

**What 'Appen to South Africa?
1976–2005. Defiance to Apartheid,
Neoliberalism, and Recuperators of
Defiance**

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2006

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Chapter 1. Introduction by Endangered Phoenix (Written in February 2005)

“In South Africa normal national or ruling-class behaviour is rendered uniquely controversial by the colour dimension.”

— *Peregrine Worsthorne, right-wing assistant editor of the Sunday Telegraph, May 13, 1984*

Quoted on the cover of a radical pamphlet in 1984, this seems particularly apt now that the “colour dimension” has been ‘virtually’ eradicated from South African politics. The normal national ruling-class behaviour of the ANC is, predictably, now every bit as horrific as its white predecessors.

However, clearly this was not predictable for some — which is indicative of some of the weaknesses of the period from 1976 to the early 90s. The global ruling class, with the help of a section of the South African white rulers, having been faced with an increasingly united and violent opposition threatening its divide and rule tactics based on race, decided that race need no longer be its central method of divide and rule, and used the relative absence of critique of black parties, leaders and umbrella organisations (for organisations’ sake) — one of the movements weaknesses — as an opportunity to stop the revolution.

This is not to say that apartheid has been conveniently confined to the apartheid museum in Johannesburg. The State still uses race, particularly against foreign immigrants and, when convenient, “coloureds,” Indians and Zulus. Just that it doesn’t use it as its central and legal means of division because it’s essential to present a positive image of progress, of a revolutionary break with the official racism of the past (a small example of this is the reconstruction, as a symbol for the “healing” of the nation under what is laughably called “majority rule,” of District 6 — a suburb of Cape Town which was bulldozed in 1966 because of its multi-racial character; significantly, its re-creation, begun amid much fanfare in 2003, has been held up by a shortage of money). This image of fundamental progress is promoted as an attempt to hide the progress of even worse miseries than State-sanctioned apartheid

– the progress of a vicious monetarism. In June 2001, a 50 year old woman evicted from what had been her and her children’s home for 12 years, said:

“This is the worst day of my life... I don’t mind moving, but they must give me another house. That is what is driving my head crazy – to go to a shack. We’re going to use paraffin in a shack and I’ve got electricity in my house. I’ve got water and a toilet: I won’t have that in a shack. That means I’m going back to the old South Africa again. That’s not freedom for us. *Apartheid was better than this.*”

The main difference between the bailiffs now and those under apartheid is one of style: they generally (though certainly not always) are less violent and sometimes speak kindly to the people being evicted and carefully lift their belongings into the street and onto the lorry. Maybe they do Sensitivity Training as part of their PhD in Bailiffing. By 2004 two million had been evicted. An average of R400 a month is needed for rent, lights and water, but by 2002 the majority of the population was living on less than R140 (about \$15) per month. A typical job would be working eleven or twelve hours a day, seven days a week for R150 per week. Some cleaners employed by the council for R22 a day spend R14 a day on the bus fare to work.

All this would have been impossible without Saint Nelson – above all, impossible without the unjustifiable respect he and the ANC got from the vast majority of those in the movement who looked to the ANC for a political solution which should have come from a more thorough *critique* of politics, of hierarchical power. And now everywhere international stars are desperate to meet him, he’s got a bridge named after him and he is at the top of every spectator’s “Man I Most Admire” list. After all, anybody who was imprisoned for such a long time by a vile regime must *by definition* be a hero, and certainly little you must look up to him. Who are you to criticise? You’re *nothing*. The fact that 100s of 1000s of South Africans suffered as much or even more than him under apartheid (and continue to) is ignored in this crass deification. He is the epitome of the ‘Progressssssssss’ of South Africa and everyone concerned with publicising South Africa with a smiley face hopes he’ll live till the World Cup because Mbeki’s no more the image black capital (and its intelligentsia want to promote of this progress) than the burgeoning crime rate. It’s because of Mandela as promoter of this image of progress that we can buy South African wine and some can go on guilt-free expensive holidays in other people’s misery: the fastest growing sector in the local leisure industry is township tours. The whole place has been gift wrapped in tourist slick from “lifestyle encounters” in Kwa Zulu to “partying in a Soweto B&B,” to the “African tableau,” “Durban is surf-central,” “Johannesburg makeovers,” the “Cape Town docks experience,” “hip hotels” and so on ad nauseam.

Some are not so impressed by Saint Nelson, however. “Mandela can go to hell!” said the mother of one guy killed by the ANC’s cops on a demo.

