

# **The Insurgent Origins of Democratization in South Africa**

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## 1. Introduction

Very little is known about how social movements impact states. Even less is known about the relationship between social movement action and democratic regime change. Some of the reasons for this lacunae stem from the difficulties studying the impacts of movements on states that are opaque—much state action occurs behind the closed doors of an authoritarian regime. In this paper, I show how social movement insurgency was crucial in creating the possibilities for democratization in South Africa. I proceed in three steps. First, I show that the state initiated reform program of the late 1970s and early 1980s was intended to modernize racial domination by elaborating racial distinctions at every level of the state. State implementation of a modernized racial domination strongly undermines arguments that suggest the state initiated democratization. Second, I show that social movement insurgency disrupted the state's racial modernization agenda by collapsing black local government structures, bringing state initiatives to a halt. Third, I show that state response was contradictory partialized: the initial and overwhelming response was severe repression in an attempt to get the racial modernization program back on track. However, at the same time, it led to covert negotiations. Failed repression created a stalemate, but also create an opportunity for those who favored negotiation to bring a democratization agenda into the state.

### **Modernizing Racism: Racial Confederalism and Racial Consociationalism**

In August of 1979, Prime Minister P. W. Botha announced a Twelve-Point Plan that he argued would bring justice to every population group in the country (National Party 1979). Botha said he would “stand or fall on the strength of that 12-point plan” and in an interview in 1991 was quoted as saying “that the Twelve Point Plan was the blueprint for the direction his administration [took] South Africa in the decade of the eighties” (Alden 1996: 292). The plan was developed in conjunction with Botha's most important constitutional strategist, Chris Heunis, who in 1981 became Minister of the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning. The Twelve Point Plan called for:

1. The recognition and acceptance of the existence of multi-nationalism and of minorities in South Africa.
2. The acceptance of vertical differentiation with the built-in principle of self-determination on as many levels as possible.
3. The creation by the Black nations of constitutional structures giving them the greatest possible degree of self-government within states which are consolidated as far as possible.
4. The division of power among White South Africans, the Coloureds and the South African Indians within a system of consultation and joint responsibility where common interests are at issue.
5. The acceptance of the principle that each group should have its own schools and communities where possible, as fundamental to happy social circumstances.
6. The willingness to work together as equals and consult on issues of common concern while maintaining a healthy balance between the rights of the individual and those of the community, and the removal of unnecessary, hurtful forms of discrimination

7. The recognition of economic interdependence and the properly planned utilization of manpower.
8. The goal of peaceful constellation of Southern African states respecting one another's cultural heritage, traditions and ideals.
9. South Africa's determination to defend itself against outside intervention with all the practical means at its disposal.
10. As far as possible, South Africa must follow a policy of neutrality in the confrontation between the super powers and give priority to her own interests.
11. The maintenance of effective decision-making by the State, founded on a strong defense force and police force to ensure orderly government as well as a sound and efficient administration.
12. The maintenance of free enterprise as the basis of our economic policy (National Party 1979).

National Party elites described the plan as a "lucid summary of the principles and policies" of the party and called on supporters to "devote themselves with enthusiasm to its implementation" (National Party 1979).

In what way was the Plan an indication of new thinking within the NP elites regarding future development in the country? In this section, I will show that the Twelve Point Plan was a distillation of a revised conception of political and economic development emerging within the NP elite in the late 1970s. Revision was a response to ever increasing signs that the grand apartheid vision of complete racial separation in all spheres of life was unachievable. As the Plan indicates, NP elites did not abandon racially based thought. On the contrary, they sought to elaborate racial categories, especially in regards to the future form of the polity. In the area of economy, greater flexibility on the issues of racial boundaries was envisioned, and the state countenanced a degree of economic citizenship rights for blacks. However, the goal here was not to eliminate formalized racial categories but to facilitate economic growth, as the state's willingness to make changes in labor policy was circumscribed by the need to maintain "necessary discrimination" to protect the boundaries of the white polity.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the reform of the polity. In this, the state shifted from exclusion to a limited form of power-sharing with Coloureds and Indians in what may best be thought of as form of racial consociationalism. Consociationalism is a term that Arend Lijphart used to define the form of polity in countries that were deeply divided along communal lines. These democracies, most notably the Netherlands, Austria and Belgium, shared power among the countries many ethnic or religious groups using the mechanisms of "grand coalitions" where political leaders from all groups jointly govern the country, and "mutual vetos," guarantees that any one segment cannot be unilaterally overruled by another. "Proportionality" is used in the place of winner-takes-all representation, guaranteeing minorities a voice. Finally, using "segmental autonomy," each population group gets control over issues they consider most vital (Lijphart 1980: 66-61). However, in the case of South Africa, the shift was primarily cooptive, since the structure was designed to ensure white control of the coalitions, even in the face of a unified opposition. What permitted this was demographics: whites outnumbered Coloureds and Indians in a ratio of 4:2:1, so as long as the white ruling group maintained racial cohesion, white control of the state was ensured. White control at the center was

