

ARTICLE FOR LEADERSHIP

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The tragedy of South Africa lies in the continued denial of its potential. It is a magnificent country whose future remains frustrated by its past.

All the ingredients for a climactic eruption have been present for decades. Even this potential remains unfulfilled - so much so, that one rates doomsday scenarios not so much on predictive accuracy, as on the originality and freshness of new assumptions. South Africa is waiting to become - a hovering society. Almost universal agreement on the untenability of the present is matched by equally deep divisions about the pattern of the future. We are all agreed on what we have to avoid, but not on what to seek. There is no shared career path for the future. Our conflict is rooted in the diversity and divergence of our hopes. South Africa is not a hopeless society; that is why its central conflict appears to be so intractable. Some have what others want, and others are determined to monopolize what some wish to get at. It is a divided society where one side's dreams and expectations for the future become the other's threat to, and frustration of the present. That is also why increasingly, it is becoming a violent, bitter and brutalized society. People are beginning to hate each other out of the future.

Why? What is the issue? Is it class, race, ethnicity? Obviously greed, intolerance, fear are primordial emotions that run deep in South Africa, but they epitomize rather than explain the dilemma. South Africa escapes analytical precision and closure. It is a land of shifting paradigms: Marxists end up making concession to race and ethnicity; liberals to class, and pluralists to almost anything that disturbs their train of thought. Very often residual categories in one framework bulge into prominence at the very moment their irrelevance has been defined, like a weak spot on a pumped up inner tube of a bicycle.

Because analyses of the South African conflict situation is so open-ended, it provides a fertile climate for ideological dogmatism. Differences of opinion, tactics and strategy often blow up into major confrontations and are seized upon to pronounce on moral sanity, sincerity of commitment or some anticipated state of grace or retribution. Ideological certainty depends on intellectual compromise and South Africa is rife with compromised intellectuals who know better but refrain from saying so. The need for certainty is the most compelling evidence of uncertainty. Ending up on the loser's side is a greater sin than being right. It becomes easy to confuse silence for wisdom.

So what is the issue ? Perhaps it is easier, if not necessarily safer, to begin with elimination. Although South Africa shares many of the characteristics of a typical colonial society, it is not. It is a colonial situation without the colonial options of external metropolitan intervention, or minority withdrawal towards it, or both. Algeria had France, Rhodesia - Britain, Mozambique and Angola - Portugal. South Africa has neither this kind of retreat and/or intervenor. Anyone who plans strategy on the assumption that it has, is preparing for a false confrontation. A civil war can only be seen as a stage in a colonial struggle at enormous cost to human and natural resources before the error inevitably has to be acknowledged. And yet, it is precisely South Africa's colonial past without the colonial option on the way to its future which makes the resolution of its present conflict so intractable and costly.

If South Africa is locked into a class-conflict, it so far stubbornly refuses to come to terms with it. At present there are simply too many "false consciousnesses" straying across enemy lines. And yet, nobody can deny that South Africa has all the characteristics of a class struggle :- extraordinary concentration of capital, collusion between state and business at key periods in its history, and a growing politicized and alienated working class.

However, it is precisely because of the intransigence of racial and ethnic factors that good old fashioned Marxists are tempted to look on South Africa as first having to resolve the colonial ("national") struggle before settling down to the "real" class revolution.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to find any black liberal amongst the workers or working class academics. But this does not serve to inhibit the optimism of liberal economists that South Africa will inevitably "grow" itself out of its present crisis if only the philosophy and practice of free enterprise is allowed to have its way. Too often the "if only" qualification becomes an intellectual escape route. There is enough evidence from the past that growth without efficient political redistribution increases a sense of relative deprivation and compounds the conflict. At the same time, it is quite true that without growth in the economy the politics of redistribution dies on the vine. It is as futile to attempt to redistribute what society does not have as it is dangerous to refuse to distribute as equitably as possible what it does have. However, more than a few "big businessmen's" courage has failed them when they have had to face the political consequences of this kind of economic analysis. It is pointless to wax eloquent on the virtues of free enterprise in a politically unfree South Africa; it is not so pointless to ponder how well free enterprise will survive in a politically free South Africa. How compatible is freedom with the demand for equality ?

