

Autonomy in the form of independent, ethnically based local authorities means that low-income Black local authorities face financial difficulties and are unable to gain access to the resources generated in wealthier areas, or by industrial and commercial land uses. This in turn means limited funds for development – whether understood as improvement in infrastructure and facilities, or employment and other projects.

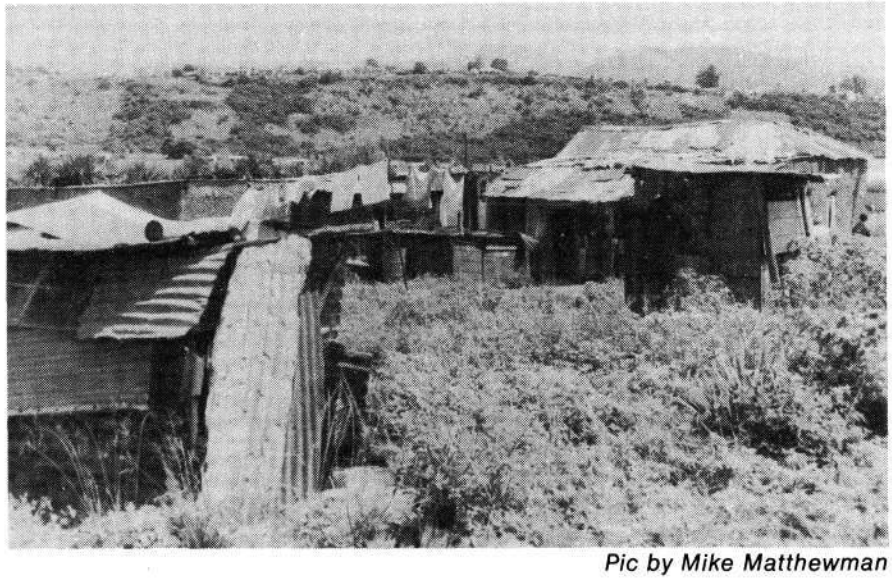
Critically, autonomy also means that residents in independent Black local authorities have little or no way of influencing the policy decisions of wealthier White local authorities – although these decisions may have an impact on their economic and social welfare. While the legal standing and financial power of local authorities is limited, a local authority which is oriented to the needs and interests of the poor can act in limited ways to improve their position.

Local authorities can take direct steps to reduce poverty and unemployment, for example, through policies to stimulate local employment, by supplementing national education and health facilities particularly in relation to pre-school care, and by subsidizing aspects of housing and transport. Physical planning policies can also be used to effect redistribution in more indirect ways. Two of the most pressing issues facing South African cities at present are the need to accommodate rapid urban growth, and to restructure the spatial form of the city along more equitable lines.

South African cities in their present form exacerbate poverty and inequality. The attenuated form of the city and huge home-work distances impose considerable time and money costs of commuting on the poor – and particularly on women.

The spatial separation of areas and income groups limits the build-up of threshholds for commercial activities and services in low-income areas. Low threshholds result in poor access to services in dormitory townships, and inhibit the development of the informal sector. Ideally, urban growth needs to be used to restructure cities towards greater compactness, more mixed land uses and income groups. In many respects this is a task for metropolitan planning, however centrally located local authorities could potentially attempt to facilitate this process by providing land for housing the poor, and by altering town planning restrictions which prevent a change in their class position or even increases in density. At present, these actions (or their impact) are limited by the existence of the Group Areas Act. However, they could become important in the future.

If the present path of creating autonomous black local authorities continues, then white local authorities will become increasingly insulated from the needs and demands of black communities. In this context, the need for change cannot even be discussed – let alone instituted in any real way. □



Pic by Mike Matthewman

by Melissa de Villiers

RULE BY THE BIG STICK

State of Emergency repression in the Eastern Cape

On June 12 1986, the South African government responded to a strong, resilient upsurge in popular resistance with an intensive security crackdown. The imposition of the country's third State of Emergency was part of a determined campaign to re-orientate the political process in favour of white domination. For close on two and a half years, the state's control over the country's turbulent townships had been in severe jeopardy. A spiral of violence, beginning in September 1984 with township protests signalling intensified and broad-based resistance to apartheid, met with an immediate and heavy-handed response from the security forces. By June 1986 over 2 000 people were estimated to have died in the unrest. Yet the townships remained mobilised as community organisations explored new and audacious ways of defending themselves against repression. In the space vacated by the collapse of unpopular local government structures the grassroots, decentralised democracy of street and area committees had begun to take hold.

The nature of the state's actions since the declaration of this third Emergency suggest five broad aspects to the Emergency strategy. Firstly, the state is trying to eliminate organised resistance as a pre-condition for advancing the reform programme. To this end there has been an attempt to seriously disrupt popular opposition forces by detaining thousands of supporters for lengthy periods, often up to 18 months or more. Secondly, the state has attempted to close off the legal space in which anti-apartheid groupings have operated. The banning of meetings, the regulations controlling funerals and prohibiting calls for boycotts, strikes and the lifting of the Emergency itself, are aimed at hindering the capacity of oppositional groupings to mobilise and win further support. In addition, curbs on the press have the effect of disallowing these groupings a public voice. Intensified SADF attacks on Frontline states since the Emergency was declared, suggest a third part of the Emergency pattern is to prevent the advance of the ANC's armed struggle.

Serious disputes and divisions within the Nationalist Party have for some time echoed a wider insecurity within the white community as to the government's ability to implement an effective solution to the country's political crises. The "success" of Emergency repression in slowing and, in places, halting township violence (though not, of course, state violence) has meant a further part of the Emergency strategy has been fulfilled: the business community's support for the state has, to some extent, been restored by official "proof" that the restoration of "law and order" is a necessary pre-condition for successful reform initiatives. Economists have claimed that the Emergency has restored confidence by removing uncertainty and that foreign investment continues. Lastly, the state has tried to re-unite the right-wing by demonstrating that it has the power, through Emergency repression, to control the African majority and that it is not prepared to bow to international pressure.

More sophisticated than the 1985 version, there can be little doubt that the third Emergency has halted — albeit temporarily — the erosion of the state's authority. Extra-parliamentary opposition has been bruised. For example, it is estimated that between 25 000 and 40 000 people were detained under Emergency regulations during the first 12 months of the third Emergency alone. Where organised mass opposition had created "people's committees" in the townships, the state has begun to impose Regional Services Councils to re-govern the areas. The state has also developed further strategies in its efforts to disrupt the pattern of black community loyalties. In the absence of authentic leaders as a result of widespread detentions, new instruments of state policy — the Joint Management Committees, the municipal police and "kitskonstabels" — have been introduced into townships countrywide.

This paper focuses on some current aspects of State of Emergency repression in the Eastern Cape, one of South Africa's most politicised regions. While every aspect of the Emergency strategy outlined above has left its impact on the region, only several are examined here. It is not the intention to downplay the existence of other forms of official or unofficial violence in the region. Rather, the primary concern is to examine those repressive phenomena which most clearly illustrate the twin themes of the Emergency's impact on South Africa's black communities: terror and disorganisation.

THE EASTERN CAPE: "LABORATORY OF RESISTANCE"

In a pamphlet issued in Grahamstown in September 1987 by a group calling itself "Victims against Terrorism", the Eastern Cape is referred to as a region "used for a number of experiments to promote the revolution in South Africa".[1] If there is some truth in this, then the region is certainly also one in which the government has experimented with its own strategies to counter revolution. The region has been subjected to extremely heavy repression in the successive waves of Emergency clampdowns. There are simple reasons for this: the Eastern Cape had advanced to a particularly high level of organisational and ideological development by the time the third Emergncy was declared.

Several key elements characterise this phase of resistance. Firstly, a clear rejection by blacks of the state's reform initiatives. Mobilisation and organisation of community residents occurred independently of the national and local political institutions so tightly controlled by the state. This does not merely relate to the fact that blacks are excluded from institutions like the tri-cameral parliament, but also that systems of local government like the town councils were seen as unrepresentative and undemocratic.

Secondly, resistance assumed regional and even national proportions, partially because of the emergence of national co-ordinating bodies like the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). There was also a more spontaneous process whereby political strategies successful in one area had an inspirational effect on other areas, building strong relationships between local black communities. In the Eastern Cape, a whole panoply of community-based organisations — women's, youth, student, civic and church groupings — were active in local townships under the broad umbrella of the UDF by the time the third Emergency was declared.

Finally, the UDF represents a broad alliance with a firm commitment to a unitary, non-racial and democratic South Africa in an open political challenge to white power and privilege.

The set of political conditions in the Eastern Cape which brought forth such strategies as rent, school and consumer boycotts as well as general wide-scale unrest were intertwined with particular socio-economic pressures. The Eastern Cape is one of the most impoverished regions in South Africa. In a recent unpublished study, Davies (1986) outlines the reasons for the crippled state of the local economy as connected to decades of governmental neglect in favour of the Ciskei/Transkei/Border corridor area, as well as an over-reliance on the motor and motor components industries.[2] Recent rationalisations in the motor industry, as a result of the recession, compounded the situation.

A schools boycott which began in early 1984 in Cradock, in protest at the dismissal of community leader and headmaster Matthew Goniwe, was the first sign of things to come. It seems accurate to say that this boycott inspired other black students in the region and later in the Transvaal to take similar action during the coloured and Indian elections for the tricameral parliament in August that year. Widespread schools' boycotts were then launched specifically as a protest against the new constitution. Frustration at unrepresentative reform initiatives like the revised constitution which seemed very unlikely to make any material or political difference to blacks' day-to-day experience found more specific expression when students took issue with their educational system as well, calling, for example, for democratic SRC's. The inevitable confrontations with security forces which followed set off a cycle of violence and counter-violence between the youth and the police in 1985.

Yet, attempts by the state to repress the student protest had the effect of mobilising support for the students and of further politicising other residents in the townships. This was to lead to a redirection of the focus of the struggle away from education and towards apartheid in general. In the Eastern Cape, this redirected energy found expression in the extensive campaign waged by the UDF against local black authorities. The youth turned their anger against the councillors and other state authorities — policemen, soldiers, informers — perceived as apartheid's agents. And since the state's most consistent response to this protest was a repressive one, it was not long before the focus of resistance shifted again to settle on the question of repression itself. Community organisation in the region and elsewhere called for the withdrawal of troops from the townships and the lifting of the ban on meetings.

1985 was also the year when black consumer boycotts of white-owned businesses brought the message of protest home to white commerce all over the country. Again, the Eastern Cape was the region where this strategy first emerged and by September it was reported that boycotts were in force in over 50 local towns, besides large parts of the Transvaal and in the Southern and Western Cape.

Some analysts claim the success of these boycotts was a major factor in provoking the declaration of the second, partial State of Emergency in the Eastern Cape late in July 1985. Yet it was in the face of the increased powers the emergency gave to the police and army that new forms of organisation began to appear. The grassroots, decentralised structures of street and area committees were formed during this emergency, designed to withstand the onslaught of repression by allowing for layers of leadership to be trained as replacements for those detained or on the run. In many parts of the region these structures began to take over certain aspects of township administration like rubbish removal and crime control, where the collapse of local government meant that these services had stopped. Thus the street and area committees had begun to function as rudimentary organs of "people's power".

In a recent study on the Eastern Cape, Roux and Helliker (1986) state that the political climate of this period was particularly conducive to the development of mass resistance; the popularity of the UDF and its affiliates was likewise significant in making the strategies of protest possible. The fact that the UDF and its affiliates managed to present themselves to local communities as respectable opponents of apartheid and, indeed, symbols of hope, was the result of the unity, action and direction they had brought to the remotest of small East Cape townships and to the region as a whole.[4]

For the South African state, this resilience was clearly unacceptable. In June 1986 the State President declared a new State of Emergency which, unlike the limited 1985 version, applied throughout South Africa. This Emergency has submitted popular opposition in the Eastern Cape to an extremely tough test.

STATE OF EMERGENCY REPRESSION IN THE EASTERN CAPE

The extensive powers of arrest and detention granted by Emergency regulations to all members of the security forces have been used far more widely in the Eastern Cape than in any other part of the country except the Pretoria/Witwatersrand/Vaal triangle.[6]

Of the recorded figures which specify the age of a detainee, 47% relate to detainees under 21 years of age, and 19% to detainees between the ages of 21 and 25. Children — officially, persons under the age of 18 — have thus emerged as a major target grouping of Emergency detentions. Only a quarter of those detained are active political activists.[7]

The pattern of arrests in the Eastern Cape has been roughly thus: detentions peaked at the start of the Emergency in June/July 1986 and rose further, but more slowly, until September that year. Releases slowly started to counterbalance the new arrests through to April 1987. A lull in arrests then lowered the overall figure. On 11 June 1987, the day before the first anniversary of the third Emergency, a mass release of 60 detainees gave hope that many more would be returning home. Instead, the detainee population dropped very slightly until a handful of releases in November reduced the recorded figure to 158 detainees still inside.[8]

The full process of the state's detention strategy must be seen to include the disorientating experience of release into a politically weakened community where work, family life and political organisation have all been severely disrupted. Where the released detainee is the family breadwinner, further problems may occur when former bosses refuse to give the workers their jobs back on the grounds that they will not employ a "political".[9] And while large-scale detentions are no longer routine, the SAP continue to use this strategy to suppress the emergence of any township organisation seen to be acting in opposition to state policy.

The Eastern Cape was popularly known by activists as a "laboratory" where national oppositional strategies were first applied. Perhaps it was only logical for Botha to use this region to test one of the emergency's newest and most repressive offspring: the municipal police.

Municipal police or "greenflies" first emerged in the townships of the Eastern Cape in April 1986. Officially, the powers of the municipal police have been defined as "the prevention of crime" and "the maintenance of law and order". Although trained by the SAP, they are employed by local authorities and are directly responsible to them.

By mid-1987, however, reports from township residents as far afield as Thabong in the Orange Free State and Port Alfred in the Eastern Cape were alleging that municipal police were guilty of large-scale abuses of power in the townships, and claiming that they were chiefly responsible for changing the mood of township residents from protest to fear.[10]

A study of 260 incidents of municipal police activity carried out by the Black Sash between April 1986 and July 1987 reveals one common thread linking all cases. The municipal police form part of the state's efforts to fill the vacuum left by the decline of community organisations and to coerce support instead for "responsible" black local authorities. Municipal policemen are used to guard the homes of councillors, to act as their personal bodyguards and to carry out some of their tasks such as the eviction of rent defaulters.

A second pattern of municipal police activity shows how they act as black auxiliaries of the South African Police (SAP), especially with regard to the work of the security police. A number of cases studied describe the municipal police arresting and interrogating residents on suspicion of carrying out acts of political violence or of belonging to political organisations whose meetings have been banned under emergency regulations. In several cases the suspect has been handed over to the SAP, who have formally detained him/her. Municipal policemen who have been recruited from the same community they control are well-placed to pick up on local tensions and political gossip. In some instances this uneasy intimacy has caused deep community rifts. As an Alexandria resident put it: "The trouble is that here some of them were first comrades, with the youth, and then they joined the municipal police. So they know everything."[11]

A third trend involves co-operation between right-wing black vigilante groupings and municipal police, and the induction of vigilantes themselves into the force. "Some of these people who are now serving as municipal policemen (in Fort Beaufort) had fled the township through unrest. They were part of vigilante groups. When the system of black municipal police was created they joined in full force and now it appears they are bent on revenge," claim Fort Beaufort residents.[12]

There are several reasons why the municipal police have proved a more effective repressive medium than blunt police repression or community council ploys. Firstly, use of this force has enabled the state to withdraw SAP and SADF troops to the background in many townships, thereby seeming to accede to the "Troops Out" call voiced so long and loud by black communities. Secondly, the lure

Pic. Eric Miller – Afrapix

of steady wages within the state system has aided the process of black co-option into government services, thereby exploiting the divisions present in already pressurised communities. Thirdly, by referring to municipal police excesses in the townships as "black-on-black violence", the state has on occasion successfully been able to obscure the links between the conflicting parties and apartheid structures. And lastly, press curbs mean the activities of municipal policemen often go unreported.

The municipal police are making their own special contribution to township violence and the disruption of extra-parliamentary opposition. Alongside such methods of direct control the Emergency strategy involves the use of co-optive methods as well. The State Security Council's Emergency Management Systems (EMS) is one example. The logic behind the EMS is derived from United States military academy counter-insurgency doctrine and draws particularly on an approach termed "low-intensity warfare". Advocates of the approach describe it as "total war at grassroots level", where the emphasis is given to political rather than conventional military operations. The objective is to isolate, through close surveillance, "terrorist" or "revolutionary" elements without antagonising the rest of the population, who are wooed with promised reform. In this way state social welfare programmes take precedence over military operations, and force is considered a last resort.

In black townships throughout the Eastern Cape (and nationally) this strategy is being implemented through local mini-Joint Management Centres (JMCs), connected through regional structures to a Cabinet Minister's Committee under the chairmanship of the State President. Convened by the security forces and unaccountable to any structure beyond the shadowy State Security Council, the JMCs aim to bring together representatives from all state departments and local government authorities. Representatives from the tricameral parliament, school principals and teachers, members of parent-teacher associations and other community figures of influence are invited to join.

