

# THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN REVOLUTION

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Writing twenty years ago in *The Socialist Register 1969*<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Arrighi and I painted a bleak picture of independent Africa's prospects, suggesting the likely 'stability of existing neo-colonial structures' for the foreseeable future and arguing that 'the "Latin Americanization" of independent Africa is well underway'. This has proven to be an accurate prophesy, although, to be honest, we could not have predicted, even in our wildest imaginings, just how catastrophic for Africa this denouement to the continent's march towards independence would prove to be. Was there a bright side to the picture in 1969? 'Hope,' we argued, 'must instead be focused upon the liberation struggle in southern Africa, the implications of which are bound to have truly continental dimensions'

**In the 'centres' of southern Africa the peasantry has been effectively proletarianized and the social structure produced by the pattern of development in which the white settlers play the hegemonic role leaves little if any, room for a neo-colonial solution. Moreover, in the periphery of this region (the Portuguese territories) the neo-colonial solution has been blocked by the 'ultra-colonialism' of Portugal and the peasant revolution which has ensued is creating subjective conditions for socialist transformation which are generally absent elsewhere in independent black Africa.**

We did counsel against 'any illusions concerning the nature and short-term prospects of the struggle in southern Africa' but concluded that, 'at the present historical moment, this (struggle) provides the main, if not the only, leverage for revolutionary change in Sub-Saharan Africa'.

The point stands. Of course, the conventional wisdom of imperial planners of the time was very different. 1969 was also the year of the notorious *National Security Study Memorandum 39*<sup>2</sup>, a National Security Council report which apparently induced Henry Kissinger to conclude, in the words of one of the Memorandum's scenarios, that 'the whites are here to stay (in southern Africa) and the only way that constructive change can come about is through them. There is no hope for the blacks to gain the political rights they seek through violence. . .' Unfortunately for the likes of Kissinger history, in southern Africa, was already moving forward with seven league boots. Contrary to NSSM 39 'the outlook for the rebellions' in the 'Portuguese territories' of Mozambique and Angola was *not* 'one of continued stalemate'. Nor could the 'white regime' of Rhodesia 'hold out indefinitely', its internal

security system able to 'meet foreseeable threats'. Indeed not even South Africa could, 'for the foreseeable future, . . . maintain internal security', even if it has been able, on balance, to 'effectively counter insurgent activity'.

A mere five years later the comfortable assumptions of NSSM 39 lay in tatters, the military victories of liberation movements in Africa having been the major precipitant of 1974's Portuguese coup; it was this coup, in turn, that paved the way for the installation of radical governments in Angola and Mozambique and for the escalation of armed struggle in Rhodesia. Nor was the mood of challenge borne by such changes to stop at the South African border. Victories elsewhere in the region were a source of inspiration there but, in any case, stirrings in South Africa had their own dynamic. The dramatic signs of renewed working class militancy visible in 1973's wave of strikes and the youth-centred militancy in the townships soon to come to a head in the **Soweto** events of 1976 announced that the long, dark night of the 1960s – when 'internal stability', imposed at bayonet point by Emergency regulation, had indeed been the order of the day in South Africa – was over.

In short, a revolutionary process was now afoot in the region and has continued to do so, bearing, among other things, considerable promise of a socialist future for southern Africa. This essay will attempt to evaluate that promise here, perhaps on firmer ground than was available in 1969 at the very outset of the revolutionary revival Arrighi and I sought to divine. However, it will be necessary, first, to trace in more detail the ebbs and flows of the process in question. Unfortunately, this essay will also have to specify the nature of the counter-revolution to which revolution in southern Africa has given rise. For the counter-revolutionary project mounted by Pretoria and its allies has been savage, setting new precedents of cruelty and cynicism. And it has determined that, whatever the achievements of the past two decades, the struggle for southern Africa is still very far from being resolved.

### *I. Liberation Struggle and the Radicalization of Nationalism*

The launching of liberation struggles in the Portuguese colonies (Mozambique, Angola and, outside the southern Africa region but important to outcomes there, Guinea-Bissau) and in white minority-dominated Rhodesia transpired in a continental context of 'successful' nationalisms. As is well known the skilled machinations of such departing colonial powers as Britain and France meant that, in general, the decolonization effected with the granting of independence in the 1950s and 1960s would only be a 'false' one, a prelude to neo-colonialism and class collaboration with the rising elites of tropical Africa. For various good reasons of their own, Portugal and the Smith regime that seized power in Rhodesia by means of 1965's 'unilateral declaration of independence' refused to risk the ploy of attempting to coopt the emergent nationalist leadership into formal positions of authority. Nationalists in southern Africa would have to stand and fight, a requirement that was

to make some difference to the terms of the decolonization bargain ultimately struck.

Not that all such nationalists could be considered immune to temptation, if, as and when a 'neo-colonialism' were to be placed on offer. Struggles would continue within the movements in Lusophone Africa and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe until very late in the day as to what the class content of liberation should actually be, once the relevant minority regime was forced to the bargaining table. Nonetheless, there was a radicalizing logic to guerilla warfare that began to imprint itself on movements like FRELIMO in Mozambique, the MPLA in Angola and even ZANU in Zimbabwe in discernible ways. Mozambique provided, perhaps, the classic case. It became apparent to many within the FRELIMO leadership that a guerilla struggle like the one launched in northern Mozambique in 1964 required a level of genuine popular participation in and identification with the emancipatory process very different from that evidenced in prior nationalist mobilizations. After all, the potential risks of throwing in their lot with the guerillas in a war zone were great for the peasantry. And the liberation movement needed not merely the peasantry's passive acceptance of its presence, but its active support – in scouting, in provisioning, in the carriage of materiel. Rejecting the *foco* approach – once in heated direct exchange with Che Guevara himself during the latter's African excursion – FRELIMO opted instead for its own version of 'people's war'.<sup>3</sup>

This meant beginning to construct rudimentary democratic structures in the expanding liberated areas, beginning to exemplify popularly based programmes in the health and education spheres, beginning to raise promising questions about such issues as the emancipation of women and even beginning to experiment with certain forms of collective production. This was a radicalization of practice on the ground that also fed back into the movement's theorization of this undertakings, giving rise to a remarkably indigenous process of discovery of the strengths of Marxism as a framework for revolutionary endeavour. This was not, of course, a level of insight that was automatically won. A fierce struggle broke out within the movement in the late 1960s, between those who were willing to accompany this kind of radicalization process and those, hankering for a 'false decolonization' of their own, who resisted it. At best, these latter pined for quick military victories in order to bring the Portuguese 'to their senses' even as they also sought to advance their own interests within the movement by politicking along tribal and racial lines or by conceiving self-aggrandizing economic schemes.

In the event the latter wing of the movement lost out and the proponents of an increasingly radicalized nationalism carried the day. Perhaps, as some observers have argued, there is a danger of romanticizing this achievement. The FRELIMO-inspired political structures were still cast in a discernibly military mould, with, they would argue, a degree of centralization of authority that could translate all too readily into a dangerous kind of 'vanguardism' in

the post-liberation phase – especially when the model had to be generalized to that considerable proportion of the country which had not been directly touched by the **experience** of the liberated areas. Nonetheless, principles of democratic empowerment were being established as well as the beginnings of a left perspective very different from the obscurantist banalities of the 'African **Socialism**' school that had been so prominent heretofore on the continent. Even though still primarily the possession of the revolutionary vanguard itself, this new perspective manifested a much clearer and more forthright understanding both of the workings of capitalist imperialism and of the dynamics of class formation *within* African societies. Most importantly, it was to provide the springboard for the attempt to implement socialist development strategies in such countries as Mozambique and Angola after the military **defeat** of Portugal – and the fall of that country's fascist government – paved the way for independence.