When Mandela came out of prison his first gift to the rulers was to call for discipline, an end to looting and an end to the theft and burning of cars (the subversion of exchange value), and an end to classroom boycotts (the subversion of ideological conditioning aimed at acceptance of relations of domination and submission). It’s no surprise that in the world following the fall of the Berlin Wall, a former promoter of State capitalism would magically transform himself into a neo-liberal (though he’s been careful to promote an image of detachment and distance from these horrendous policies of mass impoverishment). Already in the mid-80s, well before his release, he had said:

“We want Johannesburg to remain the beautiful and thriving city that it is now. Therefore, we are willing to maintain separate living until

¹ Desai is a research fellow, and journalist, at the University of Natal who also lectures part time in Journalism at the Durban Institute for Technology and The Workers College. There is no doubting the passion of this guy and his writing is very informative of the movements developing in South Africa. Nevertheless, we must be a bit wary of someone who’s a *professional* writer, who lives off his position in the division of labour. Sure, Biko was a *lawyer*, who undoubtedly contributed to the movement of the ’70s, for which he paid with his life. But there’s a difference between the crude repression of the written word under apartheid and the less overt repression of written “free” speech in the current epoch. On the other hand, we can’t imagine there are many other journalists in the world who give positive references to class violence in their own country as Desai does, but then maybe the generally violent atmosphere of daily life in SA makes such references kind of acceptable. At the same time we get the feeling — though we may be wrong — that the guy is pretty much a populist, i.e. someone whose primary concern is to be popular. For example, he offers no insights into how these movements could develop further, and when talking of the Indian community gives positive reference to Gandhi, not someone renowned for his advocacy of anti-ruling class violence. (Gandhi used his reputation and leadership role to often disarm social movements in India when they threatened to get out of hand; he opposed strikes in the super-exploitative textile industries, even going so far as to threaten suicide if workers went on strike; and he even refused to support a mutiny of a section of the *Hindu* Royal Garwhali regiment — who were brutally punished for the mutiny — when it refused an order to machine gun unarmed rioting muslims, saying he wouldn’t want soldiers in an independent India to refuse his orders to shoot if that became necessary!!!!) (*Le Monde*, 20th Feb. 1932). What’s more, Desai expresses the idea, which may very well be also a general idea amongst the population as a whole, that the ANC *sold out*, that they were ok until they got to power and adopted neo-liberal policies, as if their programme and structure ever expressed anything other than a political ambition to develop capitalism, albeit originally in a State capitalist form. However, the South African State, like States the world over, is very repressive. It’s possible that Desai could be picked on by State forces, though it’s unlikely that he’d end up “falling” out of a police station window. More likely is that he would be framed for something — like Mzwakhe Mbuli, who was arrested in late 1997 and found guilty in early 1999 of bank robbery, and now languishes in a Maximum Security Prison for a crime he certainly didn’t commit, but for which he was framed probably because of his continued criticism of the ANC and of Buthelezis’ Inkatha Freedom Party.

there are enough new employment opportunities and new homes to allow blacks to move into Johannesburg with dignity.”

With the national unemployment level at 42% (September 2003), and in some of the poorer areas the figures reaching 80% or even higher; and with no unemployment benefit or social aid, clearly there are no new employment opportunities to disturb the separate development of the white and black middle and ruling class. The degree of racial segregation in neighbourhoods, schools and lifestyle is still very evident. Only in some of the cavernous malls which have mushroomed across Johannesburg do the races mingle, “united” in their separation — as *consumers*.

So, while most of the wealth still remains firmly in white hands, the optimistic black middle class, undisturbed by visible proletarian subversion, can claim “rich people have worked hard for their money, it wouldn’t be fair to take it away from them” (Guardian, 25/5/04). At the same time, those rich white supporters of apartheid who fled the country 10 years ago are now being encouraged to come back — all is forgiven: advertisements on satellite television will be backed later this year by an international road-show of seminars and exhibitions urging expatriates commodity relations encompassing to return to a land of sunshine and opportunity, as part of the “Homecoming Revolution,” sponsored by the First National Bank. As Pamela Cox, former Head of the South Africa Division at the World Bank, has said, “What [the ANC] have done to put the economy on a right footing, is, I think, almost miraculous.” In fact, given their “miraculous” power to stop what seemed like an unstoppable social revolution, the ANC have felt almost omnipotent in their ability to intensify capital accumulation by even going beyond the advice of the IMF and the World Bank. After they came to power “by every measure (life expectancy, morbidity, access to food, water, etc.) the living conditions of the poor rapidly worsened” (Ashwin Desai¹, “We are the poors,” *Monthly Review Press*, 2002). Whilst the former National Union of Mineworkers and ANC general secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa, now owns some of the gold mines he used to organise workers in, the number of blacks living below the poverty line has risen from 50% to 62%, whilst 29% of all coloureds, 11% of all Asians and 4% of all whites also currently live below the poverty line, a dramatic increase during the “decade of democracy.” Many black people have commented on how life under the old apartheid regime was in some ways better in that there was more job security and there were state subsidies in services, which have been eroded by the neo-liberal GEAR (Growth, Employment And Redistribution) economic policy of the ANC. Neo-liberalism has meant stupendous wealth for some 300 black dynasties-in-themaking, the 5% of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange that represents “black empowerment.” Whilst an estimated 10 million South Africans have had their electricity cut off and another 10 million their water cut off, mine owner

Brigitte Radebe, wife of ANC minister and SA Communist Party leader Jeff Radebe, has become the richest black woman in Africa. The bosses' share of profit in 2003 was their biggest since 1981. Company tax has been brought down from 49 percent under apartheid to below 30 percent. It's clear that all that ideological crap emanating from the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" — which gave an amnesty to the crimes of the white ruling class during the apartheid era — was aimed at making the poor reconcile themselves to the continuation of the power of their oppressors; this time arm in arm with a burgeoning black middle and ruling class. This growing middle class is beginning, like in other parts of the world, to gentrify areas which previously had been exclusively poor communities, sending property values up enormously for those who own property, which in a generally extremely impoverished country, could well be the source of significant conflict in the future.