The JMCs are primarily concerned with gathering intelligence on political activity in their area. Such intelligence enables the security forces to better target members of resistance groupings. At the same time, the JMCs seek to identify potentially explosive community grievances. So the strategy includes both reform and repression, where failure to suppress resistance has led the state to re-emphasise cosmetic improvement in the townships while consolidating its security networks there.

Given the mantle of secrecy surrounding JMC operations, it is not surprising that there is a distinct lack of information on the government's current "upgrade" programmes in Eastern Cape townships. Residents themselves certainly know little more than what they are told by low-level state officials of long-overdue plans to pave their roads, install drainage and street lights, and build clinics and sportsfields. These improvements have been among demands made by community organisations for many years, and oppositional groupings could accurately claim their implementation as a victory. However, extra-parliamentary organisations must now tackle the question whether Emergency repression has cowed communities to the extent that township residents might choose to accept these improvements in exchange for relinquishing political demands that challenge state power more directly.

From a cursory reading of the current state of authority in Eastern Cape townships, this might indeed appear to be the case. Townships which were strongholds of the "comrades" in 1985 and early 1986, have been transformed into passive and even alienated communities, largely under the control of pro-government forces. In many instances new black local authorities have been "appointed" — rather than elected — to administer the townships, buttressed by the power of auxiliaries like the municipal police and black SAP "kitskonstabels". Repression has made it almost impossible for community organisations to hold mass meetings, while the presence of informers and municipal police make house meetings and door-to-door organising work extremely difficult. Detentions seem to be on the wane at present, but recent arrests show that the SAP are still ready to use this measure to suppress the emergence of any new organisation.[15]

In a recent article in the Weekly Mail, Patrick Laurence quotes a diplomat who remarked in an interview that the success of the State of Emergency seemingly reinforces all Botha's suppositions in declaring the Emergency. According to the diplomat, these were the State President's explicit and implicit beliefs that township revolt could be crushed by the application of greater force, that popular opposition forces could be seriously disrupted by detaining their leaders, and that the rebellion was fanned by press coverage and could therefore be contained by press restrictions.

But the ruling politicians have yet to show that the Emergency has enhanced their ability to deliver a lasting political solution. Indeed, by detaining and alienating literally thousands of community leaders, it may have made their task more difficult.[16] At a local level, the township residents of the Eastern Cape who fought the police, occupied schools, organised street committees and were detained without trial in such large numbers, must explore new ways of transcending the current stalemate. One fact remains: the exigencies of the third State of Emergency have not destroyed their struggle. Rather, the harshness of the Emergency's methods may have ensured that the struggle for a non-racial South Africa takes a more militant course.□

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2. Davies, W. J., A review of the socio-economic conditions in the Greater Algoa Bay area (GABA), ISER unpublished paper, Rhodes University 1986.
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6. DPSC monthly reports, 1986/1987.
7. DPSC, Special Report on the State of Emergency, Johannesburg, January 1987.
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10. Albany Black Sash, Unleashing the Wild Rats: Municipal Police in the Eastern Cape, unpublshed report, 1988.
11. Interview, Albany Black Sash files 1986.
12. Pamphlet issued by the Fort Beaufort Residents' Association (FORA), 1986.
15. The establishment of community advice offices in Fort Beaufort and Alexandria townships in December 1987 has already resulted in the detentions of several of those involved; while officials of a newly-established Rhodes University workers' union were arrested early in 1988 and are still detained.
16. Patrick Laurence article in Weekly Mail, June 1987.

by Cheryl Hendricks

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL RESISTANCE

INTRODUCTION

The South African state has embarked on a process of reform which has touched virtually all spheres of South African society. Many of these reforms have taken place at the level of local government. In opposition to the reform process, a host of extra-parliamentary organisations which had mushroomed in the 1980s, launched a series of protests. These protests were predominantly levelled at local government structures. This analysis focuses on community-based organisations opposition to the reforms at local government level.

Prior to the formation of the United Democratic Front (U.D.F.), community organisations also directed their struggle at local government, namely municipalities. This struggle took the form of campaigns against increases in service charges implemented by municipalities. These issues served as impetus to mobilise people as they were issues that directly affected the community.

With the formation of the U.D.F. this emphasis shifted to protests that directly challenged the existence of African, "coloured" and "Indian" local government structures. Although these protests were against local government structures, they served to challenge the reform process and to undermine the state policy of separate development.

Since 1982, the government has given top priority to the establishment of legitimate and viable local authorities. This, however, occurred within the framework of the "own" and "general" affairs principles of the 1983 constitution. Thus, racial distinctions formed the backbone of primary local authorities, while the Regional Services Councils were created for "joint decision-making" and to generate funds for the development of especially the townships[1].

However, instead of being accepted by the people they are intended to serve, these structures have become targets for community protests.

PROTESTS AGAINST LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES

The 1980s saw the emergence of many civic, youth and student organisations. These organisations grew out of the parent-student committees, support committees and various other groups which were formed during the protests that occurred from 1976 into the early 1980s.

Many of these organisations directed their struggles at increases in service charges, implemented by the municipalities. For example, the firtst protests of this nature, in the Cape Peninsula, occurred in Mitchell's Plain in 1980. Residents refused to pay a R2,00 penalty for defaulting to pay their electricity at the due date. This led to what became known as the Electricity Petition Campaign which lasted for a period of six months. Two hundred residents marched to the Cape Town City Council (C.C.C.) to hand over a petition. The residents were granted a month's grace if their account was less than R30, i.e. they would not have to pay the penalty.

Political mobilisation encouraged communities to no longer accept impositions from municipalities but to actively challenge their decisions. After the above-mentioned campaign, many communities launched other protests against increases implemented by the C.C.C. The Cape Areas Housing Action Committee (C.A.H.A.C.), which was the umbrella organisation for many of the civic associations existing in the Peninsula, initiated these protests. Campaigns against bus fare, water and electricity and other increases became the order of the day in virtually all townships throughout South Africa.

The following can be deduced from the above period of protest. Firstly, these protests developed out of issues that essentially affected only a specific community. Secondly, they never challenged the existence of local government structures per se, but rather presented opposition to decisions taken by municipalities.

In 1983, a united front of predominantly community-based organisations, namely the U.D.F., formed, with the specific aim of opposing the three "Koornhof" bills. These bills were the Orderly Settlement of Black Persons Bill, Black Local Authorities Bill and the Black Communities Development Bill, the latter two of which are in effect today. Although this was not the first time that the existence of local government structures was questioned (e.g. in 1977 we witnessed protests against the formation of community councils), it was the first time that opposition occurred on such a broad scale.

Opposition was not only directed at black local authorities, but also at the management and local affairs committees. Two campaigns can be mentioned to illustrate that these local government structures are unacceptable to the African, "coloured" and "Indian" communities.

Firstly, organisations canvassed for a boycott of the elections of black local authority, management and local affairs committee members. By staging a boycott, the community organisations intended to prove to the government that the official structures lacked support. To a large extent, this was proven to be correct by the low polls recorded. For example, the polls for management committee elections in Cape Town ranged from 1,81% to 11,98% in 1983, compared to the 16,8% to 17,6% poll (low as that was) in 1981.[2]

Secondly, the community organisations conducted a "Rent Boycott". Rent boycotts are boycotts of both rent (site) and service charges (water and electricity), which are billed and paid together.

The rent boycott had a regional character, predominantly occurring in the Transvaal and the Eastern Cape and, for the most part, only being staged in African areas. It was initiated in the P.W.V. area in September 1984, after the Lekoa Town Council decided to implement a rent hike. In 1985 it spread to the Eastern Cape and by 1986 had affected Soweto, Tembisa and Mamelodi.

The rent boycott differed from former rent boycotts in that it was implemented in part to achieve political goals, i.e. it attempted to make the local government structures unworkable. A U.D.F. pamphlet issued in August 1986, claimed that "The rent boycott weakens these structures and demonstrates to the government that there can be no taxation without representation and that the people will accept nothing less than majority rule".

The boycott therefore, highlighted grievances directly linked to the state's failure to give blacks substantive political rights in general and the persistent inadequacy and illegitimacy of the Black Local Authorities.[3] This strategy, coupled with the physical attacks on councillors, to a certain extent, had its desired effect, i.e. it has produced a crisis in black local government.

The rent boycott cost the state an estimated R300 million in lost revenue.[4] It is estimated that at least 300 houses of town councillors and African policemen were damaged by protesters, 12 town councillors were killed and an unknown number were being housed in "white" areas. Out of fear for their lives, 240 town councillors resigned.

The physical attacks on councillors is a recent phenomenon. Although, since the 1960s, the Non-European Unity Movement had been boycotting "apartheid institutions", ostracising their members, they never physically attacked them. However, since 1985, this threshold has been crossed. Predominantly charterist supporters introduced the "necklace" to deal with what they termed collaborators (e.g. members of town councils).

The state of emergency, instituted in 1986, has however been considerably successful in crushing violent resistance. Many community organisations ceased to function due to the detentions of their members, whilst the J.M.C.'s are playing a major role in the restoration of town councils.

The townships in which town councils collapsed, are being administered by administrators. According to Atkinson, Heymans and Humphries, the residents seem to give more credibility to the structures manned by the administrators. This flows from the material improvements which the administrators have effected in the townships under their control since their appointment.[5]

REASONS FOR THE COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS' REJECTION OF THESE STRUCTURES

The government-created structures are primarily rejected because they are based on ethnicity. They are considered to be a powerless appendage of the South African government and watchdogs for the status quo at local level. This is because black local authorities are under strict ministerial supervision. The Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning decides when to establish or dissolve a council, he may alter the name of the local authority, determine how many members the local body will have, and so on.

The areas that these authorities are supposed to govern are essentially dormitories, lacking the financial resources necessary for a town or city. They will therefore not be able to improve conditions in these townships.

At the U.D.F. national conference of April 1985, the meeting resolved that:

1. The state introduced the Black Local Authorities Act to control black people in the townships;
2. the government attempted to co-opt sectors of the "people" through this strategy.
3. The local authority acts have been totally rejected because of the illegitimacy and ineffectiveness in solving the problems of "our people".

Regional Services Councils have also been rejected for various reasons. Firstly, they are based on illegitimate racial structures; secondly, they have been imposed from above without adequate consultation, and thirdly, they will not improve the social and economic conditions of the township. This is because the demands for material improvements of the physical environment far exceed the capacities of the primary local authorities.

Finally, the stance adopted by the various organisations that the national question should be solved first, precludes any reform at local level being viewed as legitimate. U.D.F. informants have stressed the difficulty of affecting any significant reform at third tier as long as government policy remains premised on apartheid ideology.

They will not be satisifed with anything less than "full democratic rights for all in a united, non-racial South Africa". Thus, piecemeal attempts on the part of government will gain no acceptance. Instead, they will only serve to increase an already volatile situation.

CONCLUSION

The government faces two choices. A political solution to inaugurate local government institutions enjoying legitimacy, requires the state to negotiate with the organisations with communities' support in search of concessions that are mutually acceptable.

However, it seems that the state has chosen a different strategy. The state does not feel its domination sufficiently threatened to offer the concessions Inkatha seeks, still less the U.D.F.. Confidence in the success of coercion leads the government to continue with the counter-revolutionary and not democratic choice. It will therefore sustain repression and continue to impose ethnically segegated local government structures.

The paramilitary, kitskonstables and vigilantes will deal with any forms of opposition. This status quo will last until the next episode on insurrection.□

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by Steve Friedman

IMPLEMENTING THE REGIONAL SERVICES CONCEPT

A perspective

Six months after their establishment, Regional Services Councils seem destined to realise neither the worst fears of their criticis nor the hopes of their supporters.

THE RSC CONCEPT

RSCs were initially designed to extend the 1984 constitution's formula for "power-sharing" to non-African local government. But, once African local authorities were granted representation on the councils, it soon became clear that they would stand or fall by their impact on local government in African townships.

Some of their supporters insisted — and still do — that RSCs were a first step towards non-racial local government, that they were, as one senior constitutional planner put it, the "thin edge of the wedge" which would prompt the demise of segregated third-tier government.

Symbolically, RSCs were indeed important departures from apartheid policies because they recognised the need to give black communities a more equitable share of both wealth and power. But, because they did this within a formula which entrenched both segregated local government and effective white control, they were seen more generally, by both government decision-makers and their opponents, as an attempt to create credibility for segregated local government.

Government planners conceded that their decision to grant segregated black local authorities formal autonomy but to refuse them the finance they needed to run the townships had been a mistake. It had forced township residents to foot the bill for services directly through steep rent and service charge increases; unable to afford the increases, they had resisted, sparking the unrest which began in late 1984 and the collapse of many black local authorities.

The RSCs, they argued, would rectify the error by providing the councils with the resources they needed to serve township residents and would, therefore, help them become viable. And, by granting them a say in development decisions, the new councils would also give the black local authorities real power to "deliver the goods". Most government decision-makers thus hoped, and some critics of apartheid feared, that RSCs would provide black local authorities with resources and influence and thus give segregated local government a credibility among township residents it had never enjoyed.

RSCs also raised another set of hopes and fears. The councils are designed to improve township conditions, but they rely primarily not on central government funding but on levies raised from business in their areas. This was seen as an attempt by the government to escape direct responsibility for upgrading and running the segregated black townships whose poverty deprives their local authorities of an effective base.

Attempts to shift the burden onto township residents had failed. Instead RSCs aimed to shift the burden to employers, who would have to pay the levies which would fund black local government, and workers, who would pay indirectly through the higher prices, lower real wages and reduced job opportunities which the levies would ensure.

However, since the burden would now be borne indirectly, the risk of resistance would be reduced: while decisions by black local authorities to raise rents and tariffs inevitably prompted resistance which was aimed directly at the councils, township residents would be far less likely to link the indirect consequences of higher levies to the black local government system. The government could thus force township residents to bear the costs of segregated local government — but without prompting a backlash. Again, some government planners shared this view and hoped that RSCs would do just that.

EARLY EXPERIENCES

RSCs were, then, seen as a means of entrenching segregated local government by acting as agents of both development and constitutional reform. Early in the life of the experiment, there are signs that some of the councils may achieve gains on the first score — on the second, their prospects are bleaker. While RSCs have hardly begun their development work, they have drawn up their first budgets and outlined their priorities; some have also begun providing bulk services in their region.

Those on the Witwatersrand appear to be in earnest about devoting resources to the black townships. The Central Witwatersrand RSC thus plans to devote R66m of its R70m budget to township development[1] — only R4m has been earmarked for administration and this would seem to allay fears that a large chunk of RSC revenue would be used to fund a growing bureaucracy. The East Rand RSC appears similarly to see township upgrading as a priority — it has voted R35m for the purpose[2]. Even the Highveld RSC, whose white local authorities are dominated by right-wingers, plans to devote the bulk of its revenue to the townships[3]. Another interesting feature of the Central Wits RSC's early priorities is that it rejected a plea from the Soweto council to fund a R12m civic centre for the local authority, arguing that basics such as sewage were a far greater priority than upgrading the offices of councillors[4].

But these promising early signs are by no means uniform. The Pretoria RSC has thus devoted a large part of its first budget to development in white areas[5]. It is unlikely that their need for infrastructure is greater than that of Pretoria's black townships and this suggests that, in some areas, white municipalities will use their superior voting power to limit the resources which black areas receive.

In the Cape, the early signs are less promising still. There, RSCs are merely assuming the functions of Divisional Councils — in both Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, they are taking over not only the powers of the old Divcos, but their considerable deficits as well. The levies which RSCs are collecting are unlikely even to eliminate these let alone to provide funds for development.

Thus while RSCs were partly designed to reduce the need for black local authorities to raise rents, one of the Western Cape RSC's first decisions has been to do just that — a move which has prompted protests and calls for the increases to be frozen from the House of Representatives' Ministry of Housing and Local Government[6].

DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

RSCs' prospects of making significant inroads into township backlogs will also diminish sharply if they are expected to help local authorities in African areas overcome their growing financial crisis.

In June, the Administrator of the Transvaal, Mr Willem Cruywagen, said that RSC aid would help to reduce the councils' deficits[7] — the West Rand RSC has loaned R9m to black local authorities[8]. But there are clearly limits to RSCs' ability to fund township councils directly and the authorities appear to hope rather that RSCs' role in providing township services and infrastructure will itself relieve the pressure on council budgets.

It is also worth stressing that even those RSCs which do seem committed to development are not about to wipe out backlogs in the townships overnight. Thus the amount which its constituent councils have asked the Central Wits RSC to devote to electricity projects in its first year is only a third of the total they believe is needed to wipe out backlogs and, by its own estimates, the RSC's upgrading programme is likely to take four or five years to remove backlogs.

Urban planners sympathetic to the RSCs believe, however, that the councils will not be able to make a substantial impact on backlogs unless their revenue base is increased significantly. They predict, therefore, that RSC levies will increase fivefold as the new councils confront the fact that vastly increased resources will be needed to fund the upgrading which could give black local government an economic base.