And the issue is not really Apartheid. Apartheid is simply the flare that illuminates the scene of battle. From South Africa's colonial past, in every class analysis which comes to grips with the complexities of the present as well as the source of tension in the liberal economist's attempt to reconcile growth and redistribution lies the issue of White, racial, political, minority domination.

Obviously colonial conquest created the social and political infrastructure for white domination and British trade and financial imperialism gave it economic content. Apartheid was Afrikaner-Nationalism's uniquely "South African way" of articulating white domination. It is on the fact and intractability of white domination where the paradigms of liberals, pluralists and Marxists briefly converge before they go their separate ways to explain its significance and to predict its end.

And today, when international anger, outrage and moral revulsion is mobilized to sanction the obstinacy of Apartheid and domestic forces revolt to bring about its demise, after all is said and done, dismantling Apartheid does not only mean doing away with racist legislation, or "giving blacks a fairer deal", or even "sharing political power" (whatever that implies). It means a transfer of political power away from white domination, and with the demonstrable support of the majority of the adult population. Does this mean one-man-one-vote? Yes. Does this imply that the majority of people in Government will be black? No question about it. But these are not really the issues. The fundamental one is that after the transfer of power a white minority will not be calling the political shots. This is what domestic and international pressure on the South African government is all about.

It is against this background that the South African government's attempts at "reform", "negotiation" and "broadening democracy" have to be evaluated. There is no point in arguing whether there has been change/reform or not. Of course there has. But how do we assess its significance? There is truth in the assertion of government spokesmen that at the moment that they introduced more reforms away from Apartheid policy than ever in the history of the Nationalist Party government, they experienced the severest pressure and hostility from inside and outside the country. But this is so because with the reforms, the realization has crystallized that the South African government is not prepared to go all the way.

Of course they are prepared to negotiate and broaden democracy - but on their terms.

The tri-cameral Parliament is the continuing manifestation of this kind of logic. Nothing precipitated domestic and subsequently, international, revolt against South African government reforms more than its implementation. Why? Because it became increasingly obvious that the South African government was prepared to adjust white domination and sophisticate its entrenchment, but not get rid of it. That is why it is a living insult to raised liberation expectations. It brings those who are not white a little closer to the centre of power, whilst showing them how far away they are going to remain from it.

There is nothing fundamentally new in the thinking which accompanied the shift from racist Westminster to multi-racial Tri-Cameralism - it was simply old political wine into new constitutional casks. At the heart of it was the idea that racial groups could be accommodated as pre-determined political entities into a South African political system. Until 1983 the idea was that a Nationalist Party government could unilaterally partition racial groups away from the political centre and so preserve white "self-determination" or domination. Since 1983 the idea is that a Nationalist Party government can unilaterally integrate racial groups into the political centre and so preserve white "self-determination" or domination. No one can sensibly deny the reality of racial or ethnic groups in South Africa, but the Nationalist Party government has seized on this reality to determine that every South African individual shall participate in politics only as a member of a racial or ethnic group. If one asks "Why?", it is difficult to escape the conclusion that it is done so that Afrikaner Nationalists as the largest white ethnic group can dominate the political system as part of a racial minority. Whatever President P W Botha has in mind on the nature of reform, as the embodiment of the present Afrikaner Nationalist leadership, he certainly does not see an alternative where he and/or his party will not be firmly in political

control of South Africa. And when he talks about negotiation, he certainly has no intention of talking himself or his successor out of a job.