A letter to the Guardian (26/2/05) says:

"We saw many middle-class black families, driving new 4x4s, shopping in malls and being served by white assistants, having meals in restaurants and served by white waiters — surrounded by prominent advertisements of attractive, happy, black consumers. ...We were heartened by the lively and polite interaction between all races and economic groups."

Another letter refers to the author seeing "a growing black middle class driving smart cars, and poor whites cleaning windshields for tips and begging at crossroads." Isn't equality wonderful? In a sense this *is* progress, though not in the sense of the "heartened" letter-writers — it lays the basis for the possibility of collaboration between poor whites and poor blacks, impossible under apartheid, and indeed, there have been instances of whites joining in the stone-throwing. However, it would be dangerous to be determinist about this. Should a more significant social movement start to develop, it's clear that the ANC is prepared to use anti-white racism to impose a divide and rule, even, if necessary, using a Mugabe-type demagoguery. It's well-known that rich whites continue to operate racist criteria whenever they sell homes with land: in rural areas racism is a deeply entrenched reality — black labourers have been murdered, tortured or shot at, often for the mildest of supposed infractions. The ruling class could try to recuperate the very real anger of blacks towards the lack of post-apartheid land distribution, attacking some rich whites whilst continuing to hammer the poor, white and black. As we say, *if necessary*. It's significant that the main area of development of opportunities for blacks has been the large increase in black intake into the police force (now re-branded under the name Safety & Security — otherwise known as the SS), and into the universities — often the same thing in different clothes, most of those at University

training to become ideological cops and/or authority roles over the poor (we say “most” here — there are clearly some exceptions). In fact, the poor are effectively excluded from going to University. On May 16, 2000, Michael Makabane was shot dead at point-blank range during a peaceful protest against the exclusion of poor students from the University of Durban-Westville. The campus had been considered a hotbed of militant resistance under the old apartheid regime yet, while police repression had been brutal, no students had ever been killed during the apartheid era. The local paper, now under black editorship, called for “tougher” action against protesting students (*Daily News*, May 17, 2000).

Every day front-page stories chart the depredations of AIDS: once mainly a disease of western gay men, it is now one of poor black women — 77% of South Africa’s HIV positive are women; Durban is running out of land in its cemeteries; 7% of children are infected. Life expectancy at birth is 48, a devastating drop since apartheid (this is not just down to AIDS, of course). South Africa has the largest amount of people with HIV of any single country in the world — 21.5% of the population. In some areas, HIV infection amongst pregnant women is as high as 37.5%. By the time South Africa hosts the World Cup in 2010, there will have been between 8 and 10 million deaths. This enormous growth in AIDS was encouraged by the refusal of the government to supply cheap or free anti-HIV drugs, to even acknowledge HIV as being a significant factor in the development of AIDS.² Under internal and international pressure, not to mention the need to stem the destruction of future wage labourers essential for capital accumulation, the State was forced make a show of reversing its policy. It *did* reverse it — but only a bit. Even now, those receiving anti-HIV drugs are less than 1% of those infected with HIV. This policy ‘reversal’ was, essentially, an attempt to rehabilitate the State’s image vis-a-vis AIDS, image being so necessary for the development of capital accumulation and social control. Though it should be said, the fact that the ruling class and their kids are getting it now probably also plays a part in this ‘policy reversal.’ In 2003, with 5.1 million infected (almost half a million died in 2002 alone), the government allocated the rand equivalent of \$1.7bn, spread over 3 years, to HIV treatment — which, even if HIV victims remained at their 2003 rate, would only mean \$330 per person over 3 years. Given that health spending is fixed at 15% of total government spending, it’s not much considering the enormity of the scale of the disease and of the health problems exacerbated by State/market policy elsewhere — not much more use than shutting the stable door after the horse has

² Mbeki, like all ideologists, used a fragment of the truth for his contention that HIV doesn’t lead to AIDS: it’s mostly unknown, but there is a small percentage of those who have AIDS who have no trace of having ever had the HIV virus. Doubtless, equally secretly, there’s a load of money going into research into this small percentage, because exceptions are always a source of scientific discovery.

bolted. And how much of this money is actually effective? Death by TB accounts for almost half of deaths from AIDS-related illness, yet it costs just £5 per patient to save someone from dying of TB. TB is 100% curable, yet less than half of those who have it are cured. And to put all this into clearer perspective, military spending in South Africa for the year 2001–2002 was over \$12bn.

