

## REFORM AND REVOLT : 1983 - THE PRESENT

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This contribution considers the issue of resistance and revolt, and its interaction with the government's reform programme. It does so with reference to two phases, the first starting in 1983/4 with the introduction of the Constitution and extending up to the imposition of the Second State of Emergency in mid-1986. The second one starts in June 1986 but began to acquire a clearer shape by the beginning of 1988. By this time the government had succeeded in restoring a large measure of "order" and felt strong enough to impose wide-ranging political restrictions on the UDF and 17 other organisations.

1. The period 1983/4 - 1986

In considering the interaction between reform and revolt, it is appropriate to begin with the UDF, not because it is the oldest opposition movement (it is not) or necessarily the first to respond to the State's reform proposals, but because the UDF managed to capture the highground in mobilizing domestic resistance against the implementation of the new tricameral constitution. In doing so, it highlighted the fundamental cleavages between Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary politics and posed a crisis of

legitimacy for all individuals or organisations who participated in State-created constitutional structures. The issue of black exclusion from the new tricameral constitution was effectively seized on to question the relevance of any participation in such structures and to highlight the co-optive nature of the State's constitutional programme.

The diversity of organisations belonging to it, as well as the rapidity with which its membership increased, made it difficult to judge it in terms of a single policy or agenda. Gradually, however, "critical issues" emerged which became identified with a UDF position : The Freedom Charter, sanctions, non-racialism and a very sympathetic stance towards the ANC, although the UDF was insistent that it was not an ANC front and was committed to non-violent opposition. Nevertheless, it campaigned vigorously for the unbanning of political organisations, such as the ANC, and for the release of political prisoners. There is no doubt that the effectiveness of the mass mobilization of the UDF managed to achieve two things which characterized the nature of the revolt that accompanied reform, i.e. firstly, located it as a struggle between an extra-Parliamentary executive (i.e. State President plus State Security Council plus Security Forces) and extra Parliamentary opposition groups),

and secondly, it forced the South African State to propagandize the ANC as the "vanguard of the total onslaught."

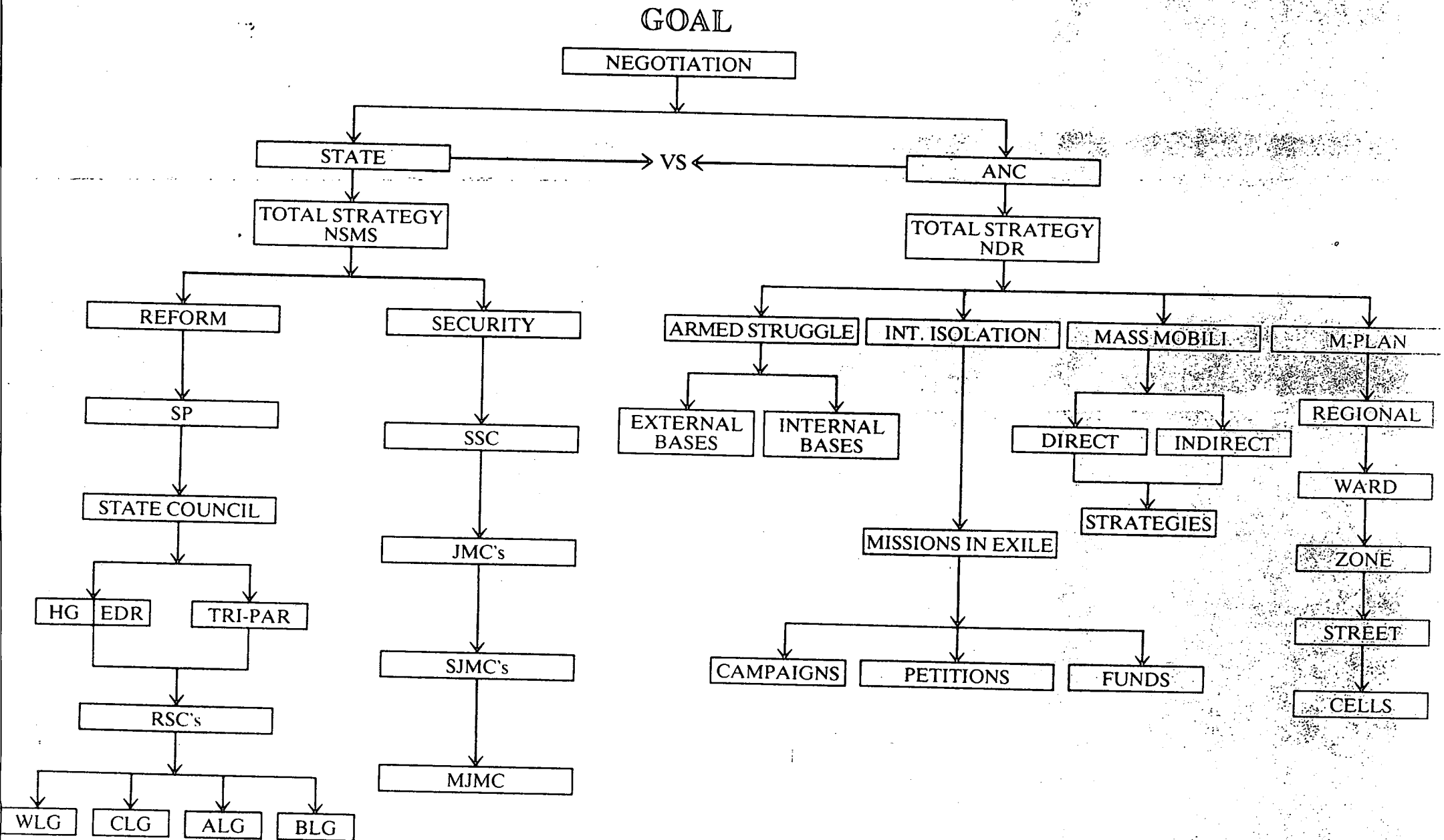
During the period June 16-23 1985 there was a Second National Consultative Conference of the ANC in Lusaka. From its proceedings as documented in Committee Reports, a comprehensive picture of the ANC structures, code of conduct, strategies and tactics as well as membership emerges.