The growing success of the armed struggle in Mozambique also gave a firm leg up to the Zimbabwean liberation movement. Although there were some signs, in the early 1960s, that Britain might be prepared to countenance a 'false decolonization' in Rhodesia the seizure of power by the Smith regime soon put paid to that idea while (at best) neutralizing Britain's notional responsibility for the fate of its quasi-colony. Military confrontation would prove necessary there as well in order to force the pace of change. **How-**ever<sup>1</sup> it took some time for the popular movement in Zimbabwe to bring this necessity into focus. For it was riven with divisions of the most wasting kind, framed not in terms of genuine ideological differences but by the kind of jockeying for position between petty bourgeois politicians that so often in Africa has activated debilitating organizational rivalries (ZANU vs. ZAPU, in the Zimbabwe case) and even ethnic rivalries (Ndebele vs. Shona, for starters). Yet ZANU was ultimately – in the early 1970s – to avail itself of **FRELIMO's** offer to open up a more effective military front in Zimbabwe via the newly liberated areas of Mozambique's Tete Province and thereby work (especially after Mozambique's own independence provided an even more secure base) to undermine, slowly but surely, the viability of the settlers' UDI project.

Yet the escalation of armed struggle did not serve to radicalize the movement there as profoundly as had been true of Mozambique, this despite the fact that in Zimbabwe, too, the ideological discourses of the movement were increasingly cast in Marxist terms. **For internecine** politicking remained very much the order of the day both between ZANU and ZAPU as rival claimants to nationalist primacy and within the two movements themselves. Various attempts to transcend these limitations on a new, more ideologically progressive basis (the ZIPA initiative of the **mid-70s**, designed to displace the old guard leadership and initially viewed with some favour by the host **FRELIMO** government in Mozambique, provides a case in point) collapsed. Guerilla advances, arguably not as deeply rooted in popular assertions on

the ground as had been FRELIMO's also seemed, in their impact, to be less integrated into the circuits of the exile leadership's politics. This, plus the fact that end-game in Zimbabwe saw the reassertion of the imperial factor (via Britain's orchestrating of the Lancaster House decolonization talks), narrowed considerably the further revolutionary potential of the popular movement's victory – though many felt, nonetheless, that the saliency of the land question in Zimbabwe and the existence of a relatively large African working class **might** serve to keep pressure on the leadership to deliver on the radical promise implicit in much of its rhetoric.<sup>4</sup>

If, however, the promise of radicalization ultimately appeared in somewhat muted form in Zimbabwe, the nationalists' victory there became an important piece in the regional pattern of advance against the redoubts of white minority rule, bringing the front-line of struggle ever closer to the region's core, South Africa. Moreover, South Africa was itself stirring during this period, the 1970s witnessing the dramatic revival of the popular movement there. As we shall see, the presence of a vast and remarkably creative working class in the latter country promises, perhaps more firmly than elsewhere in the region, that liberation there will take on an increasingly socialist edge. Yet the intricate interpenetration of racial oppression and class exploitation – and of both nationalist and socialist responses to such domination – have lent a note of unpredictability to this process. Look, for example, at the very terms of the revival we have mentioned.

Bear in mind that the 1960s represented a trough in the history of popular resistance in South Africa. That resistance had peaked in the 1950s with various dramatic campaigns of mass action, but the apartheid state all too soon had managed to regain the upper hand, using the post-Sharpville Emergency regulations to ban popular organizations like the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), to jail, ban or drive into exile large numbers of activists, to crush, in short, all open opposition. In fact the state had dealt the popular movement not merely a crushing physical blow but also a psychological one of deeply demobilizing proportions. As the banned organizations (most importantly, the ANC) struggled to reestablish a political – and now, of necessity, military – presence relevant to the new terrain, a vacuum was created that would only slowly be filled.

But filled it was, in the first instance by the emergence of the Black Consciousness movement. An ideological project that paralleled other cultural nationalist expressions of the time (like 'Black Power' in North America) it was largely the creation of petty-bourgeois intellectuals (albeit many of them of impressive stature like Steve Biko), with separatist overtones, limited strategic sense and a minimal grasp of the possible role of the popular classes in effecting social change. However, as a reaffirmation of racial pride and of the sentiment of resistance to the apartheid dispensation Black Consciousness was significant. Perhaps, as its themes began to permeate the ambience within which new generations were growing up, its immediate importance was more

psychological than political. But not for long. For it was a fresh generation of youth who, as students, would soon rock the apartheid system to its foundations. Thus, in 1976, in **Soweto** and elsewhere, they squared off not merely against 'Bantu education' and the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction but against the entire system of oppression that they despised and now chose not to fear.

Of at least equal centrality to the rebirth of resistance was the stirring of the black working class, prefigured in various ways in the late sixties and early seventies and finding its most dramatic early expression in the strikes of Durban (in particular) in 1972. But perhaps dramatic confrontation was less crucial, at this point, than the more mundane process that also marked the seventies, that of laying the organizational foundations of what were to become a wide range of vigorously independent trade unions. True, in the **Soweto** events, the fit between students and workers was often less than smooth, even producing some conflict and tension. Moreover, the most solidly grounded of the new unions (those that would soon come together under the banner of FOSATU, for example) were often loath to move quickly and assertively onto the terrain of politics per se. In part this reflected a particular reading by some union activists of the history of the 1950s when, they felt, SACTU, the trade union wing of the Congress Alliance, had all too uncritically subordinated the consolidation of its presence on the shop-floor to the demands of nationalist **mobilization**. There was also some suspicion that the vanguardist pretensions of the ANC (and, perhaps even more to the point, those of the **ANC's** close ally, the South African Communist Party) might ultimately be pursued at the expense of the working classes' own interests.

Despite such tensions it bears emphasizing that what was being created in the 1970s was the context for creative interaction between a revived popular democratic politics and an increasingly radical working-class project. In the next section we will examine in more detail how these two strands have come together to create a particularly promising and South Africa-specific version of radicalized nationalism. First, however, something further must be said about the peculiarly regional nature of the radicalization process we have begun to trace. Self-evidently, the region's political economy is tied together by the omnipresence of the long arm of South Africa, the latter's hegemony forged by long years of southern African history. Small wonder, then, that the process of liberation should itself spring across national frontiers.

Thus, the 1975 victory over Portugal of nationalist forces in Mozambique and Angola, as well as the Angolan repelling of a South African invasion force in 1975 had great and visible resonance, being, without doubt, one of the inspirations that produced **Soweto**. Nor is it entirely accidental that the next dramatic popular outburst in South Africa – the school boycotts in Cape Town and beyond in 1980 – came hard on the heels of ZANU's victory and the realization of Zimbabwean independence. Of course, the unfortunate

fact is that these kinds of linkage also fuelled the fires of counter-revolution in South Africa, making such 'front-line states' prime targets for South African 'destabilization' tactics in the next round. If victories on the 'front-line' had helped the South African movement rebuild its self-confidence it soon became apparent that the fate of such states was even more dependant on the pace with which the South African movement could build its own revolution in the region's heartland – and thus remove, from within, the chief source of their destabilization. Phrased in such terms the regional nature of the revolutionary process we are discussing has never been clearer than it is at the present moment.

## *II. The Socialist Promise*

In the first flush of independence, however, and in the former Portuguese colony of Mozambique in particular, the prospect of consolidating the revolutionary promise of the liberation struggle seemed strong. True, the colonial inheritance from the Portuguese was a grim one, Portugal's status as the most backward country in Europe having left its grotesque mark on its colonies. Thus Mozambique was relatively undeveloped even by African standards, while much of **such** development as the Portuguese had facilitated was designed to service the South African economy – via the movement of migrant labour, the provision of transport outlets to the sea, the planned marketing of power from the Cabora Bassa dam project. The precipitant flight of the Portuguese settler community at independence merely brought further into crisis an already distorted system, now undermining the network of commercialization and key agricultural and industrial sectors in ways that the new FRELIMO government would have had trouble adjusting to even under the most favourable of circumstances.

But the circumstances were to prove far from favourable. Mozambique set itself to support the struggles of its Zimbabwean allies for freedom, providing a crucial rear base for the ZANU guerillas and immediately implementing sanctions against the Smith **regime** at very great cost (the Mozambican town of Beira, one of Rhodesia's chief outlets to the sea, becoming almost immediately a ghost port, for example). There were other costs to this act of solidarity, the **most** expensive, **in** retrospect, being Rhodesia's invention of the National Resistance Movement (the MNR or Renamo), conjured up from the dregs of Portugal's former colonial security apparatus to raise the costs of FRELIMO support for ZANU by creating havoc inside Mozambique. A pin-prick at first, the Renamo tactic was to become a major instrument of destabilization once taken over by the South Africans in the wake of Zimbabwean independence. Economic dependence on South Africa also gave FRELIMO's enemies leverage. Yet **dés**pite problems inside the country and without, the new government did seek to concretize its socialist aspirations.