further entrenched by excluding the black majority from the new parliament altogether. Instead of including Africans in the new political dispensation, the state maintained its policy of separate development for blacks under the guise of racial confederalism: blacks were to find citizenship in the bantustans as they became politically independent countries. But it faced one intractable problem: a growing urban black population upon which the economy increasingly depended. To maintain racial exclusion, state elites envisaged creating representative local government structures in the townships. These local government structures were then to represent urban blacks in the bantustans.

i. Rethinking the Labor Framework: The Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions

By the time of the Soweto rebellion of 1976, the National Party elite had to confront the reality that Apartheid had failed to rid white South Africa of blacks. Prior to that, the dominant discourse of the NP was that Apartheid was working to reverse the tide of black migration to the cities. For example, a 1974 election manifesto lauded the success of separate development claiming that 1 million blacks and more than 100,000 Coloured and Indian families were being resettled under the Group Areas Act (Pro Nat 1972: 2). Confronting the reality that Apartheid had failed meant dealing with the inescapable fact that urban blacks were in the cities and surrounding peri-urban areas to stay. The question then became what to do with them.

Apartheid logic had constructed urban blacks as temporary sojourners; it followed that it was wasteful to invest precious resources in township development. Apartheid townships were sprawling areas where blacks were housed in terribly overcrowded shanty's, lacking in the usual facilities of developed urban areas: electrification, running water, shopping areas, parks, paved roads, and so on. In the aftermath of the Soweto rebellion, the state appointed two commissions to review the status of urban blacks. Guidelines for change were developed by the Wiehahn Committee of Inquiry into Labour Legislation, and the Riekert Committee of Inquiry into the Utilization of Manpower who worked in collaboration with one another "to delimit each Commission's sphere and to ensure co-ordination (Riekert Commission 1979: 1).

Wiehahn's report investigated the possibility of reforming the country's labour legislation, especially as it pertained to blacks. The commission argued that "South Africa should actively promote economic participation and freedom of competition within the South African labour system." For Wiehahn this "implied that the existing system will have to be modified in such a way that legal restrictions do not stand in the way of an individual's freedom to participate and compete in accordance with his abilities" (Wiehahn 1979: 4). He went on to argue that the current system that excludes the formal recognition of black unions promotes disorderly industrial relations with unnecessary costs for the employer, employee and the state (16-18). His commission recommended that formal recognition be granted to black unions in order to promote "a natural and organic development [that] would have beneficial effects of countering polarization and ensure a more orderly process of collective bargaining." Finally, the report argued that "exposing Black trade unions more directly to South Africa's trade union traditions and the existing institutions. . . inculcat[es] a sense of responsibility and loyalty towards the free market system" (19).

Wiehahn recognized that union incorporation into collective bargaining institutions rather than exclusion was an effective means to protect capitalism. As black unions were already a reality, and had demonstrated their disruptive power in the 1973 wildcat strikes, the state accepted this recommendation by the commission. Protecting capitalism became a cornerstone of Botha's policy agenda, and was included in the Twelve Point Plan.

The state did not accept all of Wiehahn's recommendations. Wiehahn had proposed permitting migratory workers to join unions. He had also argued for the total repeal of racially based job reservation, a system which ensured jobs for whites in certain semi-skilled categories of employment, especially in the mines and railways. Instead, the state imposed a fine on unions registering migratory workers, preserved some job reservation and banned multiracial unions (Alden 1996: 55)

Unwillingness to end job reservation outright was more closely linked with the ability to control the reaction of white labor than a desire to maintain the legislation itself. The government's white paper stated that it was better to "phase out the existing work reservation determinations in co-operation with the interested parties" (The Complete Wiehahn Report 1982: 141). More pointedly was reluctance to permit multiracial unionism and the registration of all black workers. To understand this unwillingness—given its obvious contradictions with the logic of free market development—we need to turn to the Riekert commission's investigation on the entire labor repressive framework, and its suggestions for reform.