This is the crux of the matter. On this issue different agendas for "reform", "negotiation", "broadening democracy" and "transferring power" find their origin. Those who dominate in South Africa are prepared to adjust the domination, but not to abolish it - this is their so-called "bottom-line" for reform, whereas those who oppose domination demand the abolition of it before accepting the validity/legitimacy of any reform. Because reform is essentially a bilateral process, i.e. its success or viability does not depend on one party alone, the government finds itself in a unilateral mess like someone opening up shop without any customers. But it has done more than that, it has advertised goods that it is not prepared to deliver : full citizenship, democracy and power. This is precisely what those who oppose domination demand as its alternative. That is why the overwhelming response to the reform programme of the government has been revolt - both domestically and internationally. The interaction between reform and revolt has trapped South Africa into a process of violent evolution which threatens to ravage its human and natural resources.

So, what is the government going to do ? Given its determination not to sacrifice white control in the face of mounting internal dissent and external sanctions, what are its options ? Ideologically it began to prepare, (particularly white South Africans) when P W Botha succeeded B J Vorster. The government began to abandon the ideology of Apartheid in favour of the "Total Onslaught" which demanded a "Total Strategy". It shifted from pro-actively motivating whites in favour of Apartheid/Separate Development, to reactively motivating them against the "Total onslaught". That is why the values of security and stability have begun to lose their instrumental character and are becoming ends in themselves. The National Security Management System of the P W Botha era with the centrality of the State Security Council and Joint and Mini-Management Centres

provide the policy framework within which the resources of the State are organized in a Total Strategy to combat "the threat".

Any person or movement that questions the State's perception of "the threat" is defined as part of it and similarly those who resist being co-opted into the "total strategy" become defined as its legitimate targets. It is an ideology with a built-in self-fulfilling logic. As long as the right of those who define the "onslaught" and manage the "strategy" is not threatened, they will tolerate, even encourage, "reform", "broadening of democracy" and "negotiation". Who are they? It is the "old firm" - this time better drilled and many in uniform - the leadership of the National Party - the original and final custodians of white domination. (If he has not come up through the ranks, his uniform and rank can be arranged - vide Colonel Pik Botha; and if he is not a politician, he can be made one - vide Magnus Malan : from General to Cabinet Minister.)

Anything is justified/justifiable as long as it is part of the "total strategy" to combat the "total onslaught" and both concepts are necessary to explain the necessity for continuing with white domination. The moment this necessity is questioned, e.g. during the EPG and Howe visits, the government uses concepts such as "suicide", "surrender", "chaos", "disintegration" to conjure up alternative possibilities to its own continued control. The propaganda import is obvious - if a future strategy could lead to "suicide", or some apocalyptic equivalent, the continued costs of the present one remains bearable. Divergent, even hostile interest groups find themselves somehow trapped into arguing within this propaganda framework - from right-wing racists to big businessmen - to some liberal newspaper editors. The morality and logic which argues that the fight for survival respects no rules is perfectly compatible with the argument : "better the devil you know, than the one you don't".

Within this "onslaught" ideology the government formulates its international, regional and domestic policies. Given the circular logic of the total strategy/onslaught ideology, actions of government which "normally" don't make sense become coherent, eg the raid on neighbouring territories during the EPG visit and whilst Reagan and Thatcher are fighting desperate rear guard actions against sanctions as well as the subsequent humiliation of Howe. The EPG, Reagan, Thatcher and Howe all came with the same message to the Botha government : dismantle Apartheid, release political prisoners, unban organisations and negotiate. The obvious question : What has to be negotiated once Apartheid has been dismantled?, was answered by P W Botha at the Transvaal Congress when he accused the "outside world of confusing reform with surrender". Similarly, the government's regional policy does not hesitate to defy convention, use subterfuge, lies and uncomplicated force if it serves the "total strategy" in its fight against the "onslaught".

