

A tribute to Theodor Hanf: A friend and scholar who wanted to help society resolve its conflicts:

I deliberately chose the title to stress an important aspect of Theo Hanf's work as a scholar and researcher. He never was, in my experience of him, a dispassionate remote intellectual who dabbled in social and political issues for the sake of personal reflective stimulation. From the outset I found him to be an activist scholar. He specialised in studying deeply divided societies and had a very clear commitment to finding ways out of the conflicts that gripped such societies.

When I first met him more than thirty years ago, my country, South Africa was such a deeply divided society. Theo Hanf was exploring a research project on South Africa in which he wished to conduct wide ranging surveys amongst the South African population groups to establish whether there was any prospect for peaceful change in South Africa. Most commentators and scholars on South Africa, at the time, saw the conflict as intractable and the country heading for a catastrophe.

The result of Hanf, Weiland and Vierdag's research saw the light of day in English in 1981 under the title **South Africa: The Prospects for Peaceful Change**. It is important to remind ourselves that although the German edition 1978 and the English version 1981 appeared when they did; White leaders and voters of all political persuasions were interviewed and question in 1974, 1976 and 1977 and the same was done with the spectrum of Black leadership. In other words more than two decades before FW de Klerk made his epoch making speech on 2 February 1990.

In posing the question whether there were prospects for peaceful change in South Africa, Hanf et al posed four pre-conditions which they explored in their research:

- One:** "The White political leadership must be convinced of the necessity for peaceful change and must believe that the opinions and attitude's of the electorate are not inconsistent with such change."
- Two:** "The actual opinions and attitudes of the electorate must show a trend compatible with peaceful change, or not overwhelmingly opposed to it."
- Three:** "The Black leadership groups must agree to the terms and guidelines governing peaceful change."
- Four:** "The urban Blacks must show by their attitudes and behaviour that

they are at least not opposed to the proposed course of peaceful change."

(p. 52-53 Op. Cit.)

In retrospect it seems extraordinary to say so, but this was the first time this kind of research had been done on this scale in South Africa. And the results were quite astounding. Instead of confirming the dogmatic opposites existing in South Africa, i.e. repression vs. revolt, the research showed that, amongst ordinary South Africans, there was a much greater willingness to explore avenues for peaceful change than had ever been anticipated. At the same time the research also showed that ordinary South Africans feared that the dogmatists would have their day and the costs to South Africa would be astronomical. Through this research Theo Hanf not only became my friend but also my mentor. I learned a great deal about my own country from him and in my own way began to explore the prospects for peaceful change in South Africa.

A great deal has been written on the dramatic peaceful transition that took place in South Africa from 1989 to 1994. In 1996 a classical Liberal Democratic Constitution was adopted and the first peaceful general elections under it took place in 1999.

If I were to relate the transition to Hanf et al's research a curious fact reveals itself. The Hanf research treated external international changes on a ceteris paribus (i.e. all things being equal) basis. They thus found in their research that irrespective of what external changes may occur, there were prospects for peaceful change locked up in the domestic situation. However it was precisely the occurrence of major international changes e.g. the collapse of organised communism and the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, that precipitated de Klerk's speech, Mandela's release, the appeal of apartheid laws, the un-banning of the ANC and the return of the exiles. Those who were willing to explore peaceful change in South Africa were strengthened by these developments and all of these factors contributed to "the prospects for peaceful change" becoming a reality.

Theo Hanf's research and intellectual interests ranged way beyond South Africa, e.g. Lebanon, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. I have not kept track of all his research pursuits. I do know that the same motivation which inspired him to do the kind of research he conducted on South Africa, still inspires him today.

Over the years our friendship has deepened and I have benefited enormously from his insights, conversations and seminars. I recall a workshop at his house in Metzeral in the Alsace to which he invited me. It was attended by a Palestinian activist, an Israeli army officer, and some Palestinian and Israeli academics. The atmosphere in the Combi, as we drove up the hill, was tense to say the least. It was wintertime and snowing heavily, and the Combi got stuck.

We all got out and a South African, Israeli's and Palestinian's pushed the Combi up the hill. I do not know whether this improved the prospects for peaceful change in the Middle East but we did manage to get the vehicle to the top. Needless to say Prof Theo Hanf was in the driving seat.

The measure of an academic and scholar is to be found in the diversity and range of peers from the same, or cognate disciplines, who respond to his work and take it seriously, whether they agree with him or not. In this respect Theodor Hanf is internationally renowned. I am privileged to have learnt a great deal from him and honoured to call him my friend.

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