Riekert took as his starting point the need to make "recommendations for the improvement, modernization and reform of the existing official institutional and statutory framework of the labour market in South Africa, with a view to the better utilization especially of Black manpower. . . ." (1-2). Riekert made the following recommendations:

1. Legislation that would recognize the permanence of urban black residents.
2. Legislation that would permit geographic mobility between the black townships for those with permanent residence rights.
3. Those with permanent residence rights be allowed to have their families join them.
4. Permission for permanent residents to purchase homes and promotion of home-ownership.
5. Removal of restrictions on black traders and promotion of some Black enterprise.
6. Opening up of free trade areas in the Central Business Districts of towns and cities (adapted from Price 1991: 105).

In short, Riekert's goal was nothing less than promoting "the effective functioning of the free labour market mechanism.... to be achieved by...strategic direct and indirect Government intervention with a view to the elimination of existing market failures, and the non-intervention where labour market results cannot be significantly improved" (Riekert 1979: 2). But as the recommendations suggest, Riekert did not propose that these rights be granted to all blacks, only those with permanent residence rights. Riekert defined permanent residents as those who had received permanent residence under Section 10 of the Group Areas Act. The Act included blacks who could demonstrate legal claims to be in the townships by virtue of continuous residence and employment.

Estimates placed the number of urban insiders or permanent residents at 1.5 million from an urban black population of 9 million (Price 1991:105).

The distinction that the Riekert commission made between urban insiders and outsiders was key in demonstrating that Riekert had not abandoned a larger vision of racial divisions that was part of the apartheid era—why not simply abandon all labor regulation, especially given the goals of promoting efficient free markets? Indeed, in the government white paper that accepted the majority of the recommendations of the report, the state acknowledged that:

there is a common economic system in South Africa, which means, among other things, that the various population groups participate in the labor market and that their participation will be restructured by the work place. It follows that measures and regulations that hamper the effective functioning of the common economic system, without contributing towards the achievement of other objectives, cannot be justified (cited in Price: 147).

This statement accords with point 7 in the Twelve Point Plan. In explaining the point to party members, NP elites suggested that South Africa's wealth was owed to the combinations of the contributions of white capital and expertise and the labour of "other groups" and that the groups are "inseparable." "Cooperation without threatening the interests of one another" was necessary to continued growth. In addition, they noted that "work reservation was unable to protect even the White worker" since it affected only "one out of every 500 workers" and that the new dispensation "protects all 500" by "opening the doors to full participation in the free enterprise system by other population groups" (National Party 1979).

In short, the state was willing to make certain concessions in rights of economic citizenship to a small percentage of blacks in the interests of furthering growth. But it retained the concept of labor regulation for "other objectives," goals that did not necessarily entail economic efficiency. Examining those other objectives reveals more clearly the state's continuing commitment to racial divisions.

## ii. Restructuring the Polity: Racial Consociationalism and Confederalism.

Nowhere are those continuing commitments to racial divisions more apparent than in the envisaged reform of the polity. Constitutional reform commenced with the Theron Commission of Inquiry into the Coloured Population. This report examined the socio-economic and political conditions of the Coloured people, most of whom lived in the Western Cape. The commission reported in 1976. In the political arena, it called for "satisfactory forms of direct Coloured representation and a direct say for Coloureds at the various levels of government and on various decision-making bodies...." It noted that a "process of constitutional adjustment" would be required in which the "existing Westminster-founded system of government will have to be changed to adapt it to the specific requirements of the South African plural population structure" (Theron Commission Report: 500).

A cabinet committee was established to make constitutional recommendations. The committee's proposals were announced in August of 1977 and were endorsed at the National Party's four provincial congresses in that year. In essence, they entailed the establishment of three separate parliaments empowered to legislate on 'own affairs'.

Matters of 'general affairs' would be dealt with through a Council of Cabinets in which all three groups would be represented and would legislate by consensus. Also proposed was an executive state president elected by an electoral college. The houses of parliament were based on the demographic numbers of whites (4), Coloureds (2) and Indians (1), which in effect meant that the white parliament would be able to dominate numerically should legislation face opposition in the other parliaments. An electoral college would appoint the state president and would be constituted with 50 white members, 25 Coloureds, and 13 Indians. The State president would nominate a prime minister for each house. Additionally, the proposals suggested a multiracial President's Council, separate regional councils, and separate municipal councils for towns which qualified (National Party 1977).

The state's new constitutional proposals suggested a willingness to implement a limited form of consociationalism, albeit based on racial grounds. The proposals were in accordance with point 4 of Botha's Twelve Point Plan which had accepted a "division of power" between these racial groups, but had rejected separate development because they "share the same geographic areas." The planned constitutional changes were also congruent with the overriding desire on the part of the NP to "accept multi-nationalism" and consequently "vertical differentiation" for each population group as laid out in points 1 and 2 of the Plan (National Party 1979).