However, it is on the domestic front that the government faces its greatest challenge. The crisp issue of "reform" is how to jettison Apartheid without losing control and still mobilize enough support for the "total strategy". Constitutionally the response has been a massive and sustained erosion of accountable politics in favour of co-optive decision-making. At the central and key points the government has made quite sure that its will cannot be challenged by popular rejection. This was graphically demonstrated even within the constraints of tri-cameral Parliament during the first session of 1986 when it used the nominated President Council loaded with its nominees to ram through two security bills which had been rejected by Parliament. The quid pro quo for co-optive control has been to multiracialize political participation. As the White Paper on Defence during the same session of Parliament has made clear, whites alone cannot implement the "total strategy", the other population groups have to make "their contribution" as well. At present the Government is planning to regulate this contribution both constitutionally and in the area of security.

Although it has never been explicitly formulated there are enough indications to conclude that what the government has in mind is some multi-racial constitution making provision for the group representation of homeland, urban and rural blacks as well as coloureds, Asians and whites with the white minority at the apex of control.

The government has no objection to popular elections, provided they occur within structures determined by itself and provided at the vital areas of decision-making no headcount will determine the outcome where the government's own representation is in the minority. This pattern of participation is evident in the logic of the Regional Services Council; the MEC's of the former Provincial Councils as well as the tri-cameral Parliament. The overall structure envisaged is a quasi-representative multi-racial autocracy with the white minority in firm control over political decision-making and national security. For propaganda purposes it will be presented as a Government of National Unity - the Government's domestic constitutional contribution to the "total strategy".

The viability of this system of co-optive domination will depend primarily on two things : the Government's continuing power of patronage, i.e. its ability to reward those who participate and a sufficient degree of co-operation to make the system work.

As far as patronage is concerned, the government finds itself in a dilemma. Its failed reform programme and persistence with aspects of Apartheid has led to widespread international and domestic economic desertion. Internationally it will attempt to strengthen and expand economic interests with countries such as Taiwan, South Korea and Israel, but domestically it has to strike a new deal with Big Business. Although it will continue to be the prime beneficiary of dramatic increases in strategic minerals - particularly gold and platinum, it needs a more predictable programme for economic growth.

It is in this context that strategies for "inward industrialization" and "privatization" have to be evaluated. The private sector will increasingly become divided in deciding whether to leave, tuck in behind a seige economy or more aggressively opposing government. The government will continue to confront the private sector with "rather the devil you know than the one you don't" option. Part of the "total strategy" is the clear promise that it is calculated to preserve free enterprise.

As far as the issue of sufficient degree of co-operation is concerned, experience shows that co-optive domination does not need legitimacy and/or majority support (although both will undoubtedly strengthen it), it needs enough people to participate in order to make the system work. This is where the battle is raging at its fiercest in urban black communities. The government is determined to find "good", "responsible", "peace-loving" blacks and townships are torn between co-operating and rejecting any form of collaboration. This conflict is manifesting itself in all spheres of black community life : in Education (DET Education vs People's Education), in the Church (Kairos Theology vs Establishment Theology), in Local Government (Co-option vs Free Election). The same general conflict is being considered within the black labour movement where the debate is about the most effective counter-strategy to avoid co-option. Almost every aspect of black community life has become politicized so that everyday "normal" issues become topics of heated debate. The government may have succeeded in persuading the majority of whites about a "total onslaught" and the need for a "total strategy", but is has completely failed to get the same degree of compliance from blacks. In fact, it is almost a given the more politicized the blacks, the stronger the rejection of both the "onslaught" and "the strategy" needed to combat it.

The rejection of the government's ideology and its sytem of co-optive domination was precipitated by the implementation of the tri-cameral Parliament.