This, of course, raises the spectre cited by some RSC critics — that they will be able to fund effective development only if they place a significant burden on business in their areas. Vastly increased levies might curb economic growth in the cities, eroding RSCs' revenue base and compounding the development problems they are supposed to relieve.

It remains to be seen whether RSCs who see township development as a priority will be able to raise enough money to fund it without threatening the viability of business in their area: one partial way out of the dilemma may emerge if RSCs seek loans from the capital market, an option which is now being punted by local government specialists[9]. Although loans obviously have to be paid back, this option may significantly relieve RSCs' need to fund upgrading through levy increases.

However, if the burden of funding RSCs does grow, it will not be borne by employers and workers alone — for the government appears no longer to seek to use the councils to shift its responsibility for funding township improvements onto employers and, indirectly, township residents themselves.

Firstly, the government funds RSCs in two ways — it is, like all other employers, subject to RSC levies and it also allows private employers to claimn levies as a tax-deductible expense. Accordiong to Mr Gerrit Bornman, chairman of the Central Wits RSC, the government will therefore contribute 50% of RSC revenue[10] — local government specialists believe this is an underestimate. Secondly, RSCs have received significant bridging finance from the government in the form of interest-free loans from the provinces — some critics of the system claim that only this funding has enabled some councils to begin operating[11].

The demand for bridging finance seems likely to grow — estimates by the Western Cape RSC, for example, indicate that it will only be able to upgrade township infrastructure if it receives more central government aid[12].

While the government might obviously prefer RSCs to relieve it of responsibility for funding development, it seems to have accepted that township conditions will not be improved — and stability will thus not be ensured — unless it directly allocates money to development.

Finally, the government had intended to transfer responsibility for subsidising passenger transport to RSCs, thus divesting itself of an increasingly unaffordable burden. Officially, this intention has not been abandoned. It appears, however, that the resistance of white municipalities to this plan — which was almost universal — together with its impracticality have combined to ensure its abandonment.

Mounting transport subsidies, prompted by apartheid planning policies which force the black poor to live far from the workplace, would consume most of the RSCs' revenue, ensuring that they could contribute very little to development. Even if responsibility is transferred, the government has accepted that RSCs will not be able to fund subsidies from their own resources and has agreed that the Treasury will continue to bear that portion of the subsidy burden which RSCs cannot afford[13] — this may well mean that central government continues directly to pay out the vast bulk of transport subsidies.

The fact that the government will be bearing much of the burden if RSC costs do rise, suggests that levies will not be raised indiscriminately. This may allay fears that RSCs would choke urban development, but is likely to place limits on the extent to which they can carry out upgrading plans.

In sum, the early signs suggest that RSCs will not bleed employers and workers dry and that in some areas they will prompt significant township development. But their limited resources are likely to ensure that they can have at most a partial impact on township backlogs — and that their success in providing an economic base for segregated local government will be limited.

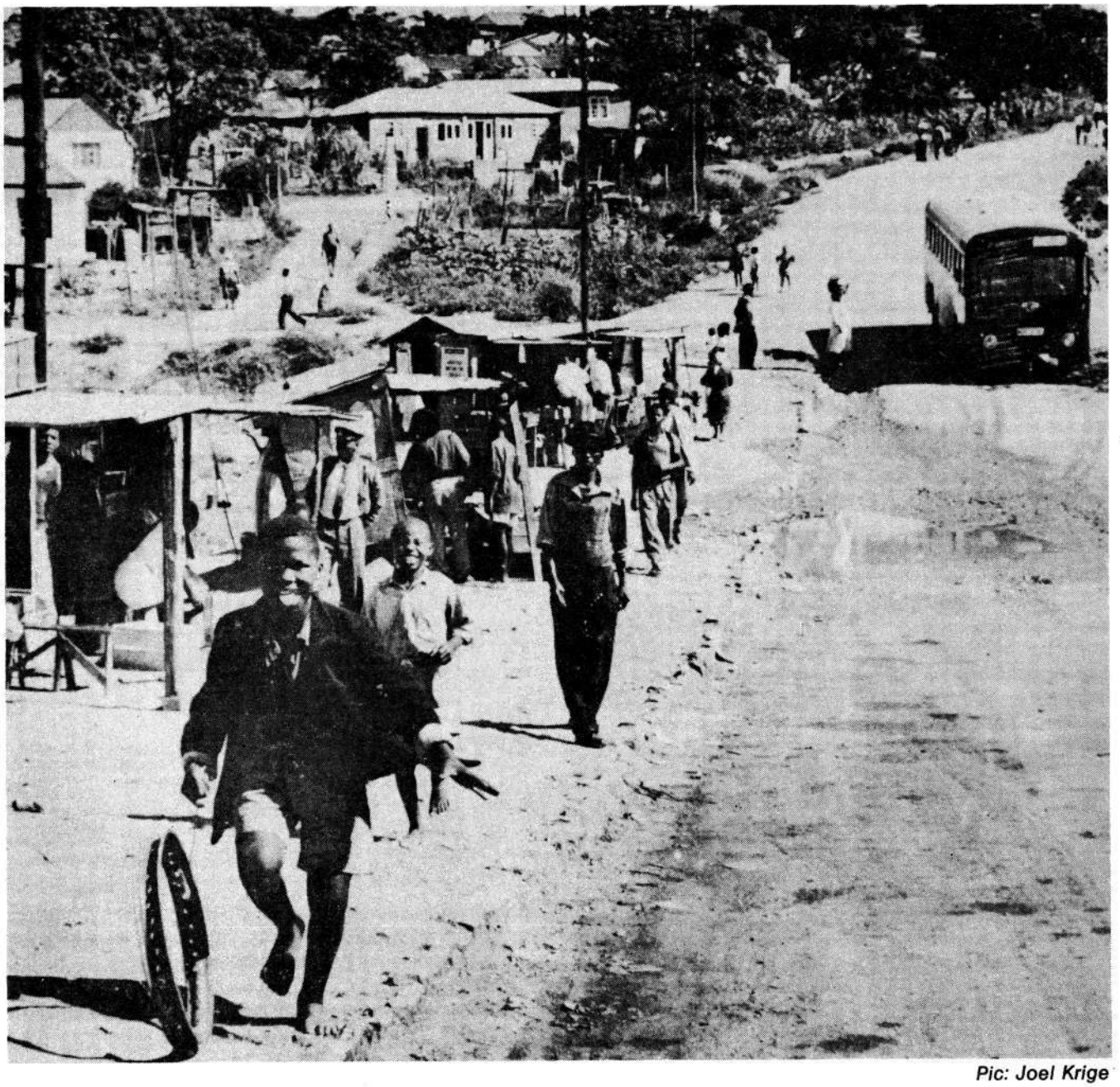
RSC POLITICS

RSCs' political role may, at this stage, be far less significant than their development function, for they seem likely to do little to boost the power or credibility of black local authorities.

Firstly, while they have only been operating for a few months, there is little evidence that RSCs are giving the township councils any more clout than they had before the experiment began. Thus the Pretoria black local authorities appear to have been unable to prevent the RSC allocating substantial funds to the white areas and coloured management committees in the Western Cape have been unable to prevent the council imposing a rent increase, despite the fact that this has been opposed by their local government ministry. Nor were the Soweto councillors able to convince their colleagues that they really needed a civic centre. Of course, they probably didn't and the rejection of their request appears to have been a sound development decision. But the incident does suggest that they have only limited influence on the RSC.

It suggests also that, should black councils attempt to use RSC resources to dispense patronage, they may be similarly thwarted if their requests conflict with its development priorities. It may also be significant that several East Rand black councils have formed an informal liaison committee with the Benoni city council to provide a platform for discussing the use of services in their area. This, of course, is what the RSC is supposed to do — but at least one East Rand council, Daveyton, says it has joined the liaison committee precisely because it believes an informal committee will offer it more influence than the RSC; it notes that its limited voting power on the formal council gives it little power to dictate its priorities[14].

Interestingly, the liaison committee idea appears to have originated with the government — councils are being encouraged to form committees by the Transvaal Provincial Administration. Officials insist that the committees will strengthen RSCs because they will build an ethos of co-operation which will help the new councils function more effectively. Perhaps — but the fact that black councils



Pic: Joel Krige

appear to need an informal body which will discuss similar issues to RSCs in order to co-operate with their white counterparts could also be seen as an admission that the councils are unable to provide them with an effective platform. Indeed, one bizarre consequence of the liaison committee idea is that the Mayor of Middelburg, an HNP member, is willing to co-operate with black councils on the committee and to agree to devote resources to black townships in response to informal requests, but is flatly opposed to RSCs[15]. The reason is that, unlike RSCs, liaison committees don't imply formal joint decision-making across race lines. But the town's black council is unlikely to pin much faith in RSCs if it can receive some of the assistance it needs simply by talking to the white mayor.

The complex system of minority guarantees which governs RSCs might also prompt an expensive immobility on some councils. One of these is the stipulation that all decisions must be taken by a two-thirds majority; on at least two councils, this has ensured that the RSC has failed to elect key office-bearers because the prevailing political alignments prevent any of the candidates winning the required support from their colleagues[16].

Of course, this might increase the leverage of black councillors because it suggests that, where deadlocks occur, they might be able to trade their votes for concessions — particularly on RSCs where they can form alliances with opposition white councils who have substantial representation. However, thus far there is little evidence of this; and the deadlocks do suggest that the consensus which government planners would like the new councils to create may prove elusive. If consensus is not achieved, decisions will be taken by the voting majority — the white councils who consume a greater proportion of RSC services. Nor is there evidence to suggest that RSCs are doing much to promote the credibility of black local government among township residents. The deliberations of the new councils take place removed from township residents and this limits their ability to win township credibility — members of the Central Wits RSC, for example, have already complained that the council appears to be making little impact on the public it serves[17].

In the Transvaal at least, the viability of black local government appears to have actually declined sharply in the few months since RSCs were launched. African local authorities in the province are facing a severe crisis, but the threat comes this time not from township activists but from the authorities in the form of the provincial administration. Frustrated by the failure of some councils to end rent boycotts or to restore order to their finances, the province has dissolved five councils and threatened to close down others.

RSC supporters would, no doubt, point out again that the system has hardly had enough time to create a healthy black local government system — but the Transvaal province appears to have decided, at least for the moment, that it cannot wait for RSCs to salvage the councils and that direct rule from above is a more effective guarantee of township stability than local constitutional experiments. Nor is it likely that RSCs will, in fact, enable the councils to overcome the financial problems which prompted the province to intervene — Mr Cruywagen partly conceded this in his June speech mentioned earlier when he questioned whether RSCs would give African councils a viable economic base from which they could raise township living standards.

One further limit to RSCs' political role is the fact that they have not been introduced in Natal because Inkatha is opposed to them and it controls African local authorities in the area — there seems little prospect that the councils will be launched in the province at all[18].

THEIR FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE

In the light of this evidence, it may be significant that at least some government planners no longer see RSCs as a mechanism for constitutional reform. They argue that the councils may be appropriate agents of urban development, but that they cannot provide a platform for effective local government: they are, they note, far too remote from township residents and offer them no effective control over local decisions. The answer, they suggest, is to retain RSCs as development bodies but to restructure local government in order to strengthen grassroots participation and to ensure that local communities have an effective say in the system.

These views will find an outlet in a new investigation which the official Co-ordinating Committee on Local Government Affairs is undertaking in an attempt to devise a uniform local government system for all races. The investigation does not in itself reflect waning official confidence in either segregated local government or RSCs — it was launched because the government would like to impose uniform legislation on local governments for all races while retaining segregated structures. But some members of the committee are likely to argue for a far more flexible system which would allow local communities latitude to decide on their own form of local government; this could entail recognition of grassroots structures not too dissimilar, at least in form, to the street committees formed during the unrest which began in 1984 and might also imply some latitude to move away from segregated structures.

These proposals are likely to face fierce resistance — but the fact that they are being considered at all suggests that RSCs are no longer seen in some official circles as appropriate instruments for restructuring local government.

Just as government officials are pinning far more modest hopes on RSCs, so too are some of its opponents beginning to modify their fears about the system's likely consequences. Thus some analysts sympathetic to the UDF are now arguing that RSCs should be seen as government development bodies which do not pose a significant threat to supporters of non-racial local government and should be treated accordingly by township civic associations. This is not a belated endorsement of RSCs; on the contrary, it implies that the political limits imposed on them by the fact that they are effectively white-controlled makes it extremely unlikely that they will help create an effective power base for black local authorities.

But it does imply also that there would be little advantage for opponents of the present local government system in devoting resources to a direct campaign to thwart RSCs; such a campaign would, of course, only be necessary if RSCs did, in fact, seem likely to strengthen the present system.

A similar point has been made, albeit from a different perspective, by the president of the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation, Mr Keith Jenkins, who argued in October that RSCs might prompt some redistribution of resources to black townships and were also an acknow-

ledgement of the need for joint decision-making by all races but added that they could be only a "Short-term palliative" to the economic and political problems facing black local government[19].

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Like several previous government reforms, RSCs are a recognition of the failure of key apartheid policies — as noted earlier, they recognise that black communities require both a greater share of "white" economic resources and a greater say in decision-making. But, like those other reforms, they are constrained by the fact that they seek also to contain change — in this case, by insisting that the redistribution of wealth and power be channelled through segregated, white controlled, structures. This not only limits their ability to achieve their stated aims — in this case, township development and joint decision-making — but also their ability to "co-opt" black elites by offering them real control over resources or decisions.

RSCs are, therefore, an acknowledgement that local wealth and power must be shared, but one which is likely to demonstrate that this cannot be achieved by instruments which reflect key apartheid assumptions. Their introduction, and the likely limits on their success, may therefore, do far more to strengthen pressures for non-racial local government than to deflect them.□

1. Sowetan 19/8/87.
2. The Star 11/8/87.
3. The Star 3/8/87.
4. The Star 18/11/87.
5. The Star 4/11/87.
6. The Star 18/9/87.
7. Business Day 16/6/87.
8. The Star 4/8/87.
9. Financial Mail 4/12/87.
10. Business Day 8/10/87.
11. Business Day 21/6/87, 25/8/87, 29/8/87.
12. Business Day 14/9/87.
13. White Paper on National Transport Policy, Department of Transport, 1987.
14. Interview with East Rand councillor.
15. The Star 17/9/87.
16. See for example The Star 10/7/87.
17. The Star 20/10/87.
18. Financial Mail 3/7/87.
19. Business Day 13/10/87.

by Fanie Cloete

LOCAL OPTION PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

"The Government has accepted the principle of maximum devolution of power and decentralisation of administration at local government level and minimum administrative control over local authorities. . . ." (Prime Minister P. W. Botha on 30 July 1982 in Bloemfontein.)

(. . . The Government has accepted) ". . . that government functions be executed at the lowest possible level of government and that higher levels of government should as far as possible only be policy making and monitoring levels of government. . . ." (Minister Chris Heunis in the House of Assembly, 6 May 1985, col. 4907.)

The Government's acceptance of the principle of a maximum decentralisation of functions in the public sector, has set the stage for potentially far reaching changes in South Africa. It is aimed at achieving a large degree of local option not only in constitutional and administrative **structures and processes** in the country but also in the nature of South African society: in other words, in its **value system.**

Until 1982 control over the processes of government was to a large extent concentrated in central state departments. The relative autonomy of provincial legislative and executive authorities had systematically been eroded between 1910 and 1980 while most local authorities were effectively controlled by provincial bureaucracies and were allowed only restricted and well circumscribed powers.

Creeping centralisation is, however, a normal feature of any bureaucracy unless it is purposefully, explicitly and continually countered by measures to achieve the opposite effect. This has been proved time and again in Western democracies.

Since 1982 the Government, as part of a more comprehensive programme of social and political reform in South Africa, embarked on a deliberate course of decentralisation of powers to the lowest possible level. This has consistently been found to be the most appropriate instrument to implement government policies effectively and efficiently in developed as well as developing countries all over the world.

There are normally three main reasons for decentralisation:

Political reasons

Decentralisation promotes grassroots democracy in that local and/or regional interest groups can participate more directly in decision-making and distributive processes of government regarding matters pertaining to them.

Economic and administrative reasons

Decentralisation can also promote more effective and efficient government. This is done by utilising existing local and/or regional administrative, technical and economic infrastructures (or creating them) to provide a wider range of services fulfilling the specific needs of the community concerned, instead of providing and controlling uniform services directly from the central governmental level. In this way decentralisation can stimulate economic development in all regions of a country. This is especially relevant in developing societies.

Ethnic or cultural reasons

Economy of scale further does not always imply a centralisation of services, especially with regard to socio-cultural services. Decentralisation can play a very important role in satisfying the distinctive needs of different ethnic or cultural communities. Demands by such interest groups for self-determination can partially or fully be met by granting the appropriate degree of autonomy on a local and/or regional basis, depending on the circumstances in each case. In many cases such autonomy is the best or only way to achieve social stability in multi-cultural democracies.