Perhaps most telling is what the state's constitutional reforms omit: provision for the political inclusion of blacks. For blacks, the state adhered to its original commitment to separate development with the goal of creating autonomous states as laid out in the Plan's point 3. Whites, Indians and Coloureds shared a territory and therefore separate development was not possible; for blacks "the settlement pattern" makes possible a political "dispensation" in which "each nation would rule itself as it pleased. For blacks, NP elites backed away from sharing power. The reason is easy to find: "The alternative," the Plan continues, "is integration, conflict and swamping of the Whites and other minorities" (National Party 1979). In other words, there was no way that the state could incorporate blacks into the central state and ensure continued white control, and thus continue to maintain the integrity of white society."

In place of racial consociationalism, blacks got confederalism with the goal of a constellation of states as laid out in point 8. "Politically independent, economically interdependent states" was a goal envisaged by Verwoerd. The real problem for this vision was the 9 million or so urban blacks, and for them the state suggested a "form of confederal dispensation" with a degree "of 'say' over their own affairs" (National Party 1979). To implement political representation for urban blacks, the state hoped to develop structures in townships which had autonomy for blacks "to govern himself as a city dweller" (Vorster quoted in Price 1991: 130). A series of community councils were created for urban blacks in which township residents were able to elect their own officials (Alden 1996: 130). Dr. P. J. Riekert, chairman of the Riekert Commission whose findings were the basis for Black Local Authority Act of 1982 suggested in a book published in 1983 that the town councils be linked to the homelands rather than to white, Coloured and Indian local authorities. Linking to white, Coloured and Indian authorities would lead to participation in central government which was undesirable (SAIRR 1983: 93).

While the Wiehahn, Riekert and Theron commissions give more detail to the principles entailed in Botha's plan, they do not provide the final grand tour—they do not

really suggest how the NP elite hoped the whole constitutional structure might work. Anna Starcke, a journalist for the Financial Mail, provided such an overview. The emergent vision was distilled from interviews with over 100 prominent South African elites (Starcke 1978). It is worth quoting at some length:

[The new system of government] has a multiracial participative central government of a unique type invented during the preceding decade. Its members are representatives of independent states, non-independent but fully autonomous homelands, of provinces that function like independent states and of equally autonomous city-states and/or cantons.

The central government deals with matters of common strategic concern, including the redistribution of wealth in the form of development aid from the richer to the poorer members, and a joint defense force, and it represents all members in the outside world. . . .

Citizenship for all is dual: Southern African citizenship, which entitles everyone to move, live and work freely in any part of the geographic region, much as citizens of EEC member countries do, and in the name of which passports for outside travel are issued to all inhabitants. And citizenship of a state, homeland, province, city-state or canton where—and only where—each adult has the vote (Starcke 1978: 20).

In short, what the NP leadership had in mind was not an elimination or amelioration of racial categories at all, but rather an extension of racial divisions to all levels of the state (Sarakinsky 1992: 8-10).

State implementation of its goals of elaborating racial categories in ways that are remarkable consistent with its initial planning. The process had begun in 1977 with the formation of Black Community Councils, elected bodies with some administrative and executive power in urban African areas. Those limited powers were expanded with the Black Local Areas Act of 1982 which legislated the existence of Town and Village councils. In essence, Councils members were to be elected by township residents and to have municipal powers (SAIRR 1982: 298-301). By March of 1982, 228 Councils had been established (Price 1991: 132).

Where state constitutional change differs significantly from the original proposals is in relation to the proposed structures of cooptation for Coloureds and Indians. While the initial proposals had argued for three separate parliaments, the 1982 constitution created one tricameral parliament. Each house could then legislate on issues pertaining to its “own affairs” while the whole parliament could legislate of issues of “general affairs.” The 4:2:1 whites to Coloureds to Indians ratio of the original proposals was maintained enabling the white house to control “general affairs.”

On 2 November 1983, whites went to the polls in a referendum in which they were asked to approve or reject the Tricameral Parliamentary reforms. The campaigning was revealing, hinting at the government’s continued commitment to racial separation. Prime Minister P. W. Botha was quoted at a National Party Youth Congress as stating that Africans were never in his or his children’s lifetime going to be included in an integrated parliament with a 4th chamber. Africans were supposed to exercise their political aspirations in the homelands that could take independence and eventually form a confederation of states with South Africa similar to the European Economic Community. Similarly, Dr. P. J. Riekert, chairman of the Riekert Commission whose findings were the



basis for Black Local Authority Act of 1982 suggested in a book published in 1983 that the town councils be linked to the homelands rather than to white, Coloured and Indian local authorities. Linking to white, Coloured and Indian authorities would lead to participation in central government which was undesirable (SAIRR 1983: 93).