Given the encompassing nature of the ANC strategies, it is inevitable that it will become involved in any significant internal resistance and revolt and that ANC supporters/members will either openly or clandestinely be active across a wide spectrum of movements, fronts, organisations and activities. That is why strikes, consumer and school boycotts, protest meetings etc. initiated by other organisations, but with the same issues at stake will enjoy ANC support and even active participation. In this sense, it sometimes becomes irrelevant whether the UDF is an ANC front or not. A spokesman for the ANC makes this quite clear when he says : "What the UDF has been doing is part of this growing resistance to the Apartheid system, the struggle to bring about a new order. We are happy with that .... I think the UDF represents the success of our appeals

to our people to be organised and to unite in action. That doesn't make them ANC, but they have got to fight the struggle."

The same applies to any other single purpose organisation pursuing a line of action that falls within the ANC's broad definition of the struggle, whether it be the Black Sash, ECC, a trade union, a church or even the PFP. This is an important point to grasp because by choosing the ANC as its prime opponent the South African state, by implication, criminalizes or demonizes any opposition group or strategy whose actions correspond with goals or strategies of the ANC. In fact, given the goals and strategies of the South African State and the ANC respectively, it is quite evident that they define each other as the prime targets of each other's total strategies. The "Total Strategy" of the South African State is the National Security Management System (NSMS) with reform. Against that stands the "Total Strategy" of the ANC which is the National Democratic Revolution for a liberated South Africa. Each strategy's final objective is the destruction of the other. That is why reform and revolt will continue to interact with one another until this cycle is somehow broken.

# Diagram on Reform & Revolt



An important consequence of the South African State targetting the ANC as its major opponent is that it can propagandize against any other party or organisation which shares values in common with ANC objectives. Thus one-man-one-vote, non-racial democracy, freedom of association, unbanning of organisations, the rule of law and the civil liberties of the individual as opposed to the "rights of the group" are values which immediately makes a party or organisation who campaigns for them suspect either a "useful idiot" or willing collaborators of the ANC. At the same time, the State can select those aspects of ANC strategy or structure which it regards as the most useful for demonising purposes and through guilt by association tar any other opposition grouping with the same brush. "Terrorism", "violence" and "communism" are the three most common.

It is particularly in the white political area where this rather crude tactic is very effective. A 1985 HSRC Survey amongst white voters indicated that 85% were in favour of "negotiating with blacks". However, only 3,6% of respondents believed that it should be with the ANC. White voters are not only conditioned to think that negotiation need not include the ANC, but are constantly brainwashed to believe that any negotiation with the ANC should be avoided at all costs. The ANC is officially presented in South Africa as a gang of incorrigible villains and demons that must be eliminated and not with whom the State should negotiate.