In developing countries decentralisation is used primarily to distribute the socio-economic benefits of growth more evenly and use scarce resources more efficiently for society as a whole on the one hand. It also involves the less developed communities in the planning, decision-making and implementation of policy in order to stimulate responsibility and self-help attitudes as tools and capabilities for further development. In a developing society it is sometimes difficult to decentralise government functions because those basic socio-economic and administrative structures and processes within which development must take place normally still have to be created.

Scholarly research has found that the ability of governments to implement decentralisation programmes successfully depends on the existence of or the ability to create a variety of attitudinal and instrumental conditions to carry out decentralised functions.

The conditions are the following:

Attitudinal conditions

- Strong political commitment and support from national and community leaders for the transfer of planning, decision-making and managerial authority to lower levels of government and to organisations that are outside the direct control of the central government;
- general support of and commitment to decentralisation within central and local bureaucracies, especially the willingness of central government officials to transfer functions previously performed by them to local communities (i.e. changes in the attitudes and behaviour of central and lower level government officials away from those that are centrist, control-orientated and paternalistic, toward those that support and facilitate decentralised planning and administration);
- creation of a minimum level of trust and respect between citizens and government officials and a mutual recognition that each is capable of performing certain functions and participating effectively in various aspects of development planning and management.

Instrumental conditions

- Appropriate allocation of planning and administrative functions among levels of government suited to the decision-making capabilities, existing or potential resources and performance capabiities of each level of organisation;
- concise and definite decentralisation laws, regulations and directives that clearly outline the relationships among and functions of the different levels of government and administration, and the roles and duties of officials at each level;
- flexible arrangements, based on performance criteria, for reallocating functions as the resources and capabilities of local governments change over time;
- clearly defined and relatively uncomplicated planning and management procedures for eliciting participation of local leaders and citizens in the formulation, appraisal, organisation, implementation and evaluation of development programmes;
- strong administrative and technical capacity at higher government levels to carry out national development functions and to support — with adequate resources — lower levels of government in performing decentralised functions;
- communication linkages among local units of government and between them and higher levels that facilitate exchange of information, co-operative activity and conflict resolution;
- effective channels of political participation and representation for rural residents that reinforce and support decentralised planning and administration and that allow them to express their needs and demands;
- adequate financial resources to acquire the equipment, supplies, personnel and facilities needed to carry out decentralised responsibilities;
- adequate physical infrastructure in local communities and transportation and communications linkages among local government units to facilitate the mobilisation of resources and delivery of public services.

The fewer of these conditions that exist, or the greater the obstacles to creating them, the greater will be the difficulty to successfully implement decentralisation programmes. Developing societies lack many of these prerequisites, especially the instrumental conditions for success. This also complicates decentralisation attempts in a developing society like South Africa. If these obstacles can be overcome, decentralisation can succeed.

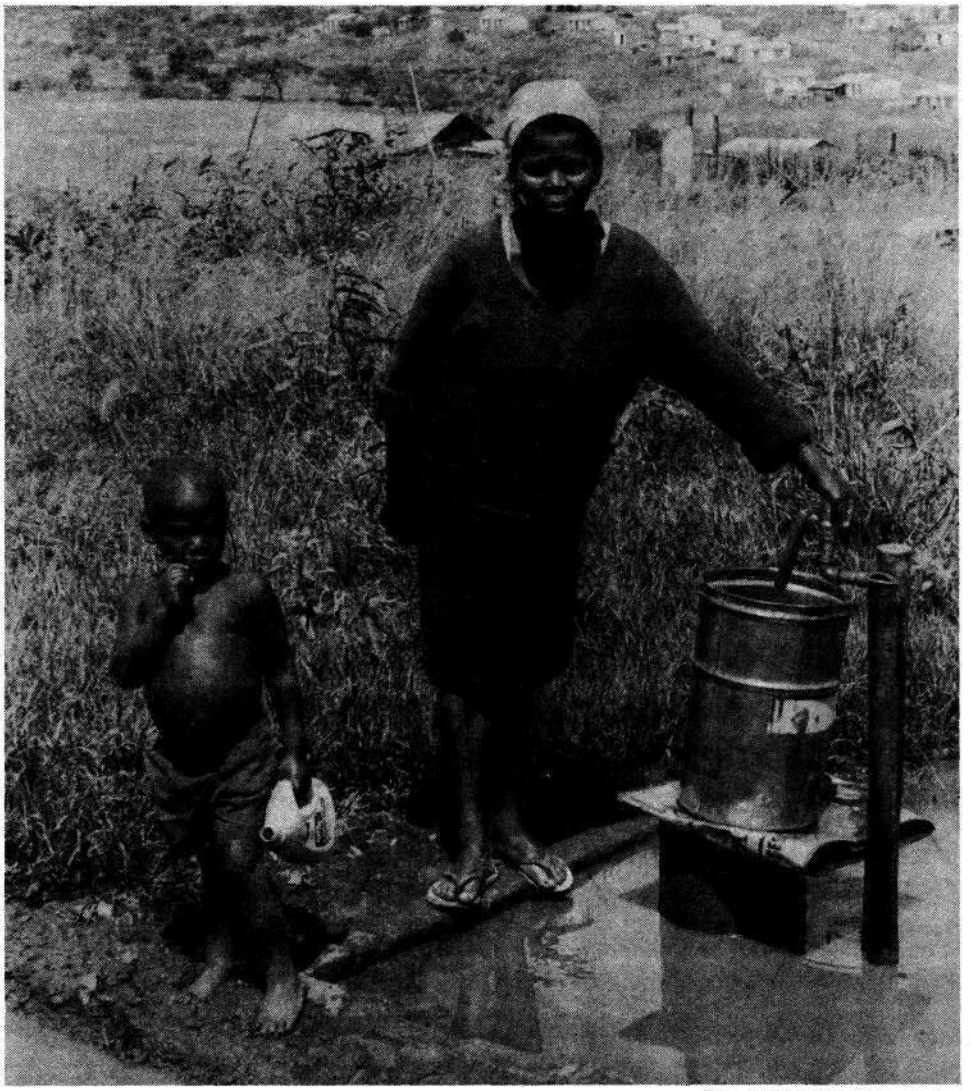
In the South African case a process of socialisation and change in the direction of local option has been started but the road ahead is long, steep and treacherous. The Government is, however, already publicly committed in principle to decentralisation. This already meets a very crucial attitudinal prerequisite for success.

The respective provincial administrations are furthermore presently engaged in explicit programmes to decentralise functions to and diminish control over local authorities in line with the Government's stated policy objectives in this regard. Simultaneously the Council for the Co-ordination of Local Government Affairs has initiated a similar process at central state department level in co-operation with the Commission for Administration. These processes are taking place on the request, with the active support and under pressure of the United Municipal Executive. The Central Government is also giving priority to the physical development of communities in order to increase the viability and resources of local authorities to prepare them for their new roles. This is unfortunately still hampered by differences among political leaders in various communities about the implementation of political objectives and a lack of funds.

It is, however, becoming increasingly clear that in order to maximise effective minority protection in South Africa, political power has to be diffused as far as possible to the respective communities and interest groups concerned. If power remains concentrated at the national level it will aggravate and increase the intensity and frequency of political conflict at that level.

A diffusion of power can only alleviate such pressures. An increasing political vested interest of the Government in decentralising as much power and functions as possible to the local level, is therefore apparent. This may dramatically increase the probability of success of attempts at decentralisation. The decision of the National Party to contest local government elections on a party political ticket illustrates this trend and confirms the increasing interest of the Government in local politics.

When judging the success or failure of the eventual outcome of these programmes, one must take into account that decentralisation is at best a medium to long term process. It cannot be completed in a year or two. The outcome of the present decentralisation attempts of the Government will only really be clear after the process has had some more time to come to fruition.□



Pic. Mike Matthewman

by Chris Heymans

THE RENAISSANCE OF LOCAL POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT IN S.A.

Local politics and government have assumed unprecedented prominence on the South African political agenda. The government considers local structures as crucial for its broader plans of institutional restructuring. In response, those in opposition from the right, as well as those in resistance from the left, have directed their strategies to a greater extent at the local level.

This article reflects on the background to this renaissance of local political processes and some of its major implications. The argument is made that the local sphere of politics is in a state of flux which makes it worthy of careful consideration by all proponents of political change who are in search of appropriate strategic opportunities and targets.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT'S RACIAL POLICIES

The government's new emphasis on the local level, emerged against the backdrop of the report of the Erika Theron commission in 1976. The vital political recommendation of this commission was that the Westminster system be adapted to accommodate what was described as ". . . the requirements peculiar to the South African plural population structure" (recommendation 178). Ever since, the government and its constitutional experts, have argued that the "group basis" of society has to form the foundation of all political institutions. By 1982, it was generally argued that this could best be achieved through the creation of institutions for mutal decision-making between the various groups; while simultaneously, separate bodies had to exist to allow these groups to decide on matters which are of exclusive concern to each of them.

Hence two reports from the President's Council in 1982 outlined the framework for a new government structure in South Africa: one set the parameters of cultural pluralism and consociationalism for institutions at central level and the other made recommendations for major restructuring at the regional and local level. The principles of joint decision-making on matters of common concern and separate decision-making on matters of group concern, provided the fundamental backbone of the proposed new institutions. These principles were institutionalised in the 1983 constitution through three ethnically-based chambers of parliament for whites, coloureds and Indians, operating within a framework of constitutionally-defined "own" and "general" matters. After the new tri-cameral parliament came into operation in September 1984, restructuring at the other levels of government received special attention.

Joint decision-making on matters of mutual concern, is being provided for in the Regional Services Councils. The various race-bound local authorities will all be represented in these bodies according to their relative consumption of bulk services provided by the RSC. Apart from being instruments for multi-racial decision-making, these bodies are also purported to be functional to the cost-efficient provision of bulk services in 22 possible categories and as instruments for the creation of infrastructure in deprived areas. It seems that they have been doing this with varying degrees of success in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In the Cape, their functionality has been constrained by them taking over the activities (and staff) of the former Divisional Councils — which has created numerous problems of bureaucracy. In Natal, Inkatha's resistance and firm opposition from farmers' associations have thus far delayed the implementation of the RSC system, but provincial spokespersons are determined to proceed with their implementation in the course of 1988.

RSCs have been criticised for a variety of reasons. They were imposed from above and institutionalise a considerable degree of top-down control from the central government through the provinces on to the local level. Voting formulas in the RSCs favour the wealthier local authorities. They also warrant criticism because they are ultimately based on racially-defined constituent parts. These criticisms remain valid, but the first few months of RSC activity have indicated that these bodies are performing some of the envisaged functions quite impressively. In the Transvaal various upgrading projects have been initiated. Cynics argue that it is merely the "honeymoon" of these bodies, and that conflicts and bureaucratic policies would ultimately curtail this ability. Yet, in the Transvaal there has thus far been hardly any bureaucratic expansion as local authorities are used as agencies for the RSCs. The Cape experience is complicated by the fact that the legacy of massive ex-Divisional Council bureaucracies seems to constrain the Regional Services Councils in their functioning, so that very little actual RSC activities have been undertaken.

The RSC's major achievement in many areas has apparently been that they have exposed white local councillors to black areas for the first time. In many RSCs the members were taken on survey tours of the regions to acquaint themselves with conditions there. Thus, while the power relations within these bodies might still favour some interest groups more than others, they have played some educational role among white members. What the magnitude of this educational process will ultimately be, is unclear, but it could be significant in a society where ignorance has been embedded in the basic way of living of people. There are cases in the Transvaal where HNP and CP people have turned into enthusiastic supporters of closer liaison and financial linkage between the white and black communities after they had the opportunity to experience the conditions in the townships. In that province, co-ordinating committees at the local level exist in most towns and cities which are useful addenda to the RSCs in their educational role. It would be presumptuous to see these bodies as the "solutions" to the historically-established alienation between people in South Africa. However, their modest achievements at this stage, serve as evidence that there is much flexibility in the realm of local politics. This makes it an arena with potential for creative politics.

While the RSCs are supposed to cater for "general" matters, local decentralised bodies are purported to be ideal instruments for facilitating the "own" affairs concept. Pretoria therefore wishes to segregate primary local authorities along racial lines, in order to achieve what is termed the "highest degree of self-determination possible".

Fully-fledged race-bound local authorities are already a fait accompli for whites and blacks. In the case of the whites, various legislative measures since 1948, have ensured racial exclusivity. Not only were the other racial groups systematically removed from these bodies, but measures like the Group Areas and Separate Amenities Acts and a host of others in various spheres, served to build a context of racial segregation at the local level. Today, many people, including government planners, believe that most whites regard racially-exclusive local authorities as vital for the protection of their political sovereignty and the maintenance of their cultural and social identities. Some officials claim that local government is as sensitive a matter as segregated schools and residential areas. Whites are said to attach considerable political and symbolic significance to their own local authorities[1].

The government has no intention to abolish racially-based local authorities. They continue to hope that the coloureds and Indians, who accepted the racialistic parliamentary framework, will eventually accept the principle of segregated local bodies. The chances seem remote. Especially the Labour Party, who holds a preponderant majority in the coloured House of Representatives, seems determined to settle for nothing less than integrated local authorities. In January 1988 they caused a temporary deadlock in the parliamentary standing committee for Natal, by refusing to allow minor legislative changes in the provisions for municipal elections, because they interpreted proposed measures to delegate more powers to local bodies, including coloured management committees, as an attempt to create segregated fully-fledged municipalities. And the party has repeatedly stated its opposition to separate local authorities. In the present climate of tension between it and the Nationalist government, it seems likely that the Labour Party will use all the institutional leverage that it has, to promote this cause.

But the most important government initiatives on the local level, occurred in the area of black local government. In the wake of the 1976 crisis, community councils were established in several black townships. The establishment of these councils was significant in the sense that they implied acceptance of some permanence for blacks outside the homeland areas. Their autonomy from the central government was, however, severely constrained. The Minister of Co-operation and Development could determine the size, tenure, committees, service conditions and method of election of each council. He was also empowered to regulate their financial affairs and confer additional powers on them.

The Black Local Authorities Act of 1982 altered the status of the black local authorities. The minister could now establish town and village councils, which are elected by Africans with residential rights in urban areas and with homeland citizenship. The new councils operate as proper local authorities with their own mayors, town clerks and executive committees. They have extensive powers — in some respects even wider ones than white local authorities.

However, their existence remains problem-ridden — to the extent that several councils had to resign in the face of community pressure since 1984. Their legitimacy problems seem related to three factors: first, their limited financial resources, a problem enhanced by the massive shortages caused by them being the main victims of rent boycotts in townships; second, the strong feelings in the townships against the very notion of racially-segregated local authorities and in favour of non-racial ones; and thirdly, the fact that the black local authorities were strongly linked to apartheid ideology from the outset. The fact that the government persisted in regarding the homelands as the ultimate political framework for black political rights, served to strengthen this perception.

The Regional Services Councils offer a new source of hope for the black local authorities. In interviews, several councillors and officials involved in this area, expressed high expectations of these bodies as instruments for the redistribution of resources to black areas. This is seen as a crucial part of any attempts to improve the image of black local authorities. There is a belief that the improvement of infrastructure and general living conditions in the townships, would assist the black local authorities in their quest for greater acceptability. The major uncertainty in this regard involves the preparedness of white local authorities to co-operate in this vein. If they fail to do so, the RSCs would not only become focal points for local conflict, but would also be unable to meet the high expectations of black local authorities.

RESTRUCTURING AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

Given its unitary form, the South African constitution has never given any safeguards to the country's system of local government. The lack of constitutional definition and protection facilitated the whittling away of local government ever since the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. This trend was perpetuated in the Republic since 1961. Not only did the central government systematically usurp many of the powers of the lower tier authorities in the ways which characterised the dynamics of government institutions in many countries, but the apartheid policies of the National Party also necessitated considerable intervention by the central state in the activities of local bodies.

The most important effect of the post-1984 restructuring process on local government, has been that it has been brought into a more direct relationship with the central government. This was brought about by the 1983 constitution as well as a number of legislative measures and institutional adaptations which bear directly on the lower tiers of government. The traditional close relationship between the provinces and local authorities has been weakened by the creation of three "ethnic" departments of local government (for whites, coloureds and Indians). In as far as their responsibilities regarding local government are concerned, provincial administrators are now due to become responsible mainly for black local authorities and RSCs, but as representatives of the Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning. At present the provinces' responsibilities for local government are still fairly extensive, but it is being anticipated that the "own" affairs ministries would increasingly supervise "own" affairs affecting local authorities, while the provinces will take charge of "general matters" affecting the local level. This would largely concern the regional services councils. However, the distinction between "own" and 'general" matters remains an ambiguous one, leaving politicians and officials at all levels of government confused. It seems indeed to be one of the important uncertainties which leaves much space for manoeuvering by those who want to play innovative politics within the rather complicated institutional framework-in-the-making.

The relationship between the central government and the other levels has also been institutionally tightened through the Co-ordinating Council for Local Government Affairs, a body comprised of representatives from all levels of government and most interest groups in the local sphere. The council's main function is to advise the government on matters facilitating co-ordination of local government activity and all legislation affecting the local level. Thus, the council plays an important role in linking the central and local levels of government and as a channel for co-operation and consultation between representatives from the various racially-defined local authorities.