Despite warnings from the liberal opposition party leader Van Zyl Slabbert and homeland leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi that excluding Africans from political participation in national-level government was a recipe for violence, the state implemented its project of coloured and Indian co-option and African exclusion. White voters were blissfully unaware of the historic significance of their action. In less than 4 years, the state would be seeking a new constitutional dispensation to include Africans, and in 10 years, it would be completing the finishing touches on South Africa's first non-racial constitution in which whites would cede power to the African National Congress.

## **2. Social Movement Response: Disrupting Domination, Demanding Democracy**

### **i. The Organization of Opposition to Racial Modernization.**

State reform opened up the space for political mobilization. Mobilization was organized differentially in the African townships and in the Coloured and Indian communities. In the former, insurgency was directed against the implementation of the town councils; in the latter against the Tricameral Parliament. Leaders from all three communities linked these local-level struggles to national demands for democratic inclusion (Lodge 1991: 52). The formation and increasing strength of the United Democratic Front (UDF) epitomized this linkage. UDF's most central demand was a simple one. Speaking at the inaugural meeting, Dr. Allan Boesak put those demands succinctly to an audience of 10,000: "We want all of our rights, we want them here, and we want them now" (Cited in Seekings 1994: 1).

Organizationally, the UDF had little coherence. It comprised a national and regional coordinating structure to which members affiliated. Its coordinating leadership consisted of a small group of elected office-bearers and a larger contingent of regional delegates sent to its highest decision making body, the National General Council. The real key to the UDF was its mass base of affiliates. The most significant affiliates were students and youth bodies, but civic, worker, women's, religious, and political organizations were also represented. At inception, over 550 organizations representing an estimated 1.5 million people were present, while 400 were already affiliated (Lodge 1991: 51).

UDF was really a front in the true sense of the word. Popo Molefe gave the following explanation for the structure of the UDF: "to unite a broadest possible spectrum of people across class and color lines. . .to bring together a maximum number of organizations of the people." He goes on to say that the UDF might have unity on only 5 percent of the activities of the various affiliates (cited in Seekings 1994: 12). Fearful that the extent of this disunity would preempt any future for the front, affiliates were ideologically and organizationally unconstrained. They enjoyed complete autonomy from the coordinating body with the single stipulation that "their actions and policies . . . are not inconsistent with the policy of the UDF" (UDF Working Principles, cited in Seekings

1994: 11). That policy was not specified initially, but the general ideological contours were articulated. Molefe commented on the UDF's founding declaration that it "goes no further than committing members to a non-racial, democratic and unitary South Africa, the particulars of which they are free to fill in for themselves" (cited in Seekings 1994: 11). While there is some evidence that the UDF became less tolerant of ideological diversity in the course of the 1980s, adopting the Freedom Charter in 1987, it never wavered in its demand for non-racial democracy (Marx 1992).

Non-racialism was also extended organizationally. Non-racial organizing, organizing which recruited members of all races, dates back to the early Twentieth Century and was most assiduously pursued by the Communist Party (Frederiske 1990). In 1950, the Communist Party was banned. Mass-based organizations of protest then formed the Congress Alliance that drew up the Freedom Charter. While there was racial cooperation, the members of the alliance were racially based: the African National Congress which included Africans only; the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People's Organization, and the white Congress of Democrats. In contrast, the UDF had self-consciously organized non-racially as a strategy to undermine state-imposed racial divisions (Seekings 1994: 10). In practice, regional divisions created by apartheid meant the UDF had few non-racial affiliates, but its coordinating structures were racially inclusive. This was very important for developing and spreading non-racialism at the highest and intermediate levels of UDF leadership. It also had important symbolic meaning since reinforced UDF demands for non-racial inclusion.

## **ii. UDF Action Against Tricameral Parliament**

How did the UDF mobilize against state reforms? In the Coloured and Indian communities, mobilizations were focused primarily against the Tricameral Parliamentary elections. Those elections were held in November of 1984. Generally, turnout figures were low. Overall turnout for the Indian House of Representatives in the new Tricameral Parliament was 20.3%. That figure drops to 16.2% if counted as a percentage of eligible rather than registered voters. Elections for the Coloured House of Delegates was 30.9% of registered voters and 18.1% of eligible voters (SAIRR 1984: 128-129). Interestingly, there is a small but significant increase in the overall levels of participation in the 1988 elections for the Indian and Coloured Houses. As a percentage of registered voters, it increases to 26.2% for Indians and 44.4% for Coloureds (SAIRR 1988: 514-515). One possible explanation for those increases was the ability of the elected officials to deliver services to their constituents, especially housing (Cameron 1991). It would thus be incorrect to regard the Tricameral Parliament as a complete failure. Rather, it represented a contested institution where the state was able to use its resources to secure some consent. However it was not in the Indian and Coloured townships where the state faced the most sustained challenge, perhaps because it had used co-option in place of exclusion.