This approach by the South African State more than anything else lies at the root of its inability to attract credible leaders into any of its co-optive structures in the centre, such as the tricameral Parliament and National Council. Any other party or organisation that petitions for the unbanning of the ANC and negotiating with it, is then rubbished as wanting to hob-nob with "terrorists" and "communists".

The government's theory of violence is one of total onslaught needing to be countered by total strategy. The ANC gives articulate, historical reasons for their violence strategy. Their means consists of forms of unconventional war and strike action. The government has a policy of co-option, control and patronage.

The state has a crisis of legitimacy and would like to reform away from this, although they are not too concerned about it as long as their control is not threatened. The ANC has a degree of strategic inflexibility because should they abandon the armed struggle, sanctions, etc., they would have support problems. The ANC policy is therefore bound by its organisational structures.

One can depict the political conflict in South Africa in the following terms :

#### REFORM

1. Creates a group-based democracy.
2. Concerned with reforming in state structures.
3. Broadens participation through co-option.
4. Wants to multi-racialize South Africa.
5. Adjusts white domination.

#### REVOLT

1. Creates an individually based democracy.
2. Concerned with reforming of state structures.
3. Broadens participation through negotiation.
4. Wants to non-racialize South Africa.
5. Removes white domination.

The ultimate objective of reform is to establish a multi-racial Government of an autocratic nature; the ultimate objective of revolt is to establish a non-racial Government of a democratic nature. Those caught up in revolt, may differ amongst themselves about the nature of that democracy and the socio-economic structure of society to accompany it, but there is unanimity of purpose that the alternative should be democratic and non-racial. Those concerned with reform and the "total strategy" may differ amongst themselves about the scope and quality of reform, but have unanimity of purpose that white minority control must not be sacrificed under any circumstances.

#### 2. The period 1986- to the present

The current period has begun with the declaration of the second State of Emergency which paved the way for massive state repression. By the beginning of 1988 the State had



managed to quell most of the open revolt. In February 1988 it proscribed the political activities of a whole range of extra-Parliamentary organisations. It also tabled legislation aimed at cutting off foreign funding of a variety of organisations.

This means that the state is not going to allow itself to be challenged directly or on a central level - it has made that quite clear. Any central-focus challenge will be ruthlessly dealt with. We have come to an end of an era as far as resistance or opposition politics is concerned - the end of protest or mass mobilization politics where there is a direct challenge to the authorities.

These restrictions mean that they have crushed those popularly based organisations that symbolically challenge the role of the state or that can be used to mobilize people to do that. They have also made it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for similar kinds of organisations to get funding from overseas.

So in a sense, what the state is trying to do, is to criminalize all dissent that does not fall within the structures it condones or is prepared to create, and then try to deal with people inside those structures.

It would be very short-sighted to see it as the same as the

actions taken against organisations in 1960 or 1977. The main difference is that some of the major supporting institutions performing a liberal resistance to the State are no longer there, or have changed substantially.

The courts have been fundamentally affected over the last 27 years. People no longer have the same access - all the amending legislation on security removes much of the jurisdiction from the courts. Parliament is not half as accountable as it was then because by creating a mass of enabling legislation they have removed whole areas of control from parliament where one just cannot question the government : on funds, on activities, on matters that are "not in the national interest."

The media situation has also changed fundamentally, with state-controlled television coming to the centre stage as prime moulder of public opinion. Newspapers have suffered, not only as a result of censorship, but from having to compete with television and consequently Parliament cannot make things public in the way it could in the past.

Supportive institutions like universities and churches also battle to play the role they did before. The whole milieu in which this clampdown has taken place is fundamentally different to what we had before.

It means that those who believe in a non-racial South Africa

inevitably have to do a very deep re-think on strategy. To continue to impose an implicit liberal paradigm on the situation - "If we march, people will understand our plight and difficulties" - is inappropriate.

Although one understands the need to express revulsion and opposition, the State's opponents do so under very unequal circumstances and without the supporting institutions of a typical liberal focus. The expression of opposition through mass mobilization has been tried, very successfully, after 1983. One of the reasons for this is that the state had to create "the space" to get the tricameral parliament off the ground - you could not very well ban people that were trying to oppose the 1984 elections so you allowed them that kind of space to use for mass mobilization.