All these figures, these banal contradictions (and we could certainly continue listing them *ad infinitum*), would have been the basic component of Anti-Apartheid movement literature prior to the ANC government, but presented in a purely moral framework without any critique of their use for the commodity economy. Such moral considerations were always the ideology of a nice ‘reasonable’ reformism of capitalism’s insanity which was utterly terrified of the uncertainty of revolution. Beyond such moralism, previous government policy has had the desired effect — namely:

1. it, initially at least — and for as long as it was feasible to maintain before the crude ‘HIV=AIDS denial’ policy became a liability — increased the profit extracted from the production and sale of such drugs for those who could afford them.
2. it got, and obviously still gets, rid of some of the population surplus to the requirements of surplus value — rather like the commodification of water does — though as with everything under the irrational selfcontradictions of capital, it might be getting rid of too many people, even for the sick requirements of a meaner and leaner economy.
3. it lowered State spending at a time when the ANC needed to concentrate its resources on establishing its power and its image of providing some external hope.
4. it intensifies anxiety about sex, which, as Wilhelm Reich long ago pointed out, encourages a submissive population. And, like all illness, it makes people more fragile, vulnerable, less able to take risks and usually less sociable, forcing the individual in on themselves (though it should be pointed out that in Kenya there is a social movement of selfhelp, outside the big towns and cities, to deal with AIDS-related illnesses, using plants).

These are the *results* of ANC policy — we certainly don’t mean to imply some conspiracy theory about HIV/AIDS. We don’t essentially judge things by their *intentions*, deliberate or not, but by their *consequences* (though one has to ask oneself *why*, for example, when a cure for TB is so cheap, is death by AIDS-related TB so high).

The fact that Mandela implicitly criticised the government's policy after he announced the death of some close relatives to AIDS in January, is one example of his subtle politicking, distancing himself from current ANC policy, a bit like the Queen did under Thatcher. As if he is 'above' politics. Clearly those pushing this image of Mandela hope everyone will forget that it was half way through his presidency that the neo-liberal politics of GEAR³ were first introduced.

But then, as always, fiction is there to play a major part in bringing a little light into the darkness of life: the two best-selling books in South Africa are a guide to teaching your children to become millionaires, and Nelson Mandela's autobiography, first published over 10 years ago.

As one can see, despite all this misery, it's essential to present South Africa as *progressive*. So David Frost, Rory Bremner, Malcolm Rifkind, Stephen Fry, Trevor McDonald, Jamie Oliver, Jools Holland and Rowan Atkinson are to be given a free luxury holiday. Well, the poor hard-working souls need it, don't they? This well-earned rest includes the mandatory (but, unfortunately, only temporary) stay in Robben Island prison, a free trip on the ultra-expensive Blue Train, and a possible photo opportunity with The Saint himself. All so as to promote the New South Africa, which they can do without the guilty conscience they would have had under apartheid, when such collaborators were publicly attacked. The sparkling brand *new* South Africa must be alright if all those lovely people are there saying how *progressive* it is. What for them is progress is the opposite for the vast majority. For those who accept dominant ideology it is always an ideology of the progress of *alienation* that's essential, as part of repressing the progress of any struggle *against* it. As everywhere throughout the world, the spectacle of progress — "we're getting there, but there's still a lot to be done" — is used to demand a patience towards the system which the system never shows towards its victims.

But some are beginning to lose patience. There are rumblings under the surface. Archbishop Tutu, at the same time as suggesting the wealthy "adopt" a poor family (giving them £18 a month or paying their kids school fees), warns the rest of the ruling class "We are sitting on a powder keg" (Nov. 2004).

Beginnings of a New Movement: "We are not Africans — We are the Poors!"

The current struggles are nothing like as powerful, or as central to the general situation in South Africa, as those of the '70s and '80s. Nowadays struggles are

³ In 1994 the newly elected ANC government issued its "Reconstruction and Development Program" which purported to be about basic needs such as jobs, land, housing, water, electricity,

essentially marginal, even if growing — and many of them, though by no means all, take the forms of *legal* challenges to the evictions and cut-offs, and the classic symbolic form of demonstrations. Whilst under apartheid, demonstrations were banned and therefore a demo usually led to a violent confrontation with the cops, this is not so much the case today. This is not to say that *all* demos don't end in a confrontation. For example, on Human Rights day on 21 March 2004 in Johannesburg near the opening ceremonies for the country's new constitutional court, the cops met a peaceful protest with stun grenades and mass arrests. The Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) and its affiliates had called for a protest to demand that basic services such as water should be included as human rights and against the installation of pre-pay water meters. Protesters were harassed, arrested and fingerprinted even before any march started. Over 50 people were held under the Gatherings Act, a law dating from the apartheid era that gives police wide powers to ban protest. Which says everything that needs to be said about Human Rights.