## **iii. UDF Against the Black Local Authorities**

In African townships where racial political exclusion prevailed, the situation was different. Township revolt did not have its origins in political factors so much as

economic ones, and a brief review of these is necessary in order to understand state responses. The Black Local Authorities Act of 1982 which established the Town and Village Councils of local governance crippled those structures from inception through lack of funding. Municipal councils had usually been funded through taxes on business, property and rents. However, black townships were generally devoid of businesses due to the constraints placed on business activity by the state. Properties were largely substandard, with few owned by township residents. In addition, since African consumers had no alternatives but to purchase goods from white areas, they were, in effect, subsidizing the growth and wellbeing of those areas (Swilling, Cobbett and Hunter 1991). This patently absurd arrangement was the unintended consequence three factors. First, African political exclusion that meant that Africans were temporary sojourners in white South Africa. Second, the realization that a developing economy required cheap African labor led to the need to accommodate Africans in local areas. Third, the application of social segregation to the city leading to separate living areas for Africans (Swilling, Cobbett and Hunter 1991: 175-176).

Town councilors were in the invidious position of having to fund their activities through increased rents. In the lives of Africans whose incomes were always minimal, a small increase in rent meant a large drop in disposable income. Between 1977 and 1984, rents were raised fourfold in the Vaal Triangle, the site of initial rebellion against town councilors (Seekings 1991: 299). Seekings goes on to note that even then rebellion did not flow automatically from hardship. What was key was the link between hardship and politics: councilors were unable to fund development except through rent increases, and township residents were unable to express their grievances to the central state. In addition, councilors were also increasingly seen as responsible for unpopular policies like rent increases and evictions. Finally, councilors used their access to resources to enrich themselves. In this context, "The only avenue through which township residents could express their discontent was open protest and demonstration, and support for extra-state civic and political organizations" (Seekings 1991: 300). What ensued was to become a pattern of spiraling protest, insurgency, and repression. Caught between the township residents and the security wing of the state was the township councilors unable to find developmental solutions outside of rent increases which were in themselves the key source of increasing protests.

By September 1986, rent boycotts had spread to over 50 townships (Swilling 1988: 200). Councilors were attacked, their houses and property destroyed. In the period between September 1, 1984 and May 28, 1995, ten town councilors had been attacked while 124 had their homes or businesses destroyed according to official reports.

Rent boycotts and the associated attacks on the councilors were one of many forms of protest action. Others included school boycotts, strikes and work stayaways, consumer boycotts, attacks on police and their homes, attacks on businesses. At the same time, the ANC stepped up its insurgent guerilla activity that rose an estimated 209% between 1984 and 1985 (SAIRR 1985: 541). One indication of the overall level of protest activity is shown in Figure 1. This graph was compiled by the Directorate Research of the Bureau for Information. The Bureau was the state's propaganda ministry, and it had its own research department that conducted research into issues and problems of national importance. It often presented those reports to the cabinet (Personal Interview #129 and 293). The graph shows unrest levels from September 1984 through May 1987. Unrest

was defined rather loosely and included physical injuries and deaths due to political violence, arson, stone throwing, mass gatherings, and petrol bomb attacks (Directorate Research 1987: 21). It clearly shows the large wave of protest activity beginning in 1984 and rising until the declaration of the first national state of emergency in June of 1986. The report recorded the total number of incidents for the first six months of 1986 at 12,225, the monthly levels of deaths at 68 and injuries at 267 (Directorate Research 1987: 21, 37).

Figure 2 puts the level of overall protest activity in the mid 1980s in historical perspective. The graph is calculated from newspaper accounts of aggregate collective protest activity against the state. A variety of South African and International newspaper sources were used, which helps in diminishing the bias that would be introduced into the data due to media restrictions on reporting political violence during the state of emergency (adapted from Sommer 1997). Two distinct waves are discernable in the 1980s: one beginning in 1983 and peaking in 1985 leading into a second peaking in 1990. The peak for the mid 1980s wave is the highest on record, despite media restrictions. More importantly, it is the wave of longest duration and highest intensity, despite the level of repression involved. Numbers of detentions underscore the scope of the mobilizations.