Many of the laws which originated from this body, contributed to a tightening of the central-local relationship. Government, for instance, now sets franchise prescriptions for local authorities, influences the salaries and service conditions of town clerks and other local government officials and provides a nationally-co-ordinated mechanism for training of local councillors and officials.

The financial relationship between the central government and local bodies, has been adapted to allow the Minister of Finance an enhanced supervisory role with regard to the latter. Local autonomy in the financial sphere is also affected by the fact that the State President's committee on National Priorities has as its brief the co-ordination of the financial priorities of the various levels of government in order to support national guidelines regarding priorities. The most significant alteration favouring local authorities is that they are now entitled to levy property taxes from the central government[2].

Many people in the local sphere argue that power is increasingly being concentrated, instead of decentralised. Government planners respond that in as far as these accusations are accurate, it should be borne in mind that they are attempting to transform the institutional network in South Africa through "reform by stealth"; which might at times require strategic actions which contradict long term objectives in the short run. Thus, it is argued, power is being concentrated to enable the government to lay the foundations for stronger decentralised institutions in the long run.[3].

CHALLENGING GOVERNMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

While the government has paid considerable attention to legislative adaptations at the local level, its opponents were forced to consider their strategies at this level too. On the conservative side, the rightwing parties are presently gearing themselves up for the coming municipal elections which are due to be held in October 1988. There is a belief in these circles that they could frustrate the government's reforms by taking charge of local authorities — who would then resist attempts to desegregate facilities and institutions at the local level. There seems to be some debate about what this should mean for the Regional Services Councils. The official Conservative Party position is that these councils ought to be taken over and then prevented from performing the roles which the government envisaged for them. But several conservatives at the local level are involved in the RSCs and seem quite supportive of their general objectives.

On the left, liberal-minded municipalities like Cape Town have a history of dispute with the government. The former refuses to co-operate with other racially-based bodies in its vicinity, and has incurred the wrath of government for that. But the Cape Town authority remains adamant in its demands for a single local authority in the Greater Cape Town metropole.

Extra-institutional groups have also had to reassess their perceptions of the importance of the local level. In the townships, street and area committees served as organisational focal points for communities-in-resistance, enabling residents to structure themselves politically and to find forms of social organisation to arrange the everyday lives of people. In the aftermath of 1984, campaigns were also launched to wreck the official local authority network in the townships — with considerable success, especially in the Eastern Cape. Demands for political change were also increasingly directed at white local authorities and chambers of commerce.

Until 1986, these actions seemed to be bearing some fruit. However, the stringent measures taken under the state of emergency have altered that. With many community leaders detained, and the security establishment apparently setting the tone through the National Security Management System in the government's response to events at the local level, the institutional space for resistance politics became severely curtailed. As a result, left-wing opposition groups seem somewhat reluctant to focus on the local level. They do not see local actors as powerful enough to affect political change sufficiently. This view is however not unambiguously supported in the organisation. From pronouncements by UDF spokespersons, it seems that the organisation feels that no local settlements can be seen as ultimate solutions until a national resolution of the South African conflict has been achieved. But they are reluctant to categorically reject attempts at reconciliation at the local level.

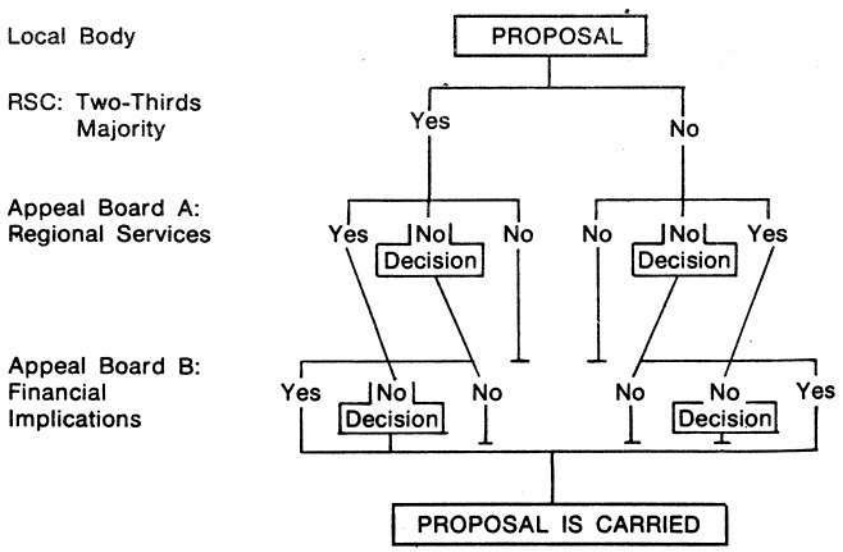
SOME FINAL COMMENTS

Local government and politics are in a state of flux. The government has been restructuring institutions at this level in order to affect the balance of power and the modes of decision-making. This process has not been completed and one is generally struck by the open-endedness of the entire process. Among the government's opponents, there is uncertainty too about the extent to which the local level ought to be taken as a strategic point for conducting the struggle for political change. There is also a considerable amount of confusion about the viability of locally based strategies in the wake of the strong state action at the local level. Opponents of the government are especially concerned about the influence of the National Security Management System — which through its impact on the flow of information in the state machinery and on the allocation of funds, could affect the outcome of political currents. Yet it is uncertain what the balance of power is between the various organs of the state.

In this very uncertainty lies the reason for the significance of local politics — an area characterised with flux where all choices and strategies seem so utterly risky and yet not in vain. Local politics is by its very nature very real to people. **Its renaissance in the South African context is therefore** hardly surprising. It could provide an important base for change in the wider society.□

1. Atkinson, D. and Heymans, C., "The Future: What do the practitioners think?" in Heymans, C. and Tötemeyer, G. (eds.) GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE? THE POLITICS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1988, Juta and Co., Cape Town, Wetton and Johannesburg, p. 144.
2. Hattingh, J., OWERHEIDSVERHOUDINGE — 'N INLEIDING, 1986, Unisa, Pretoria, P. 141.
3. Atkinson, D. and Heymans, C., op. cit, 1988, p. 153.

Flow Chart of Decision Process in a RSC



by Mark Swilling, Wits University

BEYOND LOCAL OPTION: Coercive Co-option or Democratic Transition?

The declaration of the 1986 State of Emergency mercilessly killed the patterns and processes of grassroots democratisation that welled up from the battle zones of township conflict during 1984-86. Now, instead, we have secretive Joint Management Centres that plot and plan the sophisticated co-option of local warlords who help crush mass-based social movements and are then rewarded with office for their efforts. We have, therefore, come full circle: from centrally appointed Verwoerdian bureaucracies in 1971 (the Bantu Affairs Administration Boards), to Community Councils in 1977, to the further transfer of power to the Black Local Authorities in 1982, and now, back to square one with the JMCs in full control of townships that might benefit as Regional Services Councils (RSCs) make their paternalistic disbursements. The time has indeed arrived to search for alternatives.

There is a growing realisation that democracy is best achieved by empowering local communities by decentralising political decision-making.

This position has been argued by a range of eminent scholars. Robert Dahl, one of the founding fathers of contemporary western political science, advocates a decentralised democratised political economy in response to the legitimation crisis of American federal democracy.[1] Analysing the crisis of East European socialism, Brus, the Polish economist, has come to a remarkably similar conclusion to Dahl when he calls for the establishment of a decentralised market socialist system — a proposal in line with current Gorbachevite thinking.[2] Peter Blunt has forcefully demonstrated that those Third World states most committed to pursuing the "basic needs" approach to development have also realised that democratisation through decentralisation is the best method of facilitating efficient, effective and appropriate decision making.[3]

The reason why democratisation through decentralisation is so widely favoured is simple: it helps local communities feel (a) that they can participate in decision making structures that are seen as accessible; (b) that these decision making structures have the power to directly affect the allocation of resources; and (c) that tangible gains can flow from participation. The result of these processes is the allocation of resources and management of social structures that is more efficient and effective because the central state can "unload" the decision-making burden onto local and regional governments who are in a better position to take account of circumstances posed by local conditions.

In the South African context, decentralisation is used in so many ways that, like the word democracy, it risks losing all its meaning. We must be clear, however, about how the concept is being used. The government's local government reform strategy is framed by consociational theory. This theory propounds the view that political stability in so-called "multi-cultural societies" can only be ensured if the "autonomy" of each cultural group is respected. This means creating "own affairs" structures to facilitate the self-determination of each group at local, regional and central level. However, these cultural groups are also part of a single "nation" and "country". It follows that structures are required to facilitate "joint decision-making" at local, regional and central level — hence we have "general affairs" authorities.

In practice, this consociational contract has given rise to our strange local government regime premised on ethnic primary local authorities and multi-racial Regional Services Councils. The consensus in a recent book that reviews this reformist option is that it does not facilitate decentralisation, democracy or substantive de-racialisation.[4]

Responding to the inadequacies of the consociational model, the federalists have argued that the **vertical** fragmentation of power cannot facilitate decentralisation because this must inevitably rest on the retention of race and ethnicity. Their solution is the **horizontal** fragmentation of power and sovereignty into so many local and regional "states". This, they argue in varying degrees of coherence,[5] will facilitate the determination of local and regional politics by local and regional communities without the "interference" of the central state. This recipe for "limited government" has been roundly criticised from a socialist perspective for being an ideological mask for the protection of white capitalist interests.[6].

This author has argued that substantive democratisation through decentralisation along lines spelt out in the Freedom Charter, can only take place if this is coupled to mechanisms that facilitate substantial redistribution of economic wealth.[7]

The logic of the argument thus far appears to be leading to the conclusion that what needs to be done now is the formulation of new constitutional structures for local government that conform more closely to internationally acceptable criteria. Although this is true in abstraction, it is practically unviable for a very simple reason: constitutional structures for local government cannot be devised from

below in isolation from the prevailing national constitutional, legislative and security framework. This entire national framework will not be changed in piece-meal fashion from below. The view that this is possible — at least as an interim measure — is held by those who propound the "local option"

Either because they think a true democratic and non-racial constitutional order is unattainable, or because they want to neutralise black political movements at local level to offset the threat to national political power, the propounders of "local option" argue that local power groups should be "allowed" to forge local political arrangements through an Indaba-type process.

There are two fundamental problems with this strategy. Firstly, it ignores the fact that constitutional alternatives cannot be negotiated at local or regional level. The failure of the KwaNatal Indaba and the Cape Town city council's local initiative reinforce the view that constitutional problems and issues can only be resolved at national level by way of a negotiated settlement that must, by definition, involve the National Party and the African National Congress as the primary negotiating partners. Anything short of that will more than likely be rejected by the most significant black political, community and trade union movements.

Secondly, to succeed, the government must "allow" local power groups to proceed with the "local option". Clearly this is extremely unlikely given, (a) the very limited autonomy of local government, and (b) the trend towards increasing centralisation of power through the National Security Management System (NSMS).

It is noticeable that talk of "local option" has died since the declaration of the 1986 State of Emergency. There is a very good reason for this. Throughout the country there is evidence the state is using the JMCs to engineer what we could call the "Western Cape option". using what happened in Crossroads as a model, local officials in the Western Cape have realised that local black "leaders" can be co-opted if they are given exclusive control over the allocation of resources in their own communities in return for collaboration and participation in local government structures. This exclusive control must be accompanied by the destruction of political competitors, hence warlordism is a necessary and accepted ingredient of the recipe. In the end, the state "eliminates the radicals" and draws black allies into government structures. To sustain this arrangement, repression must continue to be used against "the radicals" while significant resources are pumped through the local authorities to bolster warlord patronage networks. **It is hoped this will have sufficiently stabilised local government** to enable the local authority elections to proceed in an "orderly fashion" in October.

In short, "local option" cannot work because it impractically believes that constitutional solutions can be negotiated at local level. The coercive co-option strategy of the "Western Cape option" is also doomed because it **rests on the mistaken assumption that legitimacy flows** from large budgets and enough gun barrels. Does this mean that alternative political processes and values cannot be forged at local level? Before this question is answered directly, it is crucial to understand how we got to where we are now and what opportunities have been missed along the way. To do this, a thumbnail sketch of township protest is necessary because it was this that generated the alternative political processes that could have become the basis for a democratic transition.

For the purposes of the argument, the pattern of township protest has been broken down into stages even though this was not a unilinear process nor was it undetermined by other variables that are not mentioned.

Firstly, grievances were expressed about appalling living conditions in the community. When these were not addressed by councillors, eminent persons of one sort or another would present the grievances to local officials in the form of a petition or simply a verbal articulation of problems. It is important to note that at this stage collective organisation had not yet taken place.

Second, the authorities either ignored or rebuked the petitioners, frequently on spurious grounds such as bureaucratic procedure. The most destructive response was when officials made promises that were then broken or, even worse, accepted bribes and still failed to deliver.

Third, in response to the local authority's inadequate response, leadership groups emerge to organise the different layers of the community. This results in the formation and spread of civic organisations, youth congresses, women's groups and other similar structures.

Fourth, campaigns involving collective action take place, e.g. mass meetings, demonstrations, stayaways, consumer boycotts and other similar strategies. Essentially what was happening here is that in the absence of the capacity to affect public opinion through the press, in parliament, through access to intellectual/research structures or through other channels, the poor communities responded by mobilising their only resource, namely their collective capacity to disturb, disrupt and protest.

Fifth, collective action in the communities is met with repression as the security forces move in. This violent response to what was perceived in the community as legitimate grievances triggered widespread anger thus leading to an escalation of protest.

Sixth, a spiral of violence erupts as the rather dignified protests of previous phases give way to running street battles between militant youths and the security forces. When this was accompanied by the detention of the civic leaders, the youth became completely uncontrollable and so the spiral of violence was exacerbated.

Seventh, decentralised defence structures are established in the community which soon transform themselves into what later became known as the street and area committees. By this stage, the rupture between state and community is virtually complete and is described by township organisations as a condition of "ungovernability" that must lead to the establishment of "embryonic organs of people's power"

Eighth, a stalemate sets in as repressive action fails to break the resistance, and as the communities fail to find ways of getting the authorities to recognise their demands.

In most cases the conflict levelled at this point, i.e. an endemic stalemate. However, in many of the cases that I studied, it went further as elements in the local white and black establishments made tentative moves to resolve the stalemate through negotiations. The most successful local-level negotiations were those that took place where authorities had resigned themselves to the existence of mass organisation in the township and where the local black leadership felt they had the support and a mandate

from the constituencies to talk to local white leaders. I refer here to places like Port Elizabeth, Port Alfred, Uitenhage, East London, Outdshoorn, Worcester, Kirkwood, Cradock and others. These negotiations took place between local UDF leaders and white leaders ranging from local chambers of commerce, to local township administrators, to white municipal representatives, right up to NP MPs, the deputy-director general of Constitutional Development and Planning and Minister Heunis himself. Urban, as opposed to constitutional issues, were the main subject of these negotiations, e.g. upgrading, housing, educational facilities, trading rights, etc. There were cases, however, where discussions included the possibility of creating non-racial municipalities.

My basic point is simple: like in the trade union context, negotiations took place when both sides realised that negotiating was less costly and more stable than the continuation of an endemic stalemate. The negotiations did not follow the wholesale repression of the township organisations, nor had the substance of local power structures in the white community been substantially weakened.

This same story is applicable to what happened in the education sphere resulting in the end in negotiations between the NECC and the DET.

From this process flows a crucial conclusion. Once community organisations have, in effect, taken "political and ideological" control of the township, they do not have coercive control. They therefore have a choice. They can take on the state and risk a full-frontal confrontation, or reach a temporary accommodation with the state. The former option would have involved turning the townships into "liberated zones". However, in the absence of a permanent "people's army" to defend these zones along lines seen in northern Mozambique during the anti-colonial war, the communities had no chance of winning a confrontation. The result would have been the immediate decimation of their organisations.

The alternative, therefore, lay in demanding recognition as the represntative of the community. This is a classic pattern of power distribution during times of intense conflict and struggle. It goes back to the Paris Commune in 1848, the Soviets in Russia in 1917, Barcelona's communes during the Spanish Civil War, and the US ghetto revolts of the 1960s (which is where the notion of "ungovernability" was first used). It is a situation that Lenin referred to as "dual power" because like the relationship between the Provisional Government and the Soviets before October 1917, the existing duly constituted state agrees to recognise a rival source of power. This arrangement is usually transitional and will only culminate in a revolution if the security forces cease backing the state (like in Russia). However, in cases where the security forces remain loyal but are not used to totally smash the alternative power structures, "dual power" can lead to negotiation and geater democratisation as the rival points of power are absorbed on terms more favourable for the popular classes. This is what happened to the US ghettoes, the South American squatter movements, the Spanish Citizens Movement during the 1970s, the Phillipino protest movements after Marcos, Solidarity in Poland, Mau Mau in Kenya, the guerillas in Zimbabwe and many similar examples.

The implications of this process for the South African context are far-reaching to say the least. It boils down to the fact that movements can only be revolutionary when they operate under revolutionary conditions. Although the social movements were smashed despite their desire to negotiate, a less repressive and a more democratic long-term alternative was available.