It attempted, for example, to generalize the politically empowering experience of the liberated areas to all other parts of the country via the mechanism of the 'dynamizing groups', structures of democratic participation established in rural settings, neighbourhoods and workplaces. Truly stirring developments began to occur in the social services sphere, in education, health and the like, and significant changes were projected in the area of women's emancipation, for example. The economy, too, began to be brought under state control and planning – if at a pace, dictated by the vacuum created in many sectors by Portuguese abandonment of various economic enterprises, that sometimes ran ahead of FRELIMO's own better judgement. Within two years of achieving independence FRELIMO had become a 'vanguard party' of 'Marxist-Leninist' provenance and was conceiving large, even grandiose, plans of national economic development centred on state ownership and planning and peasant-based cooperatization.

The catastrophic forestalling of such plans is a long and painful story.<sup>5</sup> Certainly weaknesses in FRELIMO's own project provide part of the explanation. Was its vanguardism a little too closed and self-righteous, its 'Marxism – Leninism' too frozen and inflexible, its economic planning too preoccupied with high-tech, large-scale solutions and too little preoccupied with peasant need and incentives? Probably, but even as FRELIMO moved at its 1983 Fourth Congress to profit from the lessons of its mistakes its space for further manoeuvre had already narrowed disastrously, narrowed by dint of the regional war waged by South Africa that was fast enveloping the country. Soon FRELIMO found itself suing for peace with South Africa (at Nkomati in early 1984), backing away as it did so from even that minimal level of concrete assistance it had felt able to give the ANC.

And it also found itself forced to treat much more solicitously than would have been its preference with the minions of international capitalism (the global aid network and the IMF for example), forced, concomitantly, to allow a much wider space for 'the logic of the market' to determine its choices both domestically and internationally. It seems fair to say that FRELIMO's earlier errors had been primarily those of a genuinely left leadership become too triumphalist and too self-confident of its ability to force the pace of advance. Yet many observers now feared that new strata were emerging around the state apparatus and in the private sector that might begin to have a vested interest in moving the country ever more definitively away from the vestiges of its socialist project. This will not happen easily. Certainly FRELIMO's Fifth Congress, set for July of this year, seems likely to be a forum within which tough debate will take place as to how best to safeguard something of the essence of the project first developed in Mozambique's liberated areas. But as with somewhat parallel developments in Angola – albeit developments produced in the latter country in the context of an even more direct and aggressive intervention by South Africa and the United States – the results in Mozambique are a sobering reminder of the limits on what can be achieved

on the periphery of an untransformed region.

Developments in Zimbabwe are also sobering, as earlier comments in this essay have already anticipated. South Africa has sought to create trouble for an independent Zimbabwe certainly, even if in much more modest ways than has been the case in either Mozambique or Angola. But the main **barrier** to a Zimbabwean revolution has been largely self-generated, in ways anticipated during the process of liberation itself. For, as noted, the victorious movement remained less transformed by the practice of armed struggle than might have been hoped. Moreover, profiting (they argued) from the negative lessons of Mozambique's experience and, no doubt, cognizant of the hostile regional terrain, the ZANU leadership chose to approach the existing **settler/capitalist** economic structure very gingerly indeed. Yet it soon appeared that the leadership had come to make such a virtue of this apparent necessity that their revolutionary credentials were rendered increasingly suspect. Ibbo Mandaza has summarized the process in the following terms: 'as the African petty bourgeoisie began gradually to find access to the same economic and social status as their white counterparts so, too, did it become increasingly unable to respond to the aspirations of the workers and peasants. . . . It became imperative, as an act of survival for the new state, to put a rein on its mass base. . . . Political principles and ideological commitments appeared mortgaged on the altar of private **property!**'<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, advances were made via this route in terms of 'substantial levels of food production, the growth of a layer of medium to small peasant producers, a maintenance of infrastructure, improved educational and agricultural services for much of the population and an absence of racial polarization'. Yet even the commentator who makes these points confesses himself uneasy with Mugabe's 'commandist style of leadership' and his 'demobilizing (of) democratic forms of organization after independence'. And other observers emphasize Zimbabwe's extensive, often quite supine, accommodations with international capitalism, the state's self-interested muzzling of the working class and its stalling of any very meaningful programme of rural transformation (cooperativization, the beginnings of land reform and the like). And they note the fact that the Zimbabwean polity – despite the running start towards a more fundamental transformation ostensibly provided it by the experience of armed struggle – has nonetheless come to be marked by additional negative features all too familiar from developments in African states elsewhere on the continent. Thus, what has transpired is less the mobilization of the mass of population along class lines (as 'workers and peasants') and more the instrumentalization of that population as ethnic constituencies (whether as 'Shona' vs. 'Ndebele' or in terms of intra-Shona distinctions) for regional political barons jockeying for power and privilege at the centre of the system. Nor has quasi-capitalist accommodation been altogether successful even in strictly economic terms, as Zimbabwe, too, finds itself increasingly in a mendicant posture towards the IMF and its attendants.

We must be cautious here. Sobering facts about the presently visible denouements to liberation from white-minority rule in the countries we have been discussing should not blind us to the importance of what has been achieved. This is especially clear once we have grasped the fact that – given the centrality of South Africa – revolution in the countries in southern Africa cannot be fully realized until that revolution encompasses the entire region. How much more clearly exposed is South Africa than it was a decade and a half ago, then, and how much further south has the front line of struggle in the sub-continent been pushed? Isn't Zimbabwe, in spite of its contradictions still on that front-line, still rock solid, for example, in its military support for a besieged Mozambique? And hasn't that front-line itself been pushed further south in recent months, when, as a direct result of a substantial military set-back suffered at the hands of the Angolans and their Cuban allies, South Africa has had to accept the prospect of a democratic political future for its own colony of South-West **Africa/Namibia**?

Once again, the answer to this latter question must be 'yes'-and 'no'. Unfortunately, as this essay is being completed (in February, 1989) it is still too early to be confident of the precise outcome of the United Nations' entry upon the scene in Namibia to supervise the transition to majority rule, although that entry is indeed something to celebrate. Yet there are also disturbing signs that South Africa will still manage to snatch a smattering of victory from the jaws of this defeat, working as it now is (with some western connivance) to warp the political process of Namibia's transition to independence more in its favour. Its goal: to undermine the U.N.'s ability to counterbalance structures of social **control** that Pretoria has spent decades implanting on the ground in Namibia.\* Moreover, even if the process of transition is kept reasonably honest and open (thereby, undoubtedly, ensuring a **SWAPO** victory), the fact remains that South Africa's economic and military power will continue to hover over a post-independence **SWAPO** government in ways that may prove preemptive of any very great revolutionary content to the latter's project. In short, liberatory advance in Namibia could prove to be at least as flawed and as contradictory as it has been elsewhere in the region. We thus return to the heart of the matter, to the prospect for revolution in South Africa itself.

There, the key revolutionary 'moment' to date has proven to be the insurrection of 1984 – 1986, an insurrection that displayed graphically both the strengths and weaknesses of the South African movement, broadly defined. Towards that moment the seeds of resistance planted in the 1970s continued to **grow**.<sup>9</sup> Now, however, the two broad strands of above-ground resistance earlier identified began to interpenetrate even more markedly than had hitherto been the case. **Certainly working-class** activism as focussed around trade union initiatives became increasingly important. So much so that the dominant classes, caught off balance, sought (following the terms of the **Wiehann Commission**) to coopt this fledgling movement through recognition

of black trade union rights within the framework of existing and quite restrictive labour relations structures. Although a heated debate ensued within trade union circles as to whether to run the risks of registration under these terms, ultimately the process of legalization was turned back against the regime, seized upon from below to carve out further space for working class assertion. The organizational drive continued, notably in the mines (where the National Union of Mineworkers gained increasing prominence), with the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in November, 1985, ultimately **defining** a high water mark in this union sphere. Thus, by 1987, it was estimated that this union centre had as many as one million signed-up members.