**Table 1: Numbers of Detentions by the State**

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Detentions</u> |
|-------------|-------------------|
| 1983        | 418               |
| 1984        | 1109              |
| 1985        | 9989              |
| 1986        | 18174             |
| 1987        | 14653             |

Source: Adapted from Webster and Friedman 1989: 21-22.

It is impossible to know what the extent of the mobilizations might have been without such severe state repression. But the state's own estimations suggest that the National State of Emergency used to legalize the detentions led to a drop of 60% in the total number of incidents between September 1984 and May 1987 (Directorate Research 1987: 37).

No amount of repression could restore local government functioning in the black townships. Councilors resigned en masse: by 1985, a total of 257 town and community councilors had resigned (SAIRR 1985: 88). At the end of 1990, campaigns aimed at calling for the resignation of councilors had led to the collapse of 40% of the 262 Black Local Authorities (Shubane 1991: 72).

### **3. State Response: Repression and Covert Negotiations.**

State response to such large-scale mobilizations was complex. Three overriding patterns emerge: first, large scale repression informed by counter-revolutionary theory aimed at restoring order so that racial modernization might continue. Second, a growing shift by a core group of reformers to break with the racially-based logic of the Apartheid state and

commence negotiations with the ANC to democratize the state. In this section, I shall briefly evaluate each initiative.

#### **i. Counter-revolutionary strategy and repression**

Members of the state security apparatus, especially the military, had been observing constitutional changes and its consequences with growing unease. By May of 1986, according to the General Groenewald of the Directorate Research, unrest incidents had reached 2600. Using unrest data from 1984 to 1986, they attempted to “determine what future trend could be expected” and the graph suggested “an enormous escalation of unrest and terror” (Groenewald 1990: 17). Military strategists were increasingly aware that existing strategy—then under the aegis of the security police—of maintaining security was inadequate to the task: the country was under “an organized effort to make it ungovernable.” The security forces pushed for a national state of emergency. President Botha declared one on June 12, 1986.

The goals of the state of emergency were threefold: restore law and order or stability; restore normality by discovering the causes of unrest and removing them; create circumstances conducive “to constitutional, economic and social development” (Groenewald 1990: 18). According to military strategists, achieving the goals of the state of emergency required identifying the type of conflict that South Africa was in, what was the strategy of the enemy. Only then could an appropriate counter-strategy be developed (Groenewald 1990: 19).

Military strategists had been grinding out a theory of the South African conflict for decades, and nobody had been a more ardent student of these theories than President Botha himself. Several theorists of revolutionary war were influential, among them Andre Beaufre, Robert Thompson and J.J. McCuen (Alden 1996; Groenewald 1990). In essence, these theorists all argue that contemporary conflicts differ from conventional wars in that they involve a total mobilization against the state: military, political, economic, and ideological. Hence the ANC’s goals were to make the country “ungovernable” through the use of creation of a underground structure (the UDF), the use of armed propaganda or terror, the mobilization of the masses into a people’s army and the international isolation of the state (Groenewald 1990: 20). Mobilizing the masses, the revolutionaries can then replace existing government structures with alternative “people’s structures.”

State counter-revolutionary strategy was formulated to undermine the revolutionaries. Groenewald identifies three short-term steps taken to “neutralize” the revolutionaries:

1. Limit intimidation by isolating members of the people’s army, i.e. detentions.
2. Limit armed propaganda by restricting the media.
3. Restrict the political activities of revolutionary organizations (23).

These had to be followed up with a longer-term plan to eliminate the causes of unrest. Causes that were identified were “unsound local authorities, unemployment, poor housing, insufficient education and inadequate medical services” (Groenewald 1990: 22). What is so interesting in this list is the absence of explicit political demands. The focus is rather on inadequate social and economic development, and a lack of resources on the

part of the black local authorities. In fact, the Minister of Defense, Magnus Malan, went even further in suggesting the for most blacks, democracy was not an issue:

The important question is also how many black people are merely interested in satisfying their material demands—housing, education, job opportunities, clothing, bread and butter, etc. There is presently only a limited section which is really interested in political participation. I think that for the masses in South Africa democracy is not a relevant factor. They are concerned with satisfying their material needs. These needs change from time to time and is now being exploited by revolutionaries...it is of crucial importance to prove to everybody that their living conditions and living standards are being improved (cited in Humphries 1988: 114-5).