Given that this example has been brutally crushed, and given the progress of the State's violent, expensive and illegitimate coercive co-option strategy, I have come to the conclusion that little progress can be made at the local level at this stage. The consequences of this are far-reaching: the stakes are now so high that nothing short of a negotiated settlement at national level will succeed. The longer it takes to reach this point, the more damage will be caused as the warlords accumulate more and more power. In the final analysis, this might be leading to a situation where ever increasing numbers of black people give up hope altogether in a negotiated settlement.□

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by M.E. de Haas

WHOSE REALITY?

Fundamental issues in mediation and negotiation in South Africa today

> 'One of the important aspects of everyday knowledge is that it keeps certain people in power and certain others in the dark . . . There is, in other words, a social misconstruction of reality with the power structures in society partly relying on the fact that reality misdescribed cannot be seen for what it is'
>
> (Crick, 1982:303)

The origins of this article[1], which attempts to identify some of those factors which hinder the development of effective channels for mediation and negotiation are twofold, and are inter-related.

Firstly, for some time now I have become increasingly preoccupied with the question of my relationship to reality – reality being defined as 'whatever people experience as real', including the meanings they attach to their experiences (Berger et al, 1973:18). No, I am not, as far as I know, an incipient schizophrenic, except in a uniquely South African sense: As an anthropologist, part of my task is the 'discovery of the characteristic ways in which members of a society categorise, code and define their experience' (Spradley, 1972:240) and, in the tradition of participant observation, one of the ways in which I do this is by becoming immersed, insofar as is possible in the South African context, in the life situations of the members of the society, or segment of society, I am studying; i.e. there is far more personal involvement than is the case with most other social science research methods. Largely as a result of my profession, then, I am able to glimpse, to a certain extent, the reality experienced by Black (African) South Africans, particularly those living in what is roughly the greater metropolitan area of Durban. Now, my sense of schizophrenia stems, not from any sort of 'culture shock', but from the fact that I am also a member of the same broader South African society as my informants, my (White) segment being inextricably linked to the Black segment politically and economically[2], and as a White, middle-class, 'liberal' South African[3] my perceptions of the reality around me, especially insofar as political reality is concerned (and it is politics which pervades all facets of life in South Africa), differ markedly from those I experience **qua** anthropologist; not surprisingly, perhaps, the "White' reality is the more confortable of the two. Why, I have often asked myself, should these discrepancies exist?

The second source of this article relates to a speech by a member of the Official Opposition at a recent seminar on 'township unrest' in Durban, to the effect that it was imperative, if present problems were to be overcome, for Blacks and Whites 'to communicate'. There is an obvious connection between that statement and my topic, for communication is presumably central to negotiation, and mediators need to be skilled communicators. Communication, as Luckman (1983:68) rightly observes, has certainly come to mean 'all things to all men', and is seen as a panacea for a variety of contemporary ills, ranging from marital and family problems to national crises. However, like any other deceptively simple solution, it may not be as straightforward as it looks for various reasons, two of which are important in the present context.

Firstly, there must be motivation to communicate (or negotiate), which would include some perceptions about the likelihood of it proving fruitful. Just as recalcitrant spouses and rebellious teenagers may refuse to cooperate when a would-be mediator, in the form of a therapist, attempts to intervene, so too may leaders of particular political groupings dig in their heels and refuse to participate when attempts are made to set up mediatory structures (a recent example of this was the inability of the PFP to secure the participation of a variety of political groupings in their Convention Alliance).

Secondly, successful communication involves the 'objectivation and **interpretation** of knowledge' (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973:305, my italics), i.e. it is not simply 'sending a message' but receiving and interpreting what is said. Thus, as Crick (1982:289) notes,

> 'Communicative competence involves far more than knowledge and language; it involves a knowledge of social rules, apperceptions of contexts, understanding what is not and need not be said'

In short, some overarching reality structure. In a complex contemporary society which comprises a plurality of competing life worlds, even husbands and wives, not to mention their offspring, may inhabit largely different worlds; how much more so members of the different groups who would need to communicate about political problems, and whose reality I have suggested differs to such a marked extent?

Arising, then, from the two issues I have raised, the central thesis of this article is that to promote negotiation and mediation in the present crises which engulf the country some way of bridging the gulf between realities is needed, both to motivate ordinary White South Africans (who make up the constituencies of politicians) and their politicians, as well as Black leaders from a variety of political organizations (who may well, I suggest, in terms of their past experience, perceive proposed negotiations under present circumstances as a futile exercise) that negotiation is necessary, and to create a suitable climate in which it may take place. In an attempt to understand how the

present situation has come about, so that ways can be found to overcome the obstacles I have mentioned, I shall briefly consider how South African reality – in particular as it pertains to White perceptions of Black political realities – is constructed (or perhaps, more appropriately, misconstructed), and suggest that this misconstruction is contributing to the rapid polarisation we are witnessing. I shall conclude by asking questions about what all those concerned and, in particular, social scientists, can do to rectify the situation.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa, it is commonly maintained, is a plural society, i.e. one which exhibits 'sharp cleavages between different population groups brought together within the same political unit' (Kuper and Smith, 1969:3). In an attempt to gloss over the racial basis for the existing political and economic structure of the country, official emphasis tends to fall on the 'ethnic' or 'cultural' diversity of its population groups, this dogma of ethnic or cultural plurality being at the basis of the government's policy for the division of the country into 'White' (and other population groups) areas, and the various 'national states' or 'homelands'.

As with any theoretical concept, the term 'culture' is defined by anthropologists and other social scientists in different ways, most definitions falling roughly into one of two categories, i.e. either the 'totalist' type of definition proposed by the early anthropologist Tylor, which refers to the total way of life of a people, including both ideas and behaviour, as well as artefacts, or the 'mentalist'/'idealist' type of definition favoured by contemporary anthropologists, which focuses on the conceptual system of a group of people, e.g. 'shared standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating and acting' (Goodenough, 1970:99). Now it is an extreme form of the first type of definition, i.e. 'totalist', which appears most closely linked with government thinking about the need for the preservation of 'group identity', in that culture is not seen, as in definitions of the second type, as 'the medium of human communication' (Sharp 1980) but is linked to the concept of **ethnos** which refers to 'closed systems into which individuals are born, in which they must live and from which only death can separate them' (Sharp, 1980) Members of **ethnoses** may be held to share genetic and psychic, as well as cultural traits, and language is, of course, a prime characteristic of group membership.[4] As Sharp notes (**ibid**) 'A correspondence between the implications of the ethnos idea and the policy of separate development is patent' (see also Lye and Murray, 1980:18). As commentators such as Sharp and Lye and Murray point out, such an interpretation of what culture is all abotu **reifies** the concept, creating the erroneous impression that, of necessity, 'the boundaries of culture coincide with those of a given human population' (Lye and Murray, 1980: 18/19). This narrow, and empirically unjustifiable, definition of culture ignores two of its fundamental characteristics, i.e. that is is **learned** in human interaction and, as a human creation, it is even in the simplest (in terms of size, simple technology and minimal division of labour) society 'a continuous creative, inventive process' (Crick, 1982:299). Furthermore, in the South African context, such a reified model assumes a correspondence between 'culture' and political affiliation, the impression being given that the present 'homelands' are immutable entities existing in their present form since the time of Black/White contact in South Africa – an assumption which recent work by historians renders patently false; the 19th century was a period of considerable political flux, political groupings frequently being of a culturally heterogeneous nature (Ley and Murray, 1980; Wilson and Thompson, 1982). It is, I suggest, this **reified** concept of culture which dominates the consciousness of most White South Africans.

As a theoretical tool, an 'idealist' definition of culture has proved far more useful in analysing the various societies of the world, but its use does present some problems when attempting to apply it to a complex, contemporary society; put it this way, even in a small-scale, relatively simple society such as that of the Truk (Pacific) islanders

> 'No two persons . . . have identical standards for what they regard as Trukese culture, and the amount of variance they accept in one another's behaviour differs from one subject matter to another and from one kind of situation to another'
>
> (Goodenough, 1970:99)

Whilst there may be a reasonably clear-cut relationship between culture, defined in an 'idealist' sense and the reality experienced in, say, Bushman society, the relationships between culture and the reality experienced by members of a complex society such as South Africa (both Black and White) is far more complicated. Ethnography constantly refines theoretical tools, and recent work (see, e.g. Holy and Stuchlik, 1981) suggests that people's behaviour is influenced by **models** of what is perceived as culture (e.g. as 'traditional Zulu' or 'English middle class'), these models varying considerably in content depending on factors such as age, sex, geographic region, education, socio-economic standing etc., and operating selectively according to the particular situation in which the individual is functioning (e.g. a model of 'traditional Zulu' culture would be appropriate for some aspects of a wedding but not in the boardroom).

Research in contemporary South Africa suggests that the role of culture, whilst **situationally** colouring perceptions of reality, is not of major importance in the way most Blacks and Whites experience day-to-day reality, and I suggest that those factors which relate to one's position in the social structure of the country, which regulate where one may live, and work, and with whom one may interact and the type of interaction, have greater import than culture in determining the consciousness – i.e. the 'web of meanings that allow the individual to navigate his way through the ordinary events and encounters of his life with others' (Berger et al, 1973:18) – of South Africans. How then is reality constructed in South Africa, particularly as it pertains to White perceptions **vis-a-vis** Black political reality?

A sociology of knowledge perspective, which accords with the basic tenets of cultural anthropology, holds that the primary means of constructing reality is through meaningful human interaction (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Schutz and Luckmann, 1973). However, the very structure of South African society, entrenching as it does the 'separateness' of the different 'population groups', legitimated by the reified concept of culture I have referred to, mitigates against the creation, by ordinary primary means, of a shared reality structure[5]. Part of the stock 'taken-for-granted' knowledge of most White

South Africans, inculcated during socialization (e.g. school text books, separate educational institutions) is probably an implicit acceptance of the 'differentness' of 'them' as opposed to 'us'[6], exemplified by a recent (but fairly typical) comment by a White (not a government supporter) about the current 'unrest', that 'if **they** can't agree amongst themselves, how are they going to agree with **us**' (obviously over-looking the fact that whites do not agree amongst themselves politically either!). In other words, the basic requirements of a meaningful, shared constitution of reality, i.e. that Blacks are seen as 'essentially similar to me', that they 'fundamentally experience the world in the same way as I do' (Schutz and Luchmann, 1973:306) are not present. The physical (separate living areas, for example) and conceptual distance which separates Blacks and Whites reinforces this 'taken-for-granted' knowledge because of the lack of opportunity for routine **meaningful** interaction (unless the relationships of Blacks with White employees and bureaucrats can be termed meaningful). My own observations of Black/White interaction amongst persons of the same professional standing suggests a built-in guardedness may exist on the part of Blacks in their discussions with Whites.

In the absence of meaningful interaction, what then are the 'structural bases for the distribution of knowledge' (**ibid**; 324) that Whites rely on to learn about Black reality? Since direct contact of the type I have referred to is lacking, I argue that the media ('the consciousness industry') which, world-wide, 'circulate and shape knowledge' (Tuchman, 1978:2) plays a crucial role in this regard[7]. If, in general, the importance of 'the mass media for modern consciousness hardly needs much elaboration' (Berger et al, 1973:96), how much more is this likely to be the case in South Africa, where Whites lack, in most cases, direct means of participating in the realities of Black life? Whilst mindful of the extremely important role of the other media, especially television and radio, in moulding public opinion, it is to one particular form of media that I wish to draw attention in this paper, and that is the role of the supposedly 'liberal' White Press here in Natal in the construction (or perhaps, more appropriately the misconstruction') of Black reality, specifically insofar as politics is concerned. Although newspapers may seem innocuous when compared with some other forms of media, as Louw (p.35) notes,

> 'The real danger of the present situation is that the average South African liberal reader of the Press believes he is getting the full story and does not see that the agenda has been set for him by the media'

Now whilst newspapers can, and often do, run stories which provide their readers with an important window onto the world that Blacks live in, in general they tend to perpetuate the separateness of Black and White realities; for example, compare the coverage of crime in 'White' as opposed to 'Black' areas, and the coverage given to bomb blasts in 'White' areas as opposed to the violence in 'Black' areas, where a considerably greater number of the victims are innocent bystanders, and often children[8].

However, even more disturbing in the present context is the tendency, on the part of some newspapers[9] to report selectively about what happens in 'Black' areas. Now I am not implying that this one-sidedness is intentional, but it is because of their crucial role as purveyors of knowledge about Black life that it is particularly disturbing, for it gives Whites not only a partial, but a distorted view of what is happening virtually in their midst, and has implications for the political situation of the country as a whole. I shall give some general examples of this biased reporting by referring to the coverage given by one local newspaper to political events in and around Durban during 1985.

This particular newspaper carried a very one-sided picture of the disturbances which flared in Durban townships and Inanda at that time, reporting for the most part on events which placed Inkatha in a favourable light, highlighting its supposed 'peace-restoring' role, and ignoring disturbing allegations about some of the violence, e.g. that which flared at a memorial service for Mrs Mxenge (see, e.g. Sutcliffe and Wellings, 1985:3). Statements made by influential political figures about the cause of the violence were published, in spite of no Official Enquiry having taken place, and subsequent research by academics on these disturbances (Sutcliffe and Wellings, 1985; Institute for Black Research, 1985) received no mention. Since that time the trend has continued: Reports which place Inkatha or the Kwa Zulu government in a bad light are, for the most part, not published, nor are letters which seek to correct distortions through providing correct information, or which are even mildly critical of the Kwa Zulu government or its leadership. For example, reporting on May Day activities failed to mention the intimidation, and even physical coercion, which was used to draw people to the UWUSA rally – nor the fact that a considerable portion of the crowd left, or attempted to leave, early, – published reports conflicting considerably with those compiled by the Labour Monitoring Group at the University of Natal. As has been noted elsewhere as a trend in reporting (Tuchman, 1978:180), analysis is generally lacking; e.g. a recent article on clashes at Chesterville and Kwa Mashu was conspicuous for its superficiality, in spite of the fact that the main reporter involved in compiling the story had been in possession of detailed facts.[10] Could the average White, who probably also spends a fair amount of time watching television, be blamed for believing that the situation in Natal was 'calm', that Inkatha was the only local political organization with a sizeable following, & that any trouble which flared was instigated by 'troublemakers' or 'agitators' from **other** organizations?

Now all this is not to deny that Inkatha has a large following, and is an important means of political expression for many Blacks (although, for a variety of reasons, a true assessment of its strength would be difficult to obtain). It should go without saying that this article is **not** concerned with assessing the merits of this, or any other political organization, for what is intended is a sober analysis of the present situation, including an attempt to explain discrepant Black/White realities. Research[11], and informal conversations with Blacks of a variety of political persuasions (with whom a good and long-standing relationship exists) suggests that these discrepancies are very real, and that Black political reality is far more complex than most news reporting would suggest; for example, various other political groupings also enjoy large followings, it is not necessarily non-Inkatha members who are the aggressors when confrontation occurs, and there is evidence to suggest that some of the strife which occurs in the townships is amongst different factions of Inkatha, to name some of the ways in which the Black picture differs to the White one.

It is difficult not to conclude that news, as reported by this newspaper, is a 'means not to know' (Smith, quoted by Tuchman, 1978: 196/7) about Black political realities, for the sort of reporting that one expects on White politics – i.e. the wide range of viewpoints, inter-party feuding, and constructive criticism of political leaders – is not present. Apart from the other implications, the 'differentness' of Blacks is perpetuated in the way in which the news about their politics is reported. there are various reasons for this state of affairs (and I shall suggest in due course that social scientists are not blameless), for world-wide reporters tend to rely on official sources of information, and to lean towards political conservatism, reflecting the existing structures of the societies in which they live and work (Tuchman, 1978: 156; McQuail, 1985: 99); in fact, it is to the credit of the South African Press that it manages to overcome the obstacles to balanced reporting to the extent that it does.

The implications of what I have said for negotiation and mediation should be apparent: Negotiation, if it is to succeed, should include leaders who represent different political viewpoints, and mediators should be acceptable to different factions; if negotiation is to be perceived as effecting change which will improve the existing situation, obviously some of those involved must have the power, or access to power, to effect changes, **and** to safeguard the interests of all those taking part, so that there need be no fear of reprisals. Political power[12] in South Africa lies almost entirely in the hands of the Whites and, outside of the government it is the opposition parliamentarians, (through their access to Parliament, Ministers and the Press,) and the media, through its role in informing and influencing the general public, who wield a limited amount. Now if those limited sources of power are perceived as biased – and past experiences suggests that they are (because of the alignments of opposition politicians, and the fact that newspapers are seen to express White viewpoints) – is it likely that those Black leaders who, in Natal, are not part of 'homeland' structures (who also have their constituencies) would be willing to participate in negotiations? Past experience suggests that they will perceive negotiation as a fruitless exercise, **unless** those who wield power of any sort are **not** seen to be taking sides– and I realise that that is 'easier said than done' – and are likely to bring about some sort of positive change.

What can be done?