In the period from 1995 to 2000 it seems that evictions — involving police dogs, tear gas, at least one person killed and hundreds injured — were mostly not effectively opposed. But then the community started to take the offensive — for example going to politicians' houses and speaking to the gangsters to tell them not to trouble the vulnerable people in the area. They also took Durban Council to court, claiming that the evictions went against the human rights to shelter and water.

The council then tried to get the people to buy the houses (after paying their full rent arrears). In order to show how ridiculously out of touch they were, a council administration entourage arrived in Chatsworth, to 'sell' the houses. "After the protesters had spent two hours encircling the room, the process was forced to stop. It had become clear to the officials that there were no takers for that deal" (Desai). When one of the officials accused the group of being 'privileged Indians' an elderly woman screamed back, "We are not Indians, we are the poors." Within minutes this could be also heard as, "We are not Africans, we are the poors." The council then tried relocations of those who couldn't pay to toilet-sized buildings even further out of town (they're often called "dog kennels" by those forced to 'live' in them). Evictions often involve tear-gas. But they are sometimes successfully resisted. For example, in Chatsworth, February 2000, the eviction of a single African father of four children and self-employed mechanic was resisted by over 150 people, mostly Indian women, blockading the stairs to the guy's flat. They asked the police to wait for half an hour while they attempted to gain a postponement from the courts. The

healthcare, welfare. Two years later it was replaced by GEAR: "Growth, Employment and Redistribution," and having as much to do with window dressing as its acronym. It was "designed" by a cabal of 15 economists, 2 from the World Bank and the rest from big South African banks and conservative think tanks. Typically the language was one we are all now heartily sick of: "greater labour market flexibility," "foreign direct investment," "sound fiscal policy."

police did not wait. They fired live ammunition and tear gas at those preventing the eviction. The on-lookers were so angry that they all joined in. The ferocity of the community forced the security forces to call for further backup in order to retreat from the area, without effecting the eviction. On the same day, in the same town, another family to be evicted were squatting a flat after living for two years in a shed without water or electricity, and with snakes nesting in the floor. They had been on the council housing list for nine years. The community and media presence was so strong that the authorities did not attempt the eviction. Many people turned up for the court cases. As it was adjourned they went to the deputy mayor's house. As he was not at home they occupied the rent offices. At the next date of the court case the magistrates didn't show up – but 2000 protestors from the nearby African township, Bottlebrush, did. When the cases finally did go to court, the evictions notices were withdrawn.

Linking struggles in the Cape Town area, the multi-racial Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign was born.

“Much like the organisations in Chatsworth, it has become amoeba-like. When there's a need for action it expands and increases in density. In between it shrinks, concerning itself mainly with resolving community disputes and providing a kind of social worker service. The initiative of poor communities in self-organising, re-housing evicted families, and re-connecting disconnected water supplies (often using inventive local technology), and the courage of campaigners to fight the police in the streets, has meant that to enforce the war on the poor in Cape Town is no simple thing... By and large the actions of the council grind to a halt.” (Desai)

People seem to be generally more on the move nowadays than before – forming community organisations and linking with other groups in other areas; ‘emergency’ reconnections by ‘struggle electricians’ and ‘struggle plumbers;’ mass actions against evictions; demonstrations to and occupations of the houses of the councillors and officers responsible for the decisions; disconnecting the water and electricity of these officers; land invasions and workplace strikes that involve the whole community. In April 2002 there was a massive demonstration outside the home of the Mayor of Johannesburg, Amos Masonde, to protest against cut-offs. The police arrested 50 of the demonstrators including a five year old boy. Those of the demonstrators who still belonged to the ANC – hundreds of them – publicly burnt their party cards. In July 2002, the Landless People's Movement occupied Gauteng Premier Mbhazima Shilowa's office amid an angry protest over land and rent defaulters on the Cape Flats as they stoned a truck involved in evictions, and

tried to necklace a driver (necklacing was a common practice during the revolution of the '80s, involving putting a rubber tyre round the neck of a collaborator and setting fire to it: moralists may cringe, but collaboration with the system involved support for a far worse brutality – a fundamentally irrational and hierarchical violence).