Counter-revolutionary strategy lacks a clearly defined political theory for revolutionary activity. This was acknowledged by Beaufre who had suggested that total strategy be subordinated to “high policy” (Alden 1996: 44) and McCuen who had argued that “the government must have a clear political aim” (Groenewald 1990: 20). While counter-revolutionary strategy was quite successful in diminishing the level of insurgent activity, even Groenewald’s own data suggest that the baseline unrest figures in the aftermath of the 1986 emergency did not drop below 250 per month, with many months as high as 600 (23). Unwillingness to acknowledge the legitimacy of the UDF’s demand for democracy was the key problem, and neither the politicians, nor the military were willing to openly grasp the kernel of the problem and commence negotiations with the banned opposition.

## **ii. Covert Negotiations and the Origins of Democratization**

Members of the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning (DCDP) who had initiated the state modernization agenda found themselves in a conundrum: all initiatives were disrupted or boycotted. By 1985, it was clear that there was no possibility of making existing policy initiatives acceptable to black, Coloured and Indian South Africans. At this time, and in a surreptitious manner, they began to consult with activists in the UDF to determine why such initiatives were so unpopular. Stealth was required, because it was state policy not to consort with revolutionaries. One member of the department claimed to have “underground” for two weeks (Personal Interview #127), though exactly how a white man can conceal himself in South Africa’s black townships was not made clear to me.

What these state constitutional thinkers “discovered” was that their reform efforts were illegitimate because they all attempted to develop institutions “within the framework of apartheid” (Skrik vir Niks 1987: 1, translated by author). The government was “unaware of the legitimate aspirations of blacks” and that all state initiatives were seen by blacks, some coloureds and Indians as “attempts to maintain domination by whites” (1). What was needed was a three step process of political liberalization. A member of the DCDP put it this way:

Unbanning [of the ANC and other political organizations] had to happen first...then the release [of political prisoners] part and then you could abolish [apartheid legislation], but abolish would then in, virtually automatically follow in the process (Personal Interview #127).

In short, the activists had communicated that it would be necessary for the state to commence negotiations with the ANC for any meaningful constitutional development to take place. The National Party leadership had simply denied the necessity of doing this, and had hoped the counter-revolutionary strategy might restore the initiative to the state who had consistently **nominated** their own negotiating partners as a means to control the process and direction of policy change.

The first real opportunity came in 1987, when it became clear to P. W. Botha and the military that repression had not created order but a stalemate. Botha appointed a team of top civil servants from the various non-security departments to advise him on how to break the stalemate (Anonymous nd). The military gave the operative a top secret classification and the taskforce was “requested to think creatively, not be limited by government policy and aim to achieve real answers in order to make a quantum leap.” What the taskforce recommended was no less than “the immediate release of political prisoners, the scrapping of all discriminatory legislation, the unconditional commencement of multiparty negotiations, and ‘freezing’ parliament for a year in order to provide time to negotiate ...an interim constitution” (Anonymous nd). In short, the document presaged De Klerk’s liberalisation agenda by three years. The leaders of the team were the selfsame members of the DCDP who had informally consulted with the UDF activists. The taskforce reported on March 4, 1987, and the report was passed on to the Deputy Minister of Law and Order, Roelf Meyer who was to pass it on to Botha. However, because of its controversial recommendations, he first consulted with the head of National Intelligence, Neil Barnard (Anonymous nd).

Two institutional bases within the state remained opposed to implementing the taskforce’s recommendations. First, the security wing was against it since it meant that counter-revolutionary strategy had failed, and that the state would now be negotiating with revolutionary communists. What eventually shifted the balance of power against the security wing of the state was the collapse of communism, since it made it impossible to argue that the communists could support and invasion by insurgents.

More difficult to change was P. W. Botha himself. Botha had staked his political career on modernizing apartheid, and had failed. He was himself a cold-war warrior, and had publicly stated many times that he would never negotiate with communists or the ANC. Members of the National Intelligence Service had suggested to me that they had come to accept the necessity of negotiations with the ANC; “the problem was how to move Botha” (Personal Interview #403). For an additional two years, the NIS struggled with Botha’s unwillingness to change. Luck intervened: Botha had a stroke that incapacitated him; he resigned from head of the National Party and De Klerk assumed party leadership in February 1989. De Klerk began to plot the ouster of Botha. The coup came in August 14, 1989, as de Klerk and 15 members of the cabinet confronted Botha (Sparks 1994: 90). Botha resigned, and almost immediately, de Klerk announces the dismantling to the emergency state. In February 2, 1990, he unbans the ANC and other political organizations, and sets the country on a path of negotiated democratization.

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