I have argued that discrepant Black and White realities are the logical outcome of the enshrined dogma of 'separateness', which rests on the implicit acceptance of an erroneous, reified view of culture. Since daily life in South Africa does not generally allow for interaction of a meaningful nature between members of different 'population groups' the media plays a crucial role in determining White perceptions of Black realities; that it does not, for the most part, accurately reflect Black political reality is particularly disturbing given the present political climate, for lack of accurate knowledge can only feed misunderstanding and mistrustfulness, driving White and Black further apart – in short, promoting polarisation.

If a climate favourable to negotiation and mediation is to be created, ways must be found of decreasing – rather than increasing, as seems to be happening at present – the distance between White and Black, and since a lack of knowledge is one of the factors which perpetuates the present situation ways must be found of disseminating accurate information. Now whilst this point seems to me too obvious to need making, experience suggests that it **does** need to be made. I have often been struck by the lack of knowledge about other 'population groups' exhibited by generally well-informed people such as businessmen – not to mention, for example, first-year university students, who are often abysmally ignorant of fundamental realities of Black existence, such as where townships are situated, and the fact that vast numbers of men live in single-sex hostels; even politicians, of whom one would expect otherwise, appear ill-informed at times. Also noticeable is the lack of coordination of available knowledge, and of an effective channelling of it to those with some power to make changes themselves (and here I am referring to politicians of different political persuasions, as well as businessmen) or to those who perhaps have the power to make 'definitions of reality stick' (Berger et al, 1973: 197), such as the media. Implicit in all I have said is that many people may well be acting as they do because of the type of knowledge they possess; e.g. Bekker and Humphries (1985: 35) note, in connection with what they term the 'distinct institutional culture' of the late – but not – lamented – Administration/Development Boards that

> 'While attending Afrikaans universities in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960's, these directors read courses in applied social sciences, in "Native" or "Bantu" administration, and in Bantu languages. It was primarily this training couched in the Verwoerdian ideology of the time, that formed the basis for the blueprint upon which Administration Boards were to be developed'

The courses to which Bekker and Humphries refer would, of course, have stressed the reified nature of culture that I have referred to (see Sharp, 1980). All this brings me to the role of the social scientist.

As 'experts' (Schutz and Luckman, 1973:330) in what has been termed the 'Knowledge Industry' (Berger et al, 1973:96) I believe that we have a duty to use that knowledge responsibly. Now whilst the past few years have been marked by much soul-searching about the role of social scientists in South Africa (see, e.g. Webster, 1982), and much talk of 'relevant' research, what, one may well ask (considering the present political situation) has been achieved? With a view to promoting discussion on what **can** be achieved, I should like to conclude by posing some questions which, I believe, all social scientists may fruitfully ask themselves:

Firstly, are they, mindful of ethical considerations, using their knowledge constructively, e.g. lobbying politicians, businessmen, the media etc. It is all very well to criticise the media, but have they liaised as fully with it as they could have? If they do have access to power structures of any sort are they sufficiently cognisant of the way in which their research findings are being used, and the likely consequences (see Preston-Whyte, 1979); in short, are they likely to help build an overarching reality structure and increase understanding, or is it more probable that they will increase polarisation? Secondly, are they able to put aside internecine strife amongst themselves, caused by their different ideological perspectives, sufficiently to pool resources and ideas about using their knowledge more effectively?

Lastly, but most importantly, some methodological considerations come to mind: Is there sufficient collaboration between White and Black social scientists and/or fieldworkers in the interpretation of research findings? Several years ago Webster (1980:18) noted that 'there is the danger of reproducing apartheid in the very research act itself – the white sociologist conceives, the black research assistant executes', a trend which has also been drawn to my attention by informants during research of my own. Does this trend continue to exist? This brings me to the second methodological aspect, i.e. is there sufficient emphasis on **qualitative** research to complement the quantitative studies being carried out? Qualitative research not only frames questions from the 'inside' rather than the 'outside', but is particularly valuable in the sort of climate of growing polarisation we are witnessing because important and (hopefully) mutually valued links are established, and bridges are built, when White researchers focus on Black communities (or black researchers on White communities).

I realise that all this may seem the height of naivity to those social scientists who believe that no progress can be made until a radically different socio-economic formation emerges. I believe that they may be underestimating the power of ideas to influence change, and that when human life is at stake – as it is in the sort of upheaval taking place around us – **all** possible avenues of effecting peaceful change must be explored.

(This article is based on a paper given at an ASSA conference, conflict and peace studies section).

Footnotes

1. I should like to thank Professor Eleanor Preston-Whyte and Mr Paulus Zulu for reading and commenting on the original rough draft of this article; Naturally they are in no way responsible for the views expressed in it. I also wish to thank Professor Keyan Tomaselli and Mr Eric Louw of the Dept. of Contemporary Cultural Studies at Natal University for drawing my attention to the Tuchman and Louw readings.
2. Due to the narrow focus of this article I am obviously not doing justice to the complexity of South African society in generalising about 'White' and 'Black' and omitting 'Indians' and 'Coloureds' from the discussion. It is also obviously something of an oversimplification (done for purposes of comparison) to talk as if there were a single 'Black' or 'White' reality.
3. This category presumably includes politicians from, and some ordinary members of, the Official Opposition, and one would expect them to be better informed politically than possibly the bulk of White South Africans, whose attitude is probably somewhat akin to that of the proverbial Three Monkeys.
4. As in the Citizenship Act of 1970.
5. I realise that in any complex society, different groups of people experience reality differently (different classes in particular). However, I am suggesting that the extent to which there are conscious attempts to perpetuate these different realities in South Africa is unusual, to put it mildly.
6. It is quite possible that articles and books which give vivid descriptions of the 'customs' of the different 'groups' owe their popularity to the fact that they reinforce the differentness of 'them' as opposed to 'us'.
7. In America, e.g. it has been noted that the press plays a significant role in setting political priorities (Tuchman, 1978:2); Tuchman also images of the subject discussed, such as the use of 'draft dodgers' as opposed to 'draft resisters' during the Vietnam war, as well as the tendency to use the world 'unrest' for a variety of acts.
8. I am obviously referring to the position before the recent declaration of a State of Emergency.
9. Some newspapers do attempt a more balanced perspective, and more analysis of what is happening.
10. One report published under State of Emergency conditions went so far as to allege that the situation was returning to normal in one township which had been the scene of much violence; since the situation was far from 'normal' this report would have been better left unpublished in view of the restrictions.
11. My own research is not of a political nature; I am referring to other research findings which must remain confidential.
12. I am leaving aside the problematic issue of the distribution of economic power and its relationship to political power, a debate about which is outside the scope of this paper.

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by Terence Beard

THE HEART OF DARKNESS?

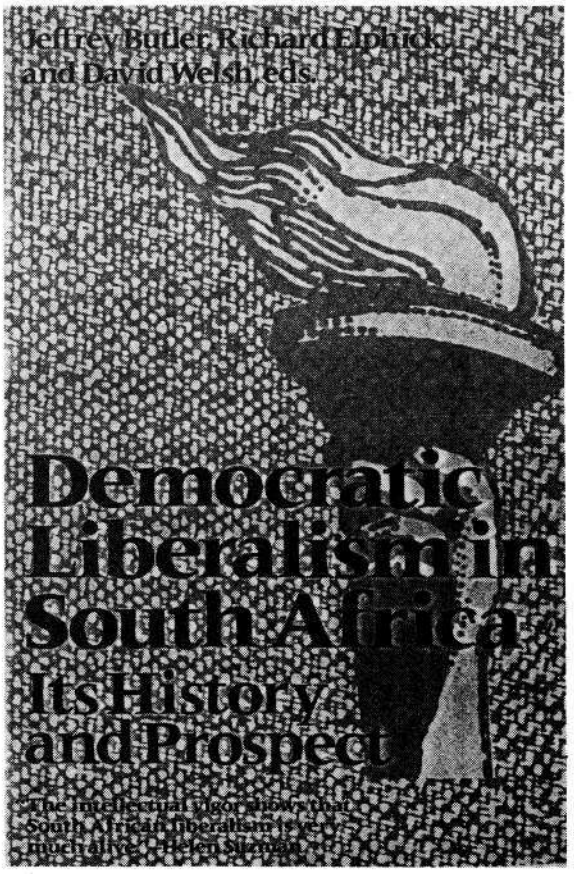
Jeffrey Butler, Richard Elphick,
and David Welsh, eds.
Democratic Liberalism in South Africa:
Its History and Prospect
(Published by Wesleyan University Press and David Philip 1987.

Present-day South Africa provides few straws for the political optimist to grasp at. The gradual escalation of conflict in the entire region, which is primarily, if not entirely, the consequence of apartheid and the reactive political and military adventurism of the apartheid regime, present ever more daunting scenarios in a region in which the root causes of political, social and economic inequalities have never been attacked. The result has been the development of endemic poverty and the polarization of South African society. So, it is not surprising that when, every now and again, commentators profess optimism about the future of South Africa and the region, it is based upon a vague hope or faith in the 'peoples' to find solutions to these massive problems.

This excellent collection of papers based upon empriical research all but two by academic liberals, (the work of a conference held at Houw Hoek in mid-1986), provides plenty of food for thought, but scant grounds for optimism. The collection ranges from historical analyses of liberalism in the Cape Colony and in South Africa since Union, through contemporary social, political, legal, economic, and institutional analyses from a liberal perspective, to assessments of future prospects. Some of the papers are outstandingly good, but, not unexpectedly, those having most impact upon the concerned South African reader are the analyses of the South African malaise and the assessments of the prospects for the future. The polarization into which we have been dragged by the apartheid regime is taking us into the heart of darkness, sadly, making it nigh impossible for those of us who are not historians, when looking at a collection both historical and contemporary, to pay the attention which they merit to studies of our more enlightened forebears. I shall, with apologies to the historians, therefore confine discussion mainly, although not entirely, to what seem to me to be important aspects of the contemporary analyses.

Liberals may be roughly but conveniently divided into two categories. Firstly there are those who emphasise the right to life, and hence the right to the means of life, leading them to espouse social democracy. And secondly there are those who tend rather to take individuals as 'given', stressing the values of 'individualism', placing emphasis upon civil rights and liberties, and upon the virtues of a 'free enterprise' economy. This dichotomy, not always clear-cut, was apparent in the work of the first great Natural Rights theorist, John Locke, who claimed that all persons were born with the rights to life, health, liberty and possessions, and that the right to life entailed the right to the means of life. On this view, social analysis must of necessity be anthropocentric, for the lives of people and their right to the means of life must always take precedence. Locke,however, in developing his theory of property, omitted any further mention of the right to life and to health, or to the means of life in what he termed 'political society'.

Since Locke's day traditional liberal theory has tended to adopt this latter position. Most modern liberal theorists would deny a right to life, claiming that this is not really a right at all, that it does not even conform with the logic of rights. For rights, they argue, are goods which their possessors may or may not choose to exercise, and which they may or may not have the means of exercising. Thus a person may have the right to travel from Chicago to London, say, but, lacking funds, is not able to. They would claim that individuals have a right to choose their occupations, to set up their own enterprises if they have the means, and if they do not, to apply for whatever jobs are available, and that their success or failure depends upon prevailing economic conditions and upon their own efforts and ability. In so far as individuals do not have the capital to set up an enterprise, or do not succeed in obtaining a job and thus the means of their subsistence,



this does not mean that they do not have rights, only that they are unable, through force of circumstances, to exercise them. This latter state of affairs is often attributed to wrong-headed interference in the economy on the part of governments. The necessity for anthropocentric analysis thus disappears, and in this way ample space is created for theorists of an unhumanitarian disposition to claim to be part of the liberal tradition.

The Liberal Party, as Douglas Irvine shows in his interesting and succinct paper, after a period of considerable disagreement between proponents who may be regarded as having espoused, broadly speaking, one of the two positions outlined above, and immediately prior to the banning of many of its most active members in the mid-1960s, implicitly acknowledged not only the right to life but the right to the means of life, stressing the need, firstly in its agricultural policy, for a redistribution of land, and hence of agricultural wealth. In 1963 it set up a committee to reformulate economic policies with the aim of adopting socialist measures in order to meet the enormous problems of economic maldistribution and the endemic poverty which pervaded the black community. In these ways it made apparent its awareness of the immense problems in South Africa which stood and which still stand in the way of ensuring the right to the means of life to all her peoples.

The debate between the Liberal Party and the 'left' in the early 1960s was in part with the Congress of Democrats, which was thought to be, to at least some extent, a front for the banned Communist Party. The Communist Party at the time was solidly Stalinist, which was why the Liberal Party concerned with the right to life, so palpably ignored by Stalin, largely withheld co-operation with and support for the Congress of Democrats. It was partly this factor, as well as factors such as the demands and plight of blacks, which drove the Liberal Party to look more and more to its social and economic policies, in order to demonstrate its humanitarianism, taking both the right to life and the right to the means of life with the utmost seriousness.

The contributors to this book are implicitly aware of this endemic problem concerning liberal values, but have not argued it in these terms. It is nevertheless apparent that what divided liberals in the 1950s and early 1960s continues to divide them today. Some of the papers collected in this work are primarily concerned to show that there is space for 'free economy' liberalism in South Africa, while others are more directly concerned with the short as well as long-term problems of economic redistribution. But there is a tension apparent in some of the papers which may be said to arise from a conflation of the two positions on rights outlined above. Jill Nattrass, so recently and tragically killed in a motor accident, argues, in an excellent and thought provoking paper, for a series of measures which would result in a redistribution of wealth, as does Sean Archer, who open-mindedly examines the Freedom Charter which he treats as an open-ended document largely compatible with redistributive economic measures which many liberals could accept.

Jill Nattrass, in developing her theses, refers to all economies as having "a physical component comprised of people, and of capital in the form of buildings, plant and machinery, and social overhead capital such as roads, dams, schools and hospitals." This is the traditional non-anthropocentric approach which demands that the value placed upon human life depends upon the particular moral values of the analyst. Nattrass's own position is retrieved by her moral values, by her obvious concern for human welfare. The tension is immediately apparent when one considers, as already noted, that 'anti-humanist' economic analyses proceed from similar basic premises. Treating people as mere factors of production, can lead, a la Thatcher and Milton Friedman, to the appraising of economies in terms of economic output alone, disregarding rates of unemployment and degrees of poverty. Whereas, stress upon the right to life and to the means of life, the anthropocentric standpoint, assumes the prime criterion of a healthy economy to be in terms of the quality of life, of how low is the level of unemployment and to what extent poverty has been eliminated.

The polemic in this collection is aimed almost as much at the neo-Marxian left as at the right. Some contributors react against the attacks upon liberalism which have stemmed from the 'left', and while acknowledging the contribution of neo-Marxian historians, reject the Marxist propensity to place class analysis at the centre of social analysis. Here and there credit is given to neo-Marxist analysis, but there is little or no attempt, apart from the outstanding contribution by David Yudelman, to espouse a theoretical position which acknowledges and builds upon this contribution.

There is much confusion in contemporary South African writing on the 'race-class' debate, with 'liberals' claiming, after Leo Kuper, both that race is not inherently a social category, and that the racial problem in South Africa arose out of the conflict between "rival groups to secure the same scarce material and non-material resources". (cf. van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh : **South Africa's Options**). They do not pick up the implications of such a claim for the forms which the incorporation of racial differentiation take at various times in our history, whereas this is what much neo-Marxian analysis is primarily about. But, as tends to be the case with most new historical and social perspectives, the neo-Marxists frequently overstated their case. Thus Frederick Johnstone, in his book '**Class, Race and Gold**', claimed that class was the cause of race discrimination, while his own analysis demonstrated no more than the forms which race discrimination took in the mining industry, how race discrimination related to class stratification as a consequence of its incorporation within a developing capitalist framework.

The time is long overdue when whoth sides in this debate acknowledge that race and class are **both** key elements in modern South Africa. Race was obviously a social category from the time van Riebeeck first arrived at the Cape. That there were no white, only black and brown slaves, is surely testimony to this. Class analysis is of crucial importance in mapping out and analysing the forms of racial differentiation. Given capitalist development, it is only to be expected that the forms of racial discrimination will be articulated around capitalist production relations, just as in Sparta, Helotry took forms consistent with Spartan militarism, communal ownership and living, and domination.

One of the problems has been that neither the neo-Marxists nor their liberal critics have had sufficient grasp of Marxian theory. The question of whether and to what extent capitalism has been compatible with apartheid and race discrimination has largely been debated without paying heed to Marx's own economic analysis. A question

which has been virtually ignored, and which demands attention, is a **theoretical** analysis of the forms of wage-labour in South Africa. To what extent during the various phases of economic development has there been '**free**' wage-labour? For to the extent to which labour has been and remains 'unfree', to that extent the economy cannot, in Marxian terms, straightforwardly be categorized as capitalist. From this perspective the liberals have a strong argument to the effect that in so far as labour has been 'unfree' in analytical Marxian terms, capitalist development has been inhibited, but it is an argument which has been ignored. And neo-Marxians need to revise their analyses in order to encapsulate the methodological implications of this theoretical point.