Community-based activism also grew apace. **Students/youth** continued to be important; the 1980 boycott movement which fanned out from the Cape demonstrated this as has the prominence of school boycott and youth militancy in the insurrectionary moment of 1984–6. But community activism was now much more broadly based, the general ambience of defiance giving rise to a range of community-centred resistances running well beyond the classroom. These surfaced in every area where the impact of the regime's deepening economic crisis and its authoritarian practices could be felt, in rent strikes and consumer and transportation boycotts for example, and gave rise to a rich array of community organizations throughout South Africa. These organizations activated workers where they lived and reinforced their growing radicalization, while also providing a particularly important nexus for the entry of women into the struggle. It was this kind of ferment, too, that was to press (some) churches more firmly into the ranks of militancy. As a result, when the initiative was taken in 1983 to organize nationally to resist the government's imposition of a new **tri-cameral** parliamentary system (involving token chambers for Indians and 'Coloureds' and continued exclusion of Africans) the building blocks for the resultant umbrella organization, the United Democratic Front, were already in place. In the UDF, it has been estimated, were two million people represented by some 600 constituent bodies. They were successful, in the first instance, in undermining the legitimacy of the tri-cameral elections but were now also girded for further confrontation with the apartheid system.

This essay earlier alluded to the interpenetration of the two strands of resistance. **This** became very marked, full of promise for the increasing efficacy and increasing radicalization of the resistance movement, although also problematic in certain particulars. As suggested above, the trade unions harboured some (notably within the FOSATU camp) who approached the broader political arena gingerly, concerned to root the workers' struggle as firmly as possible on the shop-floor and suspicious of the merely 'populist' intentions of certain political leaders. As a **result**, it was often the best organized of trade unions that chose to keep at arm's distance from the UDF. At the same time the community activism of their own membership was a force

drawing such unions into a more overt role in the political arena, making them, before long, active partners in many of the boycotts and stayaways that became such a prominent part of the struggle that fanned out from the Vaal Triangle after September, 1984. Moreover, there were also unions emerging (SAAWU and GAWU for example) that actually placed primary emphasis upon community organization and nationalist politics. As pressure for greater trade union unity developed these two elements (increasingly distinguished as 'workerist' and 'populist' tendencies) found themselves linked together in a relationship, sometimes debilitating and sometimes creative, that produced the aforementioned COSATU.

Particularly germane to the way in which these different emphases now began to play themselves out was the reemergence of the African National Congress to a position of centrality within the broad resistance movement. As I have argued *elsewhere*<sup>10</sup>, the ANC's resurgence sprang from a combination of its historical legitimacy, its ability (unlike the rival Pan-Africanist Congress) to retain unity and coherence in exile and its unique promise, exemplified by an escalating level of sabotage actions ('armed propaganda' in the ANC's lexicon), to lend military muscle to any confrontation with the state. Moreover, as the struggle escalated, the ANC showed itself particularly skilled politically in bringing the broad array of popular resistance into focus around its own slogans and programmatic demands, even in periods when popular actions seemed to have been running, spontaneously, well ahead of any direct ANC mobilization. Examples to be mentioned include the anti-SAIC and anti-Republic Day campaigns, the Free Mandela initiative, the widely-publicized emphases upon, first, 'ungovernability' and then 'from ungovernability to people's power' and the successful attempt to bring the Freedom Charter back into prominence as a crucial touchstone of the movement's demands. In addition, in organizational terms, the ANC proved successful in linking itself to the most important new initiatives being mounted above ground inside the country – with the UDF, for example, and, more indirectly but equally importantly, with a rapidly crystallizing COSATU.

This trend was not uncontested, of course. There were rivals to this ANC – UDF – COSATU alliance that was slowly but surely emerging centre-stage in resistance circles in South Africa, notably those who continued to define their politics quite self-consciously with reference to a relatively unalloyed version of the black consciousness tradition (AZAPO, the National Forum, the National Council of Trade Unions/NACTU). Such resistance to ANC – UDF – COSATU hegemony sometimes presented itself in leftist terms, attempting to rationalize its racially exclusivist preoccupations as radicalism by highlighting the centrality of the 'black working class' to its project. Not particularly convincing in many of its protestations, this tendency has remained, in any case, a comparatively minor one within resistance circles. In practice, the real debate over the probable definition of the revolutionary

content of the South African movement has tended to take place *within* the major alliance identified above<sup>11</sup>.

Not that identifying the dynamics of the struggle over the emerging content of liberation is a straightforward exercise. To begin with, there is the question of the precise degree of radicalism represented by the nationalist project of the ANC itself. Certainly the most prominent ANC ideological formulae have tended to emphasize, over the years, the advisability of a two-stage process of liberation (national liberation-cum-democratization first and socialism later) – even if, more often than not, the working class is presented as being the single most crucial element to the liberatory alliance and therefore, the ANC line hints, some kind of guarantor of socialism in the next round. No doubt there are tactical considerations at play here. Racial oppression is a particularly prominent reality in South Africa, needless to say, and it is tempting to develop a politics that centres on mass sensitivity to that fact. Not only might this be expected to broaden the class alliance of blacks pushing for change, it can even speak, it has been argued, to workers in a genuinely radicalizing manner. For with the state's repressive role etched in colour, workers might be more inclined to broaden the 'trade union consciousness' generated at the workplace into a potentially hegemonic project that implies the actual overthrow of that state. Moreover, presenting the struggle as being, first and foremost, a struggle for 'deracialization' and democratization can be expected both to add to the coalition of international supporters committed to the overthrow of apartheid and even, possibly, to help to split the white community inside South Africa itself in more promising ways than might be the case were the emancipatory project defined, first and foremost, in even more radical terms.

Yet there are also dangers to such an approach. If working-class power and socialist priorities are not established absolutely firmly from the outset, how is the pull towards mere petty bourgeois nationalism to be countered? For, as the period of insurrection was to demonstrate, the nearer the movement comes to power, the more actively will merely liberal forces in the white business community and in the black petty bourgeoisie (including within the ANC itself!) seek to narrow the nationalist agenda; moreover, the complexities of dealing with South Africa's sophisticated economy will, in and of itself, exert a formidably deradicalizing pressure upon any post-liberation government for whom, at best, some form of 'social democracy' may seem the most 'reasonable' course.

Set against this, however, is the ANC's own discernibly radical tradition (this in part associated with the South African Communist Party, and therefore something of a mixed blessing – given the difficulties that party has had in freeing itself from its long-term Stalinist incubus). Important, too, is the continuing pattern of radicalization of the township youth, ever more inclined (accurately enough) to underscore the links between capitalist exploitation and racial oppression in South Africa. And, finally, there are the trade

unions, some of the most important of which (the Metalworkers are a good example) are very far from manifesting mere 'trade union consciousness' in their increasingly socialist claims upon the future. In part the ANC has had to go to school to such unions in reestablishing its preeminent position within the South African movement, and this is yet another promising portent. Moreover, as noted above, 'Charterist' elements have had to jockey with the so-called 'workerists' within COSATU in ways that have not split the union or the broader movement and may even have strengthened them – by foreshadowing the manner in which the issues of the future can be openly debated. In short, the imperatives thrown up by South Africa's class structure seem an important inoculation against the tailing off of successful struggle there into the mere Africanization of capitalism (even if this were to be presented, with some good reason, as a tactically necessary short-term bow in the direction of 'social democracy').