This initiated a massive popular mobilization against this Parliament and in favour of the values of non-racialism and popular democratic government, both the antithesis of values underpinning the government's own constitutional programme, i.e. multi-racial compulsory group representation. And so political debate amongst the politically conscious in the majority of extra-parliamentary organizations bifurcated between the options of -

multi-racialism	vs	non-racialism
total strategy	vs	people's power
co-option	vs	non-participation
propping up the system	vs	breaking it down

It is slowly crystallizing into an ideological choice between a multi-racial autocracy vs a non-racial democracy where people are defined as either part of the "total strategy" or the "total onslaught". By defining those who argue for a popular non-racial democracy based on the free association of individuals as subversive, the government has brought the "total onslaught" into domestic politics. Its own counter strategy is to offer multi-racial patronage as part and parcel of its "reform" package. That is why the government's reform programme has to be accompanied by a massive extension of coercion or repression. For the government to allow genuine accountable politics, it would have to face the risk of popular rejection of its whole "total strategy" and finally of its own position of political domination. As P W Botha has so bluntly stated it to Howe : "This would be political suicide."

The problem of course is, that as the "total strategy" against a "total onslaught" has unfolded, so a "total strategy" for "liberation" has unfolded in response. In fact one of the significant developments of the past few years has been how the "politics of liberation" has created its own distinctive rhetoric, both inside and outside the country. Words like "comrade", "people's power", "people's education", "liberated zones", even "liberation" itself, have a popular currency in the townships that was totally unheard of

a few years ago. But it has not just remained at the level of rhetoric. Just as those who manage the "total strategy" against the "total onslaught" argue that there are no rules, so more and more those who argue for a "total strategy" for "liberation" use the same arguments. The use of violence by and against the state is fast becoming the dividing line in ideological disputes and the more timid and non-violent could find themselves trapped in moral and strategic quagmires which they cannot fathom and do not know how to resolve. The extremists on both sides radicalize all options and demand blind loyalty to the cause. For the State those who struggle for liberation are the standard bearers of the "total onslaught" and for those who struggle for liberation, the State is the enemy. We have reached the ridiculous situation where the government's "total strategy" is directed against the majority of the citizens of this land and where violence and repression is becoming the language of communication between the two. As I said, people are beginning to hate each other out of the future.

But, I started on a hopeful note. The tragedy of South Africa lies in the continued denial of its potential. It has potential - lots of it. Because of it, the struggle we are now living through is not one of decay, but of birth - even though not less painful, perhaps more so. A new country is being forged and its coming to being may be delayed, but not prevented. The duration of the delay will be measured in blood shed and violence and therein lies great sadness for all of us. Also, the longer it takes, the more difficult the reconstruction will be. There is only one way in which the costs of transition can be minimized : that is for those who control white domination to accept, and persuade those who support them, that negotiating a genuine democratic alternative is preferable to entrenching a non-democratic one. But then they would have to accept the first groundrule of democratic politics : freedom of association. This inevitably implies - dismantling Apartheid completely, releasing political prisoners, unbanning banned organizations and negotiating with representatives of those who popularly elected them for a non-racial democratic government.

The longer this takes, the greater the costs will be. South Africa has now properly entered the era in which the costs for maintaining and opposing domination are going to become progressively greater. It is not an easy time ahead, but at least it signals the beginning of the end of one stage in our history - the history of white domination in South Africa. To replace it with something more durable and better is a challenge which faces all of us.

From what has been said before, it should be clear that there are broadly speaking, two routes open to that future : a high cost one and a low cost one - both risky and not without the danger of disruption.

The main thrust of the low cost route must be to restore accountable politics on all levels of government. Of necessity this means that as far as possible the consent of the governed has to be tested both by demonstrable support for leaders and by calling them to account for decisions taken. The eventual goal of the low cost route must be to achieve political stability through consensus.

The main thrust of the high cost route must be to establish and sustain co-optive politics on all levels of government. Of necessity this must mean that the co-operation of enough people must be gained to assist in government. The goal of the high cost route must be to achieve political stability through co-ercion and compliance.