In early July 2004 a rumour went around Diepsloot (a black slum many of whose residents service the nearby ultra-ultra-rich gated town of Dainfern protected by homicidal armed guards and homicidally high-voltage fencing) that residents were to be moved to new housing miles away – so the township erupted in riots that went on for days. Of those riots Thembi, who is out of work and 18, says: “It wasn’t true that we were moving, but people thought it was true and they got very angry. This is home.” The July riots shut down the entire area and they were the most violent seen since South Africa pretended to put the apartheid era behind it. Cars were stoned, reporters attacked, police fired rubber bullets and many were arrested. Young Mathoba told a journalist 6 months later that he stoned the journalists because “*you have to talk to someone.*” The bitterness in Diepsloot was not directed at Dainfern but at the city council that “is more corrupt than the old apartheid people,” said Sophie, a maid in Dainfern – “Big jobs and good times for bigwigs – no house, no hope for us” contradicting another letter to the *Guardian* (26/2/05), which says that its author is now “able to detect improvements in their [the blacks] position – if only that they now have hope for a better future.” Fortunately this maid, at least, has no such illusions. As a '60s revolutionary said “Hope is the leash of submission.” Hope is the carrot intended to make people endure the stick. Hope in South Africa means that blacks from poor backgrounds are supposedly being indoctrinated with the idea that they have a good chance of making it into the middle class, which was not possible under apartheid, a chance which in reality is very slim. *Practical* hope, however, entails putting your desperation on the map, which increasing amounts of the working class in South Africa are beginning, yet again, to do. Those politicians who try to use or influence the new community struggles are often faced with laughter and derision. In Chatsworth, Durban, the election turnout in the year 2000 was 20 percent, not much but, sadly, considerably higher than under apartheid, when it was, supposedly, 15% (i.e. of those *registered* to vote). This was during the hated tricameral system of 1984, in which ‘Coloureds’ and ‘Indians’ were given some token voting rights for a separate parliamentary chamber – which sparked off massive violent opposition and nationwide only resulted in 21% of those *registered* to vote actually voting – but most didn’t bother to register (hence the ‘supposedly’).

Water, Water Everywhere, Yet Not a Drop to Drink

As a result of over a million water disconnections in the 8 years from 1994, 40,000 children were dying from diarrhoea caused by dirty water every year. Cholera returned with a vengeance, infecting over 100,000 people in Kwa-Zulu Natal alone. When the water company came to disconnect water in a house in Bayview, in Chatsworth, the community turned up *en masse* and formed a human wall around the targeted houses. The security company withdrew. There was a mood of elation and militancy, with people dancing in the cul-de-sacs between the rows of flats to hastily improvised music. This was now the fifth battle in a row they had won against those who would either evict them or cut off their water. Chatsworth was fast becoming a terrain of defeat for the Metro Council. The next day an agreement was reached that the water cut-offs would be stopped, accounts would be frozen with no further interest charged on arrears, and the water could be turned back on. On the day the Bayview water case was to be heard, 200 people from Umlazi arrived at the High Court. Their water had also been cut — they had come to protest in solidarity. Struggle plumbers abound — and are not prosecuted. The council re-disconnects, and the struggle plumbers dis-re-connect. Mpumalanga was violently divided during the anti-apartheid struggle. The youth were successfully manipulated by the white state with the complicity of the Inkatha Party of the Zulu apartheid collaborator Buthelezi on the one hand and the ANC and UDF on the other hand. Thousands and thousands were killed. It is also a place of desperate economic wasteland. A University of Natal survey concluded that in 2001 the average income per person was R23.70 per month. The council's electricity and rates bills are R200 a month. Nowadays there is a vibrant, militant and united struggle against both the ANC-dominated local government and the Inkatha controlled provincial government. This was sparked in 1999 when the council tried to install water meters. The community reacted by ripping up the meters and chasing the contractors away. Running battles were fought with the police and the broken water meter gadgets were left strewn everywhere. In 2001 the council tried again. Again residents resisted, ripping up the water meters. Ten thousand people attended rallies, the speeches were hot and the demands straightforward — free essential services for the poor. Amazingly, the physically capable youth of the Inkatha Youth Brigade and the earnest youngsters from a Congress tradition reached out to each other during these times. In May 2001 a mass meeting took place to protest the installation of water meters attended by: the Concerned Citizens Group from Chatsworth, the Mpumalanga Concerned Group, activists from the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee and community leaders from Umlazi. But there was also police repression, arrests, impoundment of communal cars, and two people shot dead by a shadowy ANC vigilante group.

But the most dangerous tactic employed by the council was to employ local people to install the meters, thereby risking a return to violence within the community. However, the community realised this and agreed to suspend the violent sabotage policy and instead waited for the first non-payment disconnection letters. In March 2002 the whole community closed down; schools, taxi ranks and roads were shut as tens of thousands of people marched to the local rent office. There they demanded to pay R10 a month and the UniCity officials had to process each singular payment. The idea caught on and there were 'ten rand marches' in Tafelsig, Chatsworth, Wentworth, Umlazi and Mpumalagna.