Needless to say, rendering permanent the South African revolution **will** be a source of on-going struggle even in a post-apartheid South Africa. Yet it is one thing to speculate about the post-apartheid future, another to reach that future by, in the first instance, actually overthrowing the apartheid state. In the 1984–86 period, when the pace of change in South Africa seemed to be accelerating geometrically, 'futurology' was the vogue. True, questions of class alliance germane to determining the likely long-term socialist content of liberation in South Africa are also relevant to defining the most appropriate line-up of class agents for change in the present phase of struggle. Yet, as the failure of **insurrection** was to demonstrate, there are also quite specific questions that arise regarding the modalities of insurrectionary practice itself. In fact, these are questions that the movement inside South Africa is only just beginning to wrestle with in the context of the set-back that South Africa's repressive Emergency regulations have meant for it. This essay will return to the consequent debate in its next section. Here, however, a brief look at some of the strengths and weaknesses of the revolutionary challenge exemplified in the 1984–86 confrontation is in order.

The range of incident that comprised the insurrection was significant, certainly, and so, cumulatively, was the number of South Africans involved. And it did shake the dominant classes, especially when domestic unrest also began to trigger off more dramatic sanctions activity from abroad (including, not least importantly, those 'market-induced sanctions' that saw the international banking community reconsidering the viability of South Africa's investment climate!) Yet just how deep did the organization of insurrection cut? Certainly there were those who felt, even at the time, that the UDF as a national body was top heavy, in too much of a hurry, and, in not grasping the necessity to further consolidate local organization, more merely parasitic of popular energies boiling away at that level than-it should have been. At the same time it is true that, as events wore on, more emphasis was given to the genesis of streets committees, peoples' courts and the like, institutions that

promised to provide greater resilience and an even greater sense of purpose and accomplishment at the base. And in some spheres remarkable examples of novel kinds of creativity appeared. Thus in education, in part at ANC urging, the tactic of mere boycott of the schools was scrutinized critically and, with the linking of parents groups to those of students in such organizations as the National Education Crisis Committee, exciting programmes began to be devised that sought to reclaim the schools as, in effect, quasi-liberated territory upon which to build new social relations and devise new syllabi; it was in such a context that the slogan 'Peoples's Education for People's Power' replaced that of 'No Education Before Liberation!' Perhaps, in the end, it was merely a matter of timing: the insurrection as learning experience was nipped too quickly in the bud by state repression to permit the movement to profit promptly from its mistakes and **deepen** its project sufficiently.

All the more disappointing, then, that the movement could not defend itself better from the state when the crunch came. This was especially so in light of the fact that a promise had been made by the ANC, both in the year or two immediately proceeding the insurrection and in 1985, in the heat of battle, at the movement's Kabwe Consultative Conference. The promise was that the ANC would be able to shift its military presence from mere 'armed propaganda' (however important that might be) to actively **arming** and defending the resistance on the ground in the townships. What actually transpired along these lines was very much less than this. And what of the goals of insurrection? Certainly the strategic focus of the dramatic events of the time was less than clear, in part because, almost inevitably, no one centre had real control over such events, in part because there often seemed operative the implicit premise that mere revolt, as widespread as possible, would produce relevant 'negotiations'. The ANC, at the centre of events in many important ways, did position itself deftly for such negotiations, as a string of visitors, including a weighty group of senior businesspeople, trooped dutifully to Lusaka. Yet this was not to prove adequate as a road to power.

### *III Counterrevolution and Future Prospects*

The nature of the South African state's response to the growth of revolutionary challenge, both domestically and in the region at large, has already been anticipated at several points in this essay. We have noted, in particular, the key role played by South African destabilization in undermining much of the promise of socialism in such countries as Mozambique and Angola. In Angola this has involved direct military intervention from the very dawn of Angolan independence (November 11, 1975) when, with American encouragement, South African troops drove for Luanda. Only the eleventh hour military assistance of Cuba saved the MPLA government. But this was merely the first phase of the long and wasting war South Africa (and its American ally) was to inflict upon Angola, both directly and by essential support provided

to its local cat's-paw in the fray, the UNITA movement of Jonas Savimbi. As noted, South Africa was defeated in southern Angola in 1988, but at great cost to Angola: left behind was a country in tatters, seeking economic succour from the IMF and forced to request the departure of the ANC, with its military bases, from its soil as part of 1988's peace accords.

This latter was no insignificant concession, especially given the fact that one of the key goals of South African destabilization has been a quarantining of ANC presence in the front-line states. A second goal has been to undermine the possibility of the front-line establishing an alternative grid of regional economic activity (under the auspices of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference, for example) outside the historically established economic overlordship of South Africa. Of course, this has been even more apparent in Mozambique where Zimbabwe's possible alternative links of transportation to the sea have been a chief target of Renamo activities, than in Angola. But there has been a third, quite self-conscious goal: to turn the promise of nationalist victory and, in particular, of socialist assertion in the region to mud, in order to undermine the resonance of such advances inside South Africa itself and to facilitate the broader counter-revolutionary goals of South Africa's western allies.

True, opinions have differed from time to time within the imperial camp as to when the process of military destabilization and consequent concessions made by the target regime could be said to have gone far enough. With Nkomati, for example, most western actors, including, somewhat surprisingly, the Reagan White House, chose to remove Mozambique from the top of their international hit-list, looking, increasingly, to the IMF and tied aid to finish the job of reabsorbing that weakened country into the global circuits of capital. Yet South Africa itself has preferred to drive on with its project of cruel destruction in Mozambique, seeking further to neutralize that country by, in effect, destroying the very fabric of its social life—targeting, through Renamo, essential economic linkages, murdering trained personnel and, literally, terrorizing the population. (In Angola, in contrast, as South Africa prepares to retire from the fray, the United States, at least momentarily, promises to pick up the slack in support for UNITA and works to block Angola's entry into the IMF!) Somewhat less dramatically, elsewhere in the region, South Africa has been prepared to use economic leverage (the sanctions that helped topple an awkward Lesotho government in 1986 or the economic whip that is constantly being cracked over the head of Zimbabwe, for example) and destabilization in a lower key (lightning raids into Botswana and Zimbabwe or the stirring of the pot of disunity in the latter country by sponsorship of the so-called 'super-ZAPU') to gain tactical advantage.

No less crucial has been the use of the iron fist where the threat to Pretoria's interests is even more acute — inside South Africa itself. Some measure of preemptive accommodation to be struck with black forces pressing for change has been, from time to time, part of the apartheid regime's domestic strategy,

the attempted cooptation of the black trade union movement mentioned earlier being a case in point. But, in fact, this was merely one component of the broader 'reform' package of the late 1970s that was designed to peel away a significant stratum of urbanized, relatively better-off blacks into acceptance of the legitimacy of an only marginally altered system. As we have seen, mass mobilization around an emerging programme of far more meaningful liberation quickly put paid to such a tactic. Voices could still be heard, from some sections of the business community for example (and particularly in the context of subsequent insurrection), suggesting that more substance be given to the reform initiative. Yet only the most bold were prepared to suggest that anything even approximating to a complete deracialization (and colour-blind bourgeois democratization) of South Africa might be the best means to insulate South African capitalism from going down with the country's structure of racial oppression (cf. Zac de Beer's well known comment that 'we dare not allow the baby of free enterprise to be thrown out with the bath-water of apartheid'). For most in the white community any such changes were either absolutely unthinkable on first principles or (at best) judged to be far too risky. On the other hand, half measures of 'reform' seemed not to work either. In consequence, the state's response to insurrection was to be, almost exclusively, a repressive one. When, in turn, this repression seemed to 'work' – producing, at least in the short run, a measure of social stability – most nay-sayers in the business community and elsewhere lapsed into relatively comfortable passivity once again.

