

ARTICLE FOR SOUTH - 26 MAY 1987

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One of the legacies of almost 40 years of NP rule, has been the inflation of words beyond any recognised meaning. They lose their value in the difficult art of communication. Thus according to the Government, we are going through a "broadening of democracy" by means of a "process of negotiation" where all decisions will be the result of "consensus". The latest bit of verbal inflation has to do with "extra-Parliamentary politics".

This concept is used by Government, not in the normal sense of interest groups that lie outside party political boundaries that use the power of petition and lobbying to influence politics, but in the sense of illegal, irregular, unconstitutional, subversive, political activity. In short, what the government regards as "extra-Parliamentary" are all forms of political activity that do not fall within their own created structures of participation. Ostensibly this would seem to apply to the UDF, the alternative press,

civic associations and community based organisations, but from there it is a short step to the conventional extra-Parliamentary institutions, such as the universities, the courts, the established press, the church and other voluntary organisations.

A Government that believes in the need for a "total strategy" to deal with a "total onslaught" must by definition seek to control all forms of political involvement. Consequently, unacceptable dissent must be criminalized and thwarted. All this become very clear in PW Botha's opening speech to Parliament when he stressed three things in order of priority : first priority - security; then reform, on his terms, which means group (race) based "broadening of democracy" and thirdly repression of all opposition which does not accept this.

It is in the face of this verbal inflation and constitutional co-option that the struggle for democratic principles will have to play itself out.

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