Since August 2003 at the start of Operation Gcina'Amanzi in Phiri, the water company has confronted resistance to its project to commodify water. In September 2003, residents of Phiri, supported by the Gauteng Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), resisted the installation of pre-paid water meters in the township by destroying the infrastructure that had been laid to allow these meters to be installed (though some of those involved have been arrested and jailed — one for 2 years). On October 5th 2004, residents of Chiawelo, Phiri and Dlamini joined residents from elsewhere in Soweto in blocking the Old Potch road, a main Johannesburg highroad, to demand that the installation of prepaid water meters by Johannesburg Water be stopped. Police were out in force to disperse the protestors using stun grenades and random arrests. Frustrated by continuing community resistance to the prepaid system, Johannesburg Water has not been able to complete the installation of the new meters in Phiri. And again, on January 5th 2005, residents of Bayview in Chatsworth, Durban, resisted council water disconnection teams, turning them away, but the council threatened to return with renewed force — a terrifying threat, as previously council security *murdered* Marcel King in Phoenix, Durban while disconnecting electricity. On 23rd January, a meeting of the SECC held in the community of Emdeni to mobilise/organise community members against the installation of pre-paid water meters was disrupted by three local ANC councillors, accompanied by a number of ANC members and a representative of the Mayor's office. One of the three ANC councillors then physically assaulted SECC organiser Bongani Lubisi, who was speaking to the assembled crowd. The rest of the ANC mob repeatedly issued verbal threats to the SECC activists present, telling them that they would be "killed" if they continued to hold such meetings and promising that nothing would stop the installation of pre-paid water meters. Sadly, the SECC activists chose not to retaliate and instead ignored the ANC gang and their crude neo-liberal thuggery, hastily concluding the meeting and sending a delegation to Naledi Police Station, where charges of assault and intimidation against the ANC Councillor were laid. As always, the police failed to act on the formal charges laid. It's a sign of the weakness of this new movement as compared with the old that they not only failed to confront the sick violence of the ANC but also tried to look

to the cops for redress, something unthinkable 20 years ago. And such weaknesses will encourage the ANC to do their worst.

A young Soweto black said in the late '70s:

“We would like to make it clear to the outside world that we will get whatever we want, and that whatever we want we will get. If possible we will use violence — if *possible*... Because by sitting around a table and talking about these things with the whites brings no good future to us. It’s just like talking to a stone. Now by violence they will understand a *little* of what we say — a little. Now by war they will understand everything — by *war*.”

Substitute “whites” with “the ruling class, black or white” and we can see a programme applicable to the post-apartheid era. Sure, such a leap into a revolutionary situation, into the taking of courageous risks, doesn’t come merely by willing it — and we ourselves have had our confidence enormously weakened by the retreats forced on us by the progressive defeats of struggles over the past two decades. We would certainly not advocate ‘heroic’ strategies in what is still relatively a vacuum, particularly from afar. But a critical reflection on the practical possibilities of developing movements towards such a situation is an essential moment in combatting current weaknesses.

Sparkies Lighting the Prarie Fire

“We don’t ask why or when people are cut off, we just switch them back on. Everyone should have electricity” — *Virginia Setshedi, SECC (Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee)*

In 1997, people in the poor Johannesburg suburbs of Eldorado Park and Westbury organised a “stayaway” — exhorting people not to go to work — over increases in local council rates and threats to cut power and water for non-payment. Hundreds of young people built barricades in the streets to prevent residents from getting to work. While the cops cleared away the barricades, their vehicles were stoned and a full-blown confrontation developed as the cops killed a 7 year old boy. By midday, thousands had joined the confrontation in three areas south and west of the city. Nevertheless, though symptomatic of a growing fury against the ANC, it appears not to have developed either in time or geographically: it remained, as far as we know, a one-off, though indicative of the tradition of revolt that South Africa still maintains.

In line with their programme to clear old debts, in 2001 the manager of Eskom (the state-run electricity company) announced, “The aim is to disconnect at least 75 percent of Soweto residents.” 20,000 households a month were cut off during 2001 – many times more than were connected by the ANC’s great programme to connect millions of black households to the national grid. In Soweto, the cost of one kilowatt unit of electricity is 28 cents, in Sandton (the ultra-rich area of Johannesburg) it is 16 cents, big business pay 7 cents and the worst-off rural areas pay 48 cents.

As they went to disconnect, Eskom security forces assaulted and bullied members of the community and opened fire on protestors. The community marched to the Mayor’s house and pledged to “embark on a campaign of mass non-payment.” After Emergency Electricians in Soweto reconnected 3,000 houses in six months, Eskom announced that it would not be cutting off those who could not pay – not a bad result! The SECC also went to the home of the Johannesburg Mayor Amos Maseko and disconnected his water supply and electricity. Councillor Rocky Naidoo also had his electricity and water disconnected at his house in May 2001. As part of this movement the offices of banks in Cape Town have been occupied, and the debt-collection building of the Thekwini Council in Durban was laid siege to. Apparently, the struggle to re-connect disconnected electricity supplies was initiated by anarchists in the ZACF collective and in the Shesha Action Group (SAG) in Soweto who started Operation Khanyisa, meaning “light,” the operation that illegally re-connected some 25,000 homes in Soweto.

“We Are Not Striking For Demands, We Are Striking For Dignity.”