The modalities of repression utilized inside South Africa in the past several years have been no less ruthless than those developed by Pretoria in its regional counterevolutionary activities. Indeed, one senses lessons learned in Mozambique and Angola have actually been **carried** back into South Africa for application in the black townships. Thus, in the late 1970s, the regime seemed momentarily to convince itself that it could find black intermediaries who might actually help sell 'reform' and cooptation to the broader mass of urbanized blacks and thereby legitimate the neo-apartheid system. Now, however, any black allies were much more obviously cast for the role of fellow policemen, junior partners in the repressive apparatus. True, the cutting edge of repression is still the police force and, increasingly, the army, the latter now also involved, within the framework of an innovative and remarkably comprehensive 'National Security Management System', in what is, for it, the relatively unconventional task of scourging the townships. The toll of death, arbitrary arrest and torture, crackdown on the media and banning of individuals and organizations that followed with the imposition of the partial Emergency of 1985 and the nation-wide, far more draconian Emergency of 1986 (and subsequent years) is well known. But enter, in addition, the vigilantes, black gangs with foot-soldiers drawn from *lumpen* elements but focussed around the initiatives of urban councillors and businessmen, of Bantustan politicians and warlords, who have chosen to profit from the

existing system. These are killers to whom the police either have turned a blind eye or else actively trained and they have been encouraged to stalk the democratic movement with lethal intent, as seen in the debacle of Crossroads in 1985–86 or in the deprivations carried out by Buthelezi and his **Inkatha** minions in Pietermaritzburg in 1987–8. Here is a 'scorched earth' approach to the project of neutralizing dissent fully worthy of Renamo.

More could be written about the barbarities of repression. Though less visible to the outside world because of severe restrictions on media coverage of developments in South Africa, 1988 actually witnessed an intensification of the crackdown. That this should still be necessary after several years of the Emergency is indicative of just how deep the resistance runs. Nonetheless, the costs should not be underestimated. As the *Weekly Mail* recently put the point, 'dealing with opponents on the left (is) one of the few areas where the government showed no hesitation and a clear-cut, imaginative policy. They produced a constant supply of new methods of repression, the best example of which was the Emergency restriction order. . . Individuals, organizations, even funerals, were subjected to the most extraordinary list of incomprehensible restrictions, dished out so fast that nobody could keep track. . . The government started the process by restricting 17 organizations in February, including the United Democratic Front and **Azapo**, with a partial restriction on COSATU. This dealt with the major and best known organizations. Gradually, as new bodies began to reveal themselves or old bodies took up the cudgels, they were dealt similar blows. . . It was a new form of prison without bars'<sup>12</sup>

Of course, there were plenty of bars as well, and other equally merciless tactics. Thus 'some of the major resistance leaders of the 1980s, the people who pioneered the UDF-style of non-violent opposition, were dubbed violent terrorists and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment in the "Delmas" treason trial'. Or take those churches that tried to step into the partial vacuum left by the February restrictions. 'Government response: the clergy were **water-cannoned** by the police in Cape Town, the headquarters of the SACC (South African Council of Churches) and the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference were mysteriously bombed and the Reverend Frank Chikane's mother received a hand grenade in the post.' When 143 (white) conscripts announced that they would not honour their call-up for military service it looked, momentarily, as if the state might discuss seriously the possibility of alternative service with the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). Colder heads prevailed, however, and the ECC **merely** joined the list of restricted organizations. Assassination continued to be a favourite tactic of the powers that be, both at home (where the list of victims grew) and abroad, where a pattern of physical removal of ANC activists (about 50 since 1981) peaked with the murder of the **ANC's** Paris representative, **Dulcie** September, in

March. When, as the year progressed, more and more student and youth organizations became a particular target for state attack, the implications were sobering. If the apartheid government was not even marginally interested in finding real intermediaries for dialogue about a different kind of future, what alternatives were open. As youth representatives put the point: 'underground is not a healthy terrain for struggle for an organization that wants to reach the masses, make statements and operate above-board. But conditions of near-illegality have been forced on us!'<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, the Emergency had narrowed the terrain for above ground activity, but had that terrain disappeared altogether? What could be done, for example, to follow through on the insight, produced by failed insurrection, that a firmer base would have to be built at the grass roots level both to keep the struggle alive in the short-run and to prepare a base for any future dramatic confrontation? There were those who argued that, given the strength of the state, a politics of bargaining and negotiation with the state, was the only kind of viable politics in any case. Here an analogy with the trade union's entry into the industrial relations system (the better to find space for further manoeuvre and demand) has been suggested – *ad nauseam* by Steven Friedman of the South African Institute of Race Relations, for example.<sup>14</sup> Could not township organizations also group around concrete local demands, analogous to the wage demand, in order both to make gains, build strength and gradually transform the South African situation.

Of course, this was already being done in some ways (with rent strikes in many townships) and plotted in others (the aforementioned NECC programme for the schools, for example). Nor need an extension of this approach collapse, by definition, into reformism. Perhaps a revival of Andre Gorz's concept of 'structural reform' (which he distinguishes, precisely, from 'reformism') would be illuminating here, in part because it leads to a far more revolutionary understanding of the kind of activities being identified here than does Friedman's studied 'pragmatism'.<sup>15</sup> For Gorz suggests that in periods when revolution is not immediately on the agenda organization for reform can be a revolutionary act – provided the gains demanded and won are self-consciously understood by the political movement in question as implicating, systematically, a series of further demands and provided, as well, that the mobilization of people around such demands leads to the crystallization of organizational forms that mark a process of cumulative empowerment and developing revolutionary potential. In a situation like that of South Africa this approach could mean visible advance on specific fronts (thereby giving people a necessarily *concrete* sense of the ongoing struggle in the short-run) while also building the popularly-based organizational infrastructure crucial to another, more successful round of insurrection sometime in the future. Might more of this kind of strategic thinking have given a greater sense of focus to the insurrection just past? More importantly, do possibilities for such a 'structural reform' approach still exist in the South Africa of the Emergency?

It was by thinking about similar questions, as I wrote after a recent clandestine visit to South Africa, that 'some UDF activists even briefly floated, for discussion, the idea of participating in the local blacks-only elections, and thereby seizing hold of state-structured township councils as one possible way of giving fresh focus to popular resistance to the state. Ultimately the idea was rejected, since the councils are, in fact, so tightly controlled by the apartheid administrative apparatus that they grant the democratic forces little real room for manoeuvre. In fact, only the most obvious of collaborators concluded otherwise, while Bishop Tutu and others, at some risk to themselves, called for a renewed boycott of such structures in the October elections. For its part, the state used its powers (and considerable manipulation of the electoral procedures) to neutralize the boycott and to attempt – with no great success, as things turned out – to manufacture the appearance of support for those few blacks prepared to help make its system work. Continued boycott of the councils made sense, I think, but some further discussion of the merits of the boycott made sense too. In any case, this was merely one example among the many I found of the readiness of South African democrats to scrutinize past practice in their effort to devise new and more relevant **tactics**.'<sup>16</sup>

The unions must operate in the short-run, too, and have, in fact, a little more space within which to do so. After all, a scorched earth tactic is scarcely viable for the state in the factories or the mines where the unions' constituents, the workers, are vital to the production process. Yet the unions also find themselves on the defensive under the Emergency since the state and capital have both seized on the opportunity to roll back gains that have been made. Most dramatic has been the state's harsh new Labour Relations Amendment Bill, designed to reverse the gains unions have made for themselves in recent years. But one also finds a much more pugnacious attitude on the part of employers in their wage bargaining (typified in 1987 by the reaction of so rhetorically liberal an employer as Anglo-American to the mineworkers strike and by the actions of any number of corporations since). Unions have fought back with continuing **industrial** action to be sure, and even stayed in the political arena despite the restrictions on their so doing. The dramatic three day **stayaway** in June, 1988 (jointly coordinated with popular political structures) which saw as many as three million workers off the job demonstrated this, as did COSATU's attempt (aborted by the state) to have an all-in anti-apartheid conference in September of the same year. This is still a long way from the prospect of mobilizing the working-class at the point of production to, say, occupy the factories as part of a coordinated general strike, although one could hope that another insurrectionary moment would find action along such lines playing a more prominent part. But it is significant, nonetheless.

The planned September conference was significant for another reason – even though it did not occur. For its structuring envisaged a broadening of the alliance of resistance in very suggestive ways. Certainly those on the socialist left of COSATU felt it positive that Black Consciousness – related

organizations were to be invited, less because of any objective weight in the struggle these organizations might have, however, than because of the principle of inclusiveness such an invitation established over and against the intolerance towards dissenting voices sometimes manifested by UDF-cum-Charterist cadres within and without the unions. Perhaps, it was hoped, failed insurrection had taught such cadres some greater humility than they had displayed during that insurrection or even in its immediate aftermath. If so, the democratic movement may be all the more open to the kind of self-critical learning experience it will need to undergo in order to regroup effectively – as well as more open, now and in the future, to voices of the left that continue to raise uncomfortable questions about the precise substance of the liberation that is being fought for. Indeed, some such questions might already have been relevant regarding the September meeting, given the amount of effort put into incorporating novel expressions of white liberalism (exemplified by the various sophisticated initiatives of Van Zyl Slabbert and others) into the proposed proceedings. Not that attempting this kind of outreach can be deemed to be, by definition, some kind of mistake. Merely something for wary revolutionaries to keep an eye on!