The paper by Bromberger and Hughes, in which they argue to great effect against the 'underdevelopment' thesis, arguably loses a great deal of its impact in the attempt to refute the claim that "the black population is **absolutely** and relatively impoverished," or as Shula Marks has recently written, that in 1910 "the vast majority of black South Africans... were systematically excluded... from any share in the possible rewards of capitalist growth", (my stress) Showing, as they do, that miniscule gains have accrued to blacks over the years, need not be read as undermining the central thrust of this claim. This is because "absolute" impoverishment is an ambiguous notion which can be understood in a weak as well as a strong and more precise sense.

Indeed there are statements in some of the other papers which can be read as supporting Marks' thesis. For example, on page 372, Giliomee states that "Perhaps the most important political fact in South African history is that from 1700 to the 1950s the proportion of whites to the overall population of South Africa was always sufficient to man all strategic positions in the political, economic and administrative system of the country. Whites owned almost all the land, did all the skilled and most of the semiskilled jobs in the mines and factories, and staffed the top and medium-level positions in the civil service, army and police." It can be argued that this is "absolute impoverishment", Marks' thesis. Despite the changes which have occurred since the 1950's, which Giliomee also discusses, the overall economic position of blacks remains one of poverty and deprivation for which the causes are structural and systematic, which is the basis of Marks' claim. Nattrass may also be read as supporting this claim.

It seems to me not only unnecessary but counter-productive, to reduce the disagreements with neo-Marxians to debates over whether or not blacks have **marginally** gained from capitalist growth. Whatever blacks may or may not have gained has not changed the overall picture of a society dominated by affluent whites, and in which the vast majority of blacks live in poverty and suffer from large-scale unemployment.

Apparent in the Schlemmer discussion on consociationalism is a methodological problem concerning the development of democracy. To point to the necessary conditions enables one to arrive at a definition of democracy, but because definitions are circular, the necessary conditions cannot simultaneously serve as explanations as to how democracy can be achieved. The problem remains as to how the political culture can be changed so as to make democracy even remotely feasible? Employing and extending Schlemmer's imagery, the apartheid regime is intent upon ensuring that not even the "building blocks" necessary for moving in a democratic direction can be moulded and baked. The regime, and, as a consequence, the political culture, are travelling in the opposite direction.

There are grounds for scepticism of Schlemmer's faith in consociationalism. Consociational theories understandably have great appeal for whites, but are they really liberal theories at all? Political equality is a traditional liberal goal, which entails not only universal suffrage but also giving the vote its value. For this very reason the British Liberal Party has long stood for proportional representation. Consociationalism precludes giving the vote its value, assumes equality between groups rather than individuals, and depends upon the accommodation of rival political elites, assuming their positions of leadership to be secure. In contexts where radicalism at grass-roots level makes accommodators liable to be regarded as 'sell-outs', leadership positions tend to be relatively insecure, and the possibility of elite accommodation becomes correspondingly difficult and unlikely.

The minority veto rights which group elites can wield in consociational systems, are likely in South Africa to be used to inhibit the economic redistribution upon which future stability based upon consent, and, indeed, the success of consociationalism itself, depend. Minorities are arguably better protected by bills of rights insofar as they can be protected at all, and the viability of a bill of rights depends in large measure upon the widespread acceptance of liberal and democratic values. The very redistribution of wealth which consociationalism is likely to thwart, is a necessary condition for the creation and maintenance of these liberal and democratic values.

I have focused upon criticisms of the papers. This ought not to give the impression that the collection is fundamentally flawed, for indeed it is not. The papers of which I have been critical are highly analytic, and contain many arguments which have not been touched upon. They are all well written and well worth reading. There are excellent papers by Dugard and Mathews on the rule of law, which are seminal additions to the literature, not that they add appreciably to our substantive knowledge, for the subject matter has been too widely written about for that, but the case for the fule of law is argued in fresh and illuminating ways. All in all, it is an excellent collection.

One of the deficiencies manifest in most neo-Marxist writing on South Africa is the tendency to work **solely** at the structural and macro-level with class concepts such as capital and labour, and when moving to lower levels of analysis to break capital and labour into class-fractions, avoiding reference to actors, particularly to political actors. Liberal analysis, as some of the papers in this book demonstrate, fills this gap, making clear, rather ironically, not only that it is "men who make history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances encountered, given and transmitted from the past." (Marx: **The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte**).

It is time, however, that liberal analysts begin to build upon the work of the neo-Marxists, following the singular example of David Yudelman, rather than continue to react only against it. I would go so far as to argue that the future of liberal values depends upon it, as the choice which lies

before liberals articulated by van Zyl Slabbert so compellingly implies.

The work is rounded off by van Zyl Slabbert in a short but penetrating paper which should be compulsory reading for liberals and for all who are interested in or are likely to be affected by the future of our country. His analysis, which is designed to highlight the present dilemma of where liberalism is to position itself in contemporary South Africa, either with "the politics of stability" or with "the politics of freedom", leaves liberals, in my opinion, with no real choice. Slabbert convincingly shows the choice between "incrementalism" and revolution to be a vast oversimplication, arguing that "incrementalism" can become an "albatross around (liberals') necks in today's increasingly repressive and undemocratic society." The choice has to be for "the politics of freedom", notwithstanding the price which it will obviously entail. Slabbert's analysis makes it clear that this is his personal choice, although he has made strenuous efforts to be impartial and to leave the decision open for other liberals. His analysis, however, probably unintentionally, makes the choice of "the politics of stability" an all but untenable one, for if it shows anything, it shows that Parliament under the present regime is not and is unlikely again to become an instrument of constitutional change, which the traditional liberal politics of reform and "incrementalism" is predicated upon.

What clouds the issue in South Africa, is the fact that parliamentary participation continues, for the time being at least, to provide "a forum for protesting against apartheid and as an institutional base to intervene on behalf of those who are persecuted and abused . . .". This is, as Slabbert goes on to say, "a legitimate and defensible strategy", but it is also, for humanitarian liberals, an essential strategy, which, given the choice of "the politics of freedom", makes new and extra-parliamentary roles for liberal parliamentary opposition parties imperative. "But", as Slabbert says, "this role must not be confused with that of presenting Parliament as an effective instrument of constitutional change", for it is no longer that.

The counter-argument, that this is working within and willy-nilly collaborating with the system, and therefore incompatible with "the politics of freedom", is a view which has wide and popular support, but individuals such as Molly Blackburn proved how it is possible to successfully fill the role of provincial councillor **and** espouse "the politics of freedom" while simultaneously gaining widespread black support and acclaim. Molly Blackburn demonstrated, contra one of Slabbert final points, that it **is** possible for a liberal to choose **freedom** and not be "accused of wanting to dilute, divert, or hijack the revolution". Of course, not many liberals are Molly Blackburns, but her example is one which cannot be lightly dismissed.

Slabbert writes. "The government cannot even tentatively explore a possible democratic solution, because if its intentions were sincere such a solution would lead inexorably to its own demise. The only strategy apart from continuing brutal repression must be co-optive domination" where the goal of co-optive domination is "multiracial autocracy". It is unlikely in the extreme that the government would step down in the event of a miraculous election victory for the parties to its left, although it is less certain that it would not give way to the Conservative Party, for the latter is also dedicated to Afrikaner Nationalist controlled 'white' domination. The question reduces itself to the extent to which the government and the military consider a return to 'grand apartheid' a viable alternative. Or would they see it as a trap for the unwary which will result in the demise of 'white' control? The present path of "multi-racial autocracy" is one which has not been lightly or even very willingly chosen, co-optation strategy being seen as the only means of ensuring continued control. The present trend is for the system to become ever more closed, while the strategy of co-optation enables the government and the state, playing upon the gullibility of the white electorate, to argue the contrary. The possibility, in the short or middle term, of constitutional change in a democratic direction through parliamentary legislative action is so remote that it can be discounted.

van Zyl Slabbert's analysis (unwittingly ?) undercuts many of the points which are made in papers which precede it, to a degree obscuring the roles which liberals can play 'as liberals' within our polarized society, for if they choose "the politics of freedom" it is hard to see what **independent** roles there are which are or could be viable. This is not to criticise Slabbert, but to stress that the choice seems increasingly and unavoidably to be that of working within extra-parliamentary structures, few, if any, of which, are dedicated to purely liberal values and/or goals. The task seems, rather, to be that of endeavouring to inject liberal values into existing organizations wherever and whenever this is deemed necessary.

This is an immense task, but not, perhaps, as difficult as it at first sight appears, for South Africans have suffered intolerably and for too long from inhuman and illiberal policies and practices not to see the importance of liberal humanitarian values. In the liberals' favour is that "the politics of freedom" takes freedom to be the prime goal, leaving considerable scope for those who wish to give it more precise meaning and content. The value of human life has steadily been depreciated over the years, and the present strife, as in the Pietermaritzburg area, depreciates it still further. There is undoubtedly a role for liberals and a place for liberal values in our society.

Liberals, in my view, cannot afford not to abandon the pursuit of laisser faire capitalism. There is no reason why liberal values such as the right to life and to the means of life, and of civil and legal liberties should not gain support, for they do not invite the kind of opposition which is generated by the tenets of the economics of 'free enterprise'. The latter stands little chance of acceptance in inegalitarian South Africa, and is likely to prove just as much a liberal "albatross" as "incrementalism". If associated with liberal humanitarian values, the 'free enterprise' credo is more than likely to sink the 'liberal ship' by debasing these other values.

Liberal humanitarian values together with the liberal notion of democracy are far too valuable to risk for the sake of economic arrangements based upon an ideal type and which have never in any case existed in practice. A mixed economy is a minimal goal, and given the abolition of apartheid there is no reason why it should not in principle become as rational and successful a system as that, say, of Sweden. But this assumes the demise of apartheid, and there is little prospect of this, alas, within the foreseeable future.□

by Tony Voss

EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR THE FIRST TIME

NADINE GORDIMER:
A SPORT OF NATURE
David Philip 1987

Ever since **The Lying Days** there has been a strong millenarian, not to say apocalyptic, strain in Nadine Gordimer's fiction. The apocalypse is never directly encountered; rather, moments of vision, but we are left inside history, even in July's People, where the apocalypse is ambiguously survived. The first two novels find release in escape, but from **Occasion for Loving,** the commitment of Ms Gordimer's confrontation with South Africa has deepened. Only in Mehring's ironic departure at the end of **The Conservationist** is escape contemplated again. In the more recent works, the commitment takes her heroines deep into the heartlands of South Africa; prison in **Burger's Daughter,** the "homelands" in **July's People.**

A Sport of Nature, so its epigraph from the O.E.D. tells us, signifies an organism "which exhibits abnormal variation or a departure from the parent stock or type . . . a spontaneous mutation; a new variety produced in this way." The title describes the novel's heroine, Hillela, who is Jewish, suburban, colonial, white, South African, a creature of Apartheid who survives, mutates into Azania. Hillela is, scientifically speaking, an emergent, a phenomenon not predictable from its pre-constituent elements, and thus an earnest of hope for white South Africa.

This, then, is a prophetic novel. Hillela is named for a Zionist grandfather (other Jewish connotations of her name are also significant), but abandoned by her mother for a Mocambique night-club dancer, and begins her education at a private boarding school for girls in what was, then, Salisbury, whence her father is a salesman. But when Hillela oversteps the bounds of discretion by bunking out with a "coloured" boy, she is expelled and sent to live in the home of her liberal Aunt Pauline in Johannesburg. Pauline and her lawyer husband Joe are responsible for Hillela's moral and political education; her rich Aunt Olga takes on her training in taste and deportment. Hillela seems to follow a path (which leads, among other places to guitar-playing in coffee bars) between Pauline's Saturday literacy classes for blacks and Olga's fashionable shops. But the expulsion lays down the pattern of Hillela's career, a sequence of transgressions, orphanings and exiles which extend and re-constitute her "family". From adolescence Hillela's focus of transgression and growth is sexual: she leaves Pauline's house after making love with her cousin Sasha; she leaves South Africa in the company of her male journalist lover, who is ostensibly fleeing the Special Branch. (He is said, later, "almost certainly" to have been a "double-dealer".)

In exile, Hillela's exuberant sex life gradually synchronises with her political commitment. On Tamarisk Beach, East African meeting ground of political exiles, a "member of the command" is among the men "far from their wives and likely to be so for many years, with whom she slept." After a more extended liaison, with a Belgian ambassador (recounted in a chapter called "The Diplomatic Bag") she marries Whaila, a commander in Umkhonto we Sizwe. With their daughter, Nomzamo, named for Mrs Nelson Mandela, they constitute what Hillela calls "the rainbow family". Her commitment (ambiguously personal-political) is only intensified after Whaila's murder, and Hillela becomes an agent of the liberation struggle (a term Gordimer fights shy of), managing arms and food from Europe and the U.S. to Africa, promoting her cause in the other direction. Having resisted the temptations of marriage to an East Coast Ivy-league liberal brownstone executive, Hillela becomes one of the wives (but the only mistress?) of General Reuel, leader of a black African state, and, at his side in the novel's last chapter, returns triumphantly to "Whaila's Country", to appear on a dais in a Cape Town stadium at South Africa's liberation celebrations. The sexual and the political come together, so to speak, in the last moments of the story, as "Cannons ejaculate from the Castle."

Hillela's story is intricately set in a pattern of south African political events of the immediate past (post-1948) and possible future. Set against Hillela's pilgrimage in exile is the progress of her cousin and first(?) lover, Sasha, who becomes a Trade Union worker, serves a jail sentence, takes up armed resistance and ends the novel in exile in Holland.

Ms Gordimer, then, tries to take Hillela's story through and out of history into prophecy. In that sense, she has written again the story of which she has written many versions before. But Ms Gordimer has also said that **A Sport of Nature** is a story she has always wanted to write. For a reader attuned to the compulsion, the duty and the scruple of Ms Gordimer's fiction, summed up for me in these words from **The Conservationist,**

> Distress is a compulsion to examine minutely – this anguished restless necessity, when something can't be undone, when there's nothing to be done, to keep going over and over the same ground . . .

what seems to be the indulgence of **A Sport of Nature** may come as a surprise. The politics of the novel strike me sometimes as possibly either naive or cynical.

Hillela is a sixties child before her time; wise in what Yeats called "the wisdom of the body", she is described by others as free, instinctive, innocent. She can believe nothing without experiencing it herself ("through your skin"). For her "everything happens for the first time". Yet, private as all her motives seem to be ("her assurance so provocatively perfect"), "No history of her really can be personal history . . ." The most striking manifestation of this in the novel is Hillela's sexual behaviour; she "loved men", we are told by the ambassador, "as one is allowed to say a man 'loves women'". Her political trajectory is identified with her sexual career. This has seemed, I gather, distasteful to some readers, who have read Hillela's life as saying something like "Free love leads to liberation".

The air of mystery about Hillela, which Gordimer conveys in a narrative method that implicates rumour, news and anecdote, covers or embodies, I would guess, a deep fantasy for the author. Ms Gordimer has always had a tendency towards a romantic attitude to sex (memorably expressed in **Occasion for Loving** and **A Guest of Honour)** and there is, I imagine, a degree of writerly indulgence in Hillela's story, which suggests that instinct and telling the truth in bed will eventually win out politically. This seems naive but is in a sense what is imaginatively available to Ms Gordimer, and Sasha's idea, which the author seems equally to endorse, that "the dynamic of real change is always Utopian" recalls the Rick Turner of **The Eye of the Needle.** There is even to-day (and perhaps especially in the AIDS era) something deeply subversive of both bourgeois and revolutionary morality in the faith that energizes Hillela's sexual pilgrimage.

As I read it, **A Sport of Nature** is not hedged about with metafictional ironies. There are moments of writerly self-consciousness; as when Hillela says 'I went to a court once and there was another kind of talk, another way of words dealing with things that had happened . . ." And in this novel's version of S.A. history Rosa Burger and Nelson Mandela are equally real presences. For the theory of discourse, that is as it should be, but for Ms Gordimer, I would guess, the narratable world exists in a way that it doesn't for her littoral fellow-craftsperson, J.M. Coetzee. In the end, the story tells against its teller. In this novel, the author imagines again the survival of revolution, but as **Burger's Daughter** leaves Rosa in the prison-house of fiction, so **A Sport of Nature** leaves Hillela (and Sasha) in exile.

It is a fascinating book, full of rich detail, yet letting it all hang out.

Footnote

In Part Two, "A Voyage to Brobdingnag", of his **Travels,** Swift's Gulliver is identified by the King's Scholars as

> . . . **Relphum Scalcoth,** which is interpreted literally **Lusus Naturae:** a Determination exactly agreeable to the Modern Philosophy of Europe: whose Professor, disdaining the old Evasion of **Occult Causes,** whereby the Followers of **Aristotle** endeavour in vain to disguise their ignorance; have invented this wonderful Solution of all Difficulties, to the unspeakable advancement of human knowledge.

Swift's criticism may be applicable to **A Sport of Nature,** and its heroine Hellela, whose instinctive (sexual political trajectory is set against the uncomfortable sequence of choices of Sasha. But there are many young South Africans like Sasha, who have made oppositional political choices on rational grounds; and have given up comfort and career for social principles.

A tribute to Alan Paton will appear in the next issue of Reality.

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