The difference in cost between these two routes can be calculated in terms of : levels of violence, destruction of human and natural resources and overall reduction in the quality of life. Both approaches can also be spelt out in terms of procedures, risks and advantages involved in their implementation :

(a) Low Cost procedures :-

- (i) The government must formulate a clear transitional programme for achieving a democratic government based on freedom of choice and universal suffrage. Obviously experts can be involved in its drafting, but most important of all, the main political actors have to be consulted and the government intention be made clear to them. It is vital that such consultations take place privately and in confidence.
- (ii) Equally important is that similar briefings be conducted with the leadership in the security establishment so that their unequivocal support for such a package be obtained.
- (iii) In both (i) and (ii) the objective must be to formulate an alternative which could make the inevitable sacrifices of transition bearable as well as make any attempts to sabotage the achievement of such a goal appear to be manifestly unreasonable.
- (iv) Only once (i) and (ii) have been achieved, must the government go public and in as spectacular a fashion as possible announce that - South Africa is going to get a democratic government based on freedom of association and universal suffrage|one-person-one-vote;
 - All aspects of Apartheid will be dismantled;
 - All organizations will be unbanned and be allowed to operate legally and peacefully in South Africa;

- All political prisoners will be released and allowed to participate legally and peacefully in the political life of South Africa;

— Once the domestic political situation has been given time to stabilize as a result of the above change, the government is prepared to negotiate a democratic constitution and the transfer of power to it.

- (v) The present situation in (particularly black) South Africa is highly undemocratic and unstable or where any democratic organizations exist government refuses to recognize or deal with them. It is therefore obvious that time must be allowed for banned and other organizations to organize themselves, test their popular support and establish democratic representation. Only after this period will it be possible to find out what the relative strengths of the ANC, PAC, Inkatha, UDF etc. is and who to deal with in the political process.
- (vi) Whilst the period of stabilization takes place, the government can demonstrate its bona fides by systematically getting rid of racial inequality in all those areas of social and economic life where the State bears responsibility for the welfare of the individual. Non-racial advisory bodies can be set up to assist with this task in the areas of Education, Welfare, Housing, Health etc.
- (vii) Throughout all the preceding stages, a sustained propaganda campaign must make it quite clear that the goal is a fully democratic South Africa; that white domination and all forms of racial

domination will disappear and thus it is clear intention of the government to transfer power to an agreed democratic constitution where individuals will participate as adults on the basis of freedom of association.

(b) Low Cost Risks :-

- (i) It is doubtful whether a serious right-wing electoral threat will materialize as a result of the above procedures. There certainly is the risk of right-wing violence, both from within and outside bureaucratic structures. But the State has the ability and the capability to deal with it unambiguously if it wishes to.
- (ii) The release of prisoners and banned organizations certainly holds the risks of immediate short-term instability as communities and organizations celebrate, protest and demonstrate. But this should pose no long-term threat to the overall security situation and things are bound to settle down after an initial period of turbulence.
- (iii) The risk of escalating domestic violence is always present. But this is a given in both the low and high cost route. Except in the low cost route, the State's reaction to violence is legitimized by its declared commitment to bring about a democratic South Africa, whereas its use of repression in the high cost route legitimizes resistance and revolt.

(c) Low Cost Advantages :-

- (i) Political leadership right across the spectrum will be clarified. The question of who are the real leaders or stooges will be resolved.
- (ii) Political support for movements and organizations will have been determined. No longer will extravagant claims and counter-claims have any credibility other than that which is demonstrated through popular support.
- (iii) Real negotiations between real leaders can for the first time lead to binding political agreements.
- (iv) Accountable politics will have been restored to community life in South Africa and the long road to stability based on consensus rather than coercion will have begun.

The high cost route to the future is what most of this article has been about. We are on it now. The overall procedure is the total strategy. The risks are obvious : escalating violence, racial polarization, a declining economy. The advantages : coercive stability and the questionable security it provides.

Over the last 12 years I have spoken to many, many people about the political future of South Africa - to radicals, revolutionaries, liberals and right-wing fascists. I have shared a meal with a conservative boer on his farm and talked deep into the night with bitter and angry young comrades in townships. I have listened to trade unionists, church leaders, educationists and community leaders. Through all these encounters I have tuned my political antennae to two issues : is a democratic South Africa possible and are its people up to it ?