Unfortunately, the fact that the state ultimately banned such a meeting may be the most important thing about it. If it is significant that fresh attempts continue to be made to regroup the struggle aboveground, the difficulties of doing so underscore, as noted above, the importance of also having an underground. Insofar as this latter must also be conceived as being a *military* underground there is another possible dilemma, however. How is it possible to seek to split the white community by entering (however circumspectly) into dialogue with such credible liberal forces as exist there, while simultaneously attempting to raise the costs of apartheid for its beneficiaries by means of armed action? This is not an academic question. It has surfaced, apparently within the ANC itself, around the question of 'hard' and 'soft' targets. The ANC had already made it clear that, in pursuing military targets on the terrain now offered by the apartheid regime, there could be fewer guarantees than previously that civilian casualties could be avoided. Then, in mid-1988, statements by certain ANC personnel were taken in the South African press to imply that direct attacks on (white) civilians could not be ruled out, a controversy that coincided with a spate of such attacks inside South Africa. As it turned out, some of these attacks were of uncertain provenance (quite possibly provocations) and others the ANC disowned as mistakes, eschewing publicly – and not for the first time – the use of such tactics (just as it had on an earlier occasion been moved to condemn the wave of 'necklacing' that momentarily swept the townships). Not that the issue is undebatable. Would a collapse into 'mere terrorism' actually harden white attitudes as is often claimed, or might it, in the longer run, wear down white intransigence while further mobilizing black support? The case of Northern Ireland, to go no farther afield, tends to suggest the latter scenario to be an unlikely one,

something the ANC, at the end of the day, is itself well aware of. At the same time, it is not difficult to imagine a certain desperation entering, from time to time, into the calculations of some armed liberators when faced with so gross and unyielding an enemy as the South African state.

Fortunately, the ANC is chiefly active on the military front in other, more promising, ways. Indeed, it 'carried out an unprecedented number of guerilla attacks (in 1988), despite security force claims that the movement's momentum had been broken. According to South African Police statistics, a total of 238 guerilla attacks took place in the first ten months of 1988, compared with 234 during the whole of last year, 230 in 1986, 136 in 1985 and 44 in 1984.'<sup>17</sup> In addition to the familiar brand of exemplary sabotage, many of these actions seem to have directly targeted army and police personnel (something promised, in June of 1988, by ANC military leader Chris Hanu and quite welcome). Moreover, it seems likely that, more than previously, much of the back-up for these actions – the training and logistics – is grounded within structures internal to the country. This is just as well since South African destabilization in the region probably has had a negative impact on ANC's military capacity (lengthening supply lines and raising costs, for example); indeed, this may have been one important factor in making the ANC's armed presence less evident during the 1984–86 insurrection than might have been expected. As is true generally of the popular movement, then, there are lessons to be learned by the ANC from failed insurrection. Yet there is a clear indication that questions regarding both underground work and broader political strategy are being taken very seriously indeed within the ANC as it attempts to lay the ground-work for future advance.

One thing is clear, in any case: there is unlikely to be any purely military solution to the struggle in South Africa. Unfortunately there will be no negotiated settlement of the apartheid question (let alone of the capitalism question!) either – not until the existing regime is weakened very much more than it has been to date. Make no mistake: the apartheid regime is not all-powerful even now. Underlying its repressive bluster are very real economic weaknesses and vulnerabilities, these being signalled by continuing problems of slow growth, chronic unemployment, on-going balance of payment difficulties and vulnerability to sanctions (whenever, in international response to a renewed visibility of dramatic popular resistance, these may become a serious threat once again).<sup>18</sup> Nor is the political ground on which the government walks altogether solid. Certainly dissent exists on the centre-left of the white political spectrum. More important is the well-publicized 'rise of the right' (the Conservative Party, the neo-Nazi AWB), although this is less of a threat – and certainly less of a brake on 'reform' – than is sometimes claimed. For most problematic of all, in fact, is the lack of direction within the Nationalist Party camp itself, 'hard-liners' and 'soft-liners' (insofar as they can be meaningfully distinguished) more often than not merely neutralizing each other while also producing a mishmash of contradictory state policy. The passing from the

scene of P.W. Botha, very much 'the leader' as the last surviving member of apartheid's parliamentary class of 1948, will not ease matters in this regard – even if intensified repression can serve for some time as a policy refuge for his immediate successors.

Yet, in the last analysis, one is drawn back to the fact that the regime can find no way to legitimate its rule politically vis-a-vis the black population. This is its real weakness. True, that black population is not an unproblematic category for the resistance movement either. The creative energy of the emergent South African movement has been formidable, a point to which this essay will return. But what is ultimately so tragic about the intransigence of South Africa's apartheid regime is how it has moved to choke off and denature such energy. Baulked of fulfillment, however temporarily, some of this energy can turn sour. Recall Gramsci's aphorism: 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms **appears**.'<sup>19</sup> The pathology apparently attendant upon Winnie Mandela's recent role in **Soweto** is merely one example of such a morbid symptom. So, too, are those former militants amongst the township youth who have turned vigilante or informer, as the police rally to rebuild their own brand of township network. So, too, are those who permit themselves to be mobilized by ruthless warlords, along patron – client lines, against progressive trends in Natal or Crossroads.

As noted, the state will continue with attempts to shore up its own strata of black intermediaries – new urban partners for the Bantustan elites already in place. How much space can it hope to buy in this way? And how much by diverting some financial resources, especially to townships that have proven to be revolutionary flashpoints in the past, in order to complement its harassment of local militants with a modicum of economic betterment? (Housing is a particularly popular sphere for current experimentation in such up-grading of the living conditions of some of the more stabilized of black urban dwellers, for example.) Nor can one rule out other kinds of 'formative action', designed by capital and the state further to divide, rule and coopt. Indeed, even progressive trade union leaders worry aloud about a possible stratification of the working class itself that might prove counterproductive to revolution. What, they ask, are the implications of a gap that is emerging between workers in full-time, often skilled or semi-skilled, employment, workers who are organized and even relatively better off, and others, the marginalized, the unemployed or underemployed, who are piling up in the sprawling peri-urban shanty towns?<sup>20</sup> Specifically, the unions have attempted to counter the perils of a split between such strata with programmes for organizing the unemployed and such innovations as the 'Living Wage Campaign' (albeit, to date, with only modest success). Yet this is just one of the many challenges attendant upon uniting and mobilizing a black **population** whose profile is constantly being reshaped by the vagaries of an increasingly complex South African economy.