But the conditions of mass mobilization and protest politics have changed fundamentally. One can see why people still try this approach but the state has made it abundantly clear that they will clobber and arrest these people.

So, if one cannot challenge centrally, if one does not have supporting institutions, perforce one has to look at new means of keeping the ideal of a non-racial South Africa alive.

What is going to happen is that resistance, or protest, or opposition is going to be driven back into communities and

into "functional areas" like labour and education.

Communities and townships will have to explore how they will survive under these new circumstances. Do they make use of educational structures that are being created by the state for their own purposes, as they have done in the field of labour? In the area of civic administration, do they participate or not - do they grab hold of structures and control them? If so, how?

So it is no longer a matter of planning strategy on a broad central level in an attempt to mobilize the whole population to march on Pretoria or whatever. The State is going to drive that back to the communities.

In areas like labour and education, people are going to have to say : how do we create an alternative dispensation? There was a time in black education when structures were simply abandoned, but now schools are seen as a structure within which to organize and move in another direction.

The same applies to universities. The state is aware of this and accordingly tells them to put their houses in order because that becomes an area of challenge over which it does not really have any control, except to forcibly take over the university, like the University of the North. Institutions are being shaped and mauled by this struggle and one cannot

respond to this by simply howling out one's anger.

Inevitably as time progresses, the state is going to lose control in certain areas. But the last area it will lose control is at the centre. That is why it is ridiculous to challenge the State at the central area because that is where it is strongest.

One can foresee more a series of ad hoc, decentralized challenges targeted at points of greater state vulnerability rather than some highly visible, centrally planned opposition that can be crushed relatively easily, with its leaders placed in jail or restricted? With any centrally planned, mass mobilization drive the easiest thing for the State to do is to infiltrate and pick up the leadership. But if one does an analysis of the dynamics of the changes and looks at the weak spots or where there inevitably has to be a relinquishing of control, those are the areas where people can become more autonomous.

It's not as dramatic or as sensational as challenging directly, but the state has all the resources at its disposal to stop a direct challenge dead. If one goes back to what happened with the clampdown on the 17 organisations, it is possible to revive what they stood for but it would be self-delusionary to think one can simply create new organisations and carry on as before.

Equally, if the Provision of Orderly Internal Politics Bill goes through and they cut off foreign funding, there is a whole range of organisations that simply cannot go on surviving.

One can see a kind of strategic realism being forced on extra-Parliamentary opposition due to the changed circumstances where they will have to take some pretty tough decisions.

Ironically Parliament itself is going to be increasingly unable to mediate this conflict because the very process that took away the powers from the extra-Parliamentary organisations eroded the constitutional significance of Parliament. This is because as the State took away those powers, accountability in Parliament was taken away and put into an extra-Parliamentary executive.

The executive, by increasingly circumventing Parliament, has staged a quiet coup on their own for the last five years. Areas that are traditionally associated with civilian government just are not there any more.

Accompanying the creeping coup, there has also been a loss of ideological purpose. Apartheid was essentially a proactive ideology - they were going to go for something and those who hated it could engage it. But now, they have a

reactive ideology - the total onslaught and total strategy - and the issue is control.

So as time moves on the issue is not when apartheid is going to collapse or separate development is not going to work : it now becomes a logistical exercise : when is the security establishment not going to be able to control?

Now that the state has taken to arguing that a variety of legal activities help fuel the "revolutionary climate", what sort of space do ordinary citizens have left to fight for, say, a non-racial democracy ? If one is looking for the conventional kind of liberal space in a democratic society, it is not there. The opportunities for protesting, marching or voicing one's displeasure are extremely proscribed. The worst thing to do is to treat South Africa like a civil rights struggle. It is not a civil rights struggle, but a struggle for power, and in that struggle for power or control the space that will be left will be space that people will have to start creating for themselves.

That is why the example to work with is more likely Eastern Europe - more like Poland than the USA or a former British colony. South Africa is moving more towards the Eastern Europe totalitarian model where an alternative society begins to develop outside of the official structures. As the state deregulates - or privatizes - people are going to start organizing their own lives and just getting on with

things.

This slow process of change, this flat-earth view that South Africa has been burdened with for four decades, must eventually disappear. Many present today may not be there to enjoy it, but there is no need to despair for the future. What is very necessary is that those who really are committed to a non-racial South Africa will manage to rid themselves of infighting, grand-standing and of personalizing the struggle.