Under apartheid, workers, usually organised within black Trade Unions which had initially been illegal, won considerable gains – sometimes achieving wage hikes as high as 200%(!), though often this was down to just bloody-minded autonomy and trade unions seemed just a means to progress. Now – surprise, surprise – they are clearly totally collusive with the ANC government. Take COSATU’s endorsement of a Labour Relations Act that, while supposedly guaranteeing more labour rights, in fact places so many mediation obligations before aggrieved workers that it is extremely difficult to embark on a legal strike (also, COSATU is party to NEDLAC, a cross-class labour/government/business policy forum that tends to lock it into agreements with the ruling class). Or take for instance, the National Union of Metalworker at Volkswagen – in 2000 it signed a deal which included, amongst other things: no overtime pay for weekend work, compulsory overtime

with no notice, half the break time, and a pension reduction. Workers learned about the signing in the newspapers. When workers struck against the deal, without the Union, they didn't sufficiently confront the inevitable scab labour the bosses brought in, and then tried to get the labour mediation court to rule in their favour – but they lost.

However, at Engen, the South African affiliate of the oil multinational Exxon, workers forged better links with the local community and didn't put faith in the courts. The Engen plant is the single biggest employer of people living in Wentworth, a Durban township with typical high unemployment. Once a year, Engen employs thousands of temporary workers for six weeks during the annual factory overhaul. Engen has its own training centre but uses temp agencies to employ people. Any attempt at unionising results in the temp agency contract being dismissed.

In 2001 a strike was planned. But there was a danger of the anger turning in on the community itself, via either the scabs, or the temp agency bosses, many of whom also lived in Wentworth. So the workers invited prominent members of the community to be on their organising committee. A joint body called the Industrial Relations Forum was formed and operated as both the strike committee and the equivalent of the residents associations in the other areas. The executive of the union devolved their organization into a loose and very broad grouping of activists and community and religious leaders. The unemployed (some of the better off call them 'gangsters') were represented at the discussions and their inclusion played a crucial role in cutting off Engen's ability to recruit scabs. All the time the workers tried to ensure Engen was totally isolated from reaching potential allies in the community, by "getting there first" in the information battle and creating space for various interest groups to become part of the strike committee. For much of the time the union and community structures appeared as one.

The strike was solid from the beginning, despite the knowledge that this two months work was all many of the people would get all year. At the first meeting *every single worker* attended, along with their wives and teenage sons – "keen for action." They all put their badges needed to gain entry to the plant into a large bag and a constant roving picket was planned, but as the meeting broke up some of the key organisers were arrested and the bag of badges were taken by the police. Desai was at the meeting the next day:

"Reggie, one of the workers, takes to the stage. In a speech, replete with Durban slang, he talks of labouring at Engen for over two decades. He talks of exploitation, of being pushed around, and the hurt of still having to find employment again and again every year through a labour broker, being 'inducted' anew each time into a plant he built. It

is a moving speech that he translates himself into Zulu for the benefit of the African ‘chargehands’ of a particular labour broker who has just joined the strike after walking off the nightshift. They form a bright blue knot in the back of the hall where they stand in their overalls. Spirits are unbelievably high. I feel transported back into the 1980s and the meetings of righteous anger against apartheid that abounded. A member of the Cape Town gang of metalworkers brought down to assist on the shut, pledges his crew’s support for the strike. He speaks in Afrikaans and the message is translated into English and Zulu.”

After the meeting, everyone went to the police station to demand back their badges. Not a single window in the Wentworth police station remained unbroken. The army moved into Wentworth using apartheid-era security legislation. The company was trying every trick to bully, cajole, bribe and propagandise the people back to work. It didn’t work. Then they let the temp agencies know that they would accept the strikers’ demands and made a written offer to underwrite the important wage parity demand.

But now that the community had found its voice and its strength there was a sense of purpose beyond the compromises and they stayed out on strike. Desai:

“When I pointed out to one of the community leaders that they had won the strike and could just as well call it off his answer confounded me: ‘We are not striking for demands, we are striking for dignity.’ I told him that Engen could not provide ‘dignity.’ ‘Exactly, my friend, exactly!’ was his answer.”

The strike went on for another week until Engen itself negotiated with the strikers and capitulated to all their demands including the instatement of a man badly injured by the police.

The strike at Engen, unlike that at Volkswagen, did not take seriously the conciliation and other legal measures afforded in post-apartheid South Africa. It relied on timing a wildcat strike to fit in with the company turnaround when the company was most vulnerable. A considerable amount of energy was devoted to building community support whilst not becoming a captive of one political tendency or casting itself in dogmatic ideological terms. ‘It was as if the whole of Wentworth was on strike.’

The Durban Social Forum

It's heartening to see in this tentative renewal of proletarian self-organisation a rejection of many of the organisations opposed to such self-organisation. Take, for instance, the declaration of the Durban Social Forum (DSF) in August 2001:

“Colonialism is dead but new overlords impose themselves. The World Bank, WEF, G8, IMF, and WTO. They are supported not only by lackey governments like our own but also by a legion of other forked-tongued abbreviations: NGOs, UNOs, USAIDS, and WCARs, of which we are all deeply suspicious, despite their pretense at caring for us.”

The DSF, having organised a national march and a series of meetings questioning the World Anti-