Indeed, it is the growing political capacity of the popular movement, faced with these and other challenges, that will determine just how fatal is the fact that neither state nor capital can legitimate themselves in South Africa. Certainly, the Emergency of the 1980s is not the Emergency of the 1960s. 'Morbid symptoms' to the contrary notwithstanding, the psychology of resistance now runs very deep. Inevitably, because of this, there will be dramatic flash-points of national significance; the regime itself has nightmares about the likely mass reaction if Nelson Mandela were to die on its hands in prison (although it equally fears to release him). But flash-points are not a revolution, even if they can prove to be privileged moments for focussing revolutionary energies. How will that energy, undoubtedly present in South Africa, find more effective focus? There can be no doubt that lessons have been learned. The latest *Weekly Mail* provides the mundane but instructive example of recent actions by the Western Cape Students' Congress: 'The burning barricades, the demonstrations violently broken up by police recalled the turmoil of 1985. But a new discipline and maturity underlay student action. Instead of adhoc reactions, protests formed part of a co-ordinated programme marked by thorough canvassing of student opinion for properly mandated change.' Moreover, the action's 'major significance. . . lay beyond the (large) numbers involved: it resulted in police reversing a decision to enter schools and ensure teaching took place'.<sup>21</sup>

'Discipline and maturity'. 'A coordinated programme'. Too often the image of South African protest in the western media, even when that coverage has been reasonably well-intentioned, has been that of the rock-throwing black mob, angry with good reason perhaps, but a mob nonetheless. A more accurate image of the history of the last ten or fifteen years of resistance (as sketched in the above account of it) would be that of profound political creativity and an ever higher level of organizational achievement on the part of the South African resister. As seen, the considerable revolutionary energy this essay has often alluded to as distinguishing the South African scene has already found powerful expression in an impressive array of organizations – in organizations like COSATU, like the UDF, like the ANC, like a hundred others, in organizations that focus the commitment of tens of thousands of individuals, in organizations bent but not broken by repression. This, and the renewal of a psychology of resistance, are the key facts about contemporary South Africa to be noted by those who would wish to see it transformed. It is these organizations that will not give the regime peace, these that carry the promise of ultimately finding the key to liberation. As I have hinted, within and between them struggle will occur (and often it will be class struggle) not only about the modalities of the current struggle but also about the precise content of liberation, about just how profoundly revolutionary that liberation will be. But already these organizations have served to empower the workers of South Africa, to empower the black population of South Africa, in significant ways. And they continue to do so.

In the end, it is the promise represented by the trajectory of such organizations that gives resonance to Magdoff and Sweezy's characterization of South Africa, penned several years ago: 'Its system of racial segregation and repression is a veritable paradigm of capitalist superexploitation. It has a white monopoly capitalist ruling class and an advanced black proletariat. It is so far the only country with a well developed, modern capitalist structure which is not only 'objectively' ripe for revolution but has actually entered a stage of overt and seemingly irreversible revolutionary struggle.'<sup>22</sup> Irreversible? In fact, Magdoff and Sweezy do themselves contemplate other possibilities, warning that 'a victory for counter-revolution – the stabilization of capitalist relations in South Africa, even if in somewhat altered form – would. . . be (a) stunning defeat for the world revolution'.

And some such 'stabilization' there has certainly been. It would be wise not to be triumphalist about South Africa. No matter how often it is said that fundamental change is – must be! – inevitable there, it is still something that will have to be won. The apartheid state will have to be overthrown, the logic of capitalism ('racial' or otherwise) that has been so integral to the repressive South African state will have to be qualified and, ultimately, reversed. This essay has reflected on some of the difficulties of so doing. But if triumphalism is no answer it would be equally unwise to despair. Reflect back upon the National Security Study Memorandum with which this essay began. As stated at the outset, things have come a long way since 1969 – in what has been, measured as 'historical time', a relatively short span. Moreover, to repeat, this essay has been able to affirm that the crystallization – psychological, organizational – of advances already achieved provides a formidable legacy upon which the southern African movement, broadly defined, can mount the next round of challenge. Recall the story (perhaps apocryphal, although one hopes not) about Mao Zedong and the events of 1789. How did he evaluate the outcome of the French Revolution, he was asked. 'Its too soon to tell', he replied.

True, as well, of the southern African revolution. Yet the prospect of victory – for South Africa, for southern Africa – remains a good one. Later rather than sooner perhaps, undoubtedly at much greater cost than could be wished, likely to be a bit murkier in its outcome than one might have predicted a few short years ago – but a good chance nonetheless. Is there a possibility that Magdoff and Sweezy's hopes for the world-wide resonance of developments in South Africa will also then be realized? 'A victory for revolution, i.e. a genuine and lasting change in basic power relations in South Africa,' they write, 'could have an impact on the balance of global forces comparable to that of the revolutionary wave that followed World War II! For such a global outcome, too, the struggle continues.

## NOTES

1. Giovanni Arrighi and John S. Saul, 'Nationalism and Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa', *The Socialist Register 1969* (London: Merlin Press, 1969).
2. 'National Security Study Memorandum 39' of 1969 was published, with a useful introduction by Barry Cohen and Mohamed A. El-Khawas, as *The Kisser Study of Southern Africa* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1975).
3. On Mozambique see, *inter alia*, John S. Saul (ed.), *A Difficult Road: The Transition to Socialism in Mozambique* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985).
4. See my 'Zimbabwe: The Next Round' in *The Socialist Register 1980* (London: Merlin Press, 1980); this appears, in up-dated form, in John S. Saul, *Socialist Ideology and the Struggle for Southern Africa* (Trenton, N.J. and Toronto: Africa World Press and Between the Lines, 1989).
5. See my 'Development and Counterdevelopment Strategies in Mozambique' in John S. Saul, *Socialist Ideology*. . . (ibid.). as well as the various articles on Mozambique (notably by Judith Marshall, Otto Roesch and John Loxley) in recent issues of *Southern Africa Report* (available, by subscription, from TCLSAC, 427 Bloor St. W., Toronto M5S 1X7, Toronto).
6. In Ibbo Mandaza (ed.), *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition, 1980-1986* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1986), p. 51.
7. J. Hyslop, reviewing A. Astrow, Zimbabwe: A revolution that lost its way? in *South Africa Labour Bulletin* (Johannesburg) 12, 6/7 (August/September, 1987); see also, in this special issue of *SALB* on 'Labour in Post-Independence Zimbabwe', the debate feature, anonymously authored, entitled 'The Political Economy of Zimbabwe: Is Zimbabwe in Transition to Socialism?' and Ian Phimister, 'Zimbabwe: The inheritance of the anti-colonial struggle' in *Transformation* (Durban), 5 (1987).
8. Victoria Britain, 'Stacking the Deck in Namibia', *Southern Africa Report*, 4, 4 (March, 1989).
9. John S. Saul and Stephen Gelb, *The Crisis in South Africa*, revised edition (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986); see also, *inter alia*, Rob Davies, Dan O'Meara and Siphon Dlamini, *The Struggle for South Africa*, new edition (London: Zed Press, 1988). There is a wealth of sources on the various phases of the evolution of events in South Africa, most importantly such regularly published South African journals as *The Weekly Mail*, *Work in Progress*, *South African Labour Bulletin*, *Transformation* and *South African Review*.
10. John S. Saul, 'South Africa: the Question of Strategy', *New Left Review*, 160 (November-December, 1987).
11. See *ibid.*
12. Anton Harber, 'On the Move. To Nowhere', *The Weekly Mail* (Johannesburg), 4, 46 (December 23, 1988 to January 12, 1989); this issue contains a number of articles usefully reviewing South African developments in 1988.
13. Quoted in Shaun Johnson and Vusi Gunene, 'Under siege. Slogan-chanting students retreat underground', *The Weekly Mail* (*ibid.*).
14. See Friedman's regular column in *The Weekly Mail*, as well his suggestive pamphlet *Reform Revisited* (Braamfontein: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1988).
15. The reference is to Andre Gorz, 'Reform and Revolution', *The Socialist Register 1968* (London, Merlin Press, 1968).
16. John S. Saul, 'Without Proper Papers: Inside South Africa', *Monthly Review*, 40, 8 (January, 1989), pp. 9-10.

17. Gavin Evans, 'The figures show ANC's alive and bombing', *Weekly Mail*, (*op. cit.*).
18. See the special issue of *Southern Africa Report* on 'Apartheid Economics', 4, 4 (March, 1989) as well as various papers prepared in 1988 under the auspices of the Johannesburg-based Labour and Economic Research Centre; these papers, the product of a collective effort coordinated by Stephen Gelb, are shortly to be published in book form.
19. Quoted in Carl Boggs, *Gramsci's Marxism* (London: Pluto, 1976).
20. On this and other related issues see 'COSATU: The Year in Retrospect' in *Southern Africa Report*, 4, 3 (December, 1988).
21. Gaye Davis, 'Tough DET clamps "throw down gauntlet to students"', *Weekly Mail* (*op. cit.*).
22. Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy, 'The Stakes in South Africa', introducing a special issue of *Monthly Review*, 37, 11 (April, 1986), on 'South Africa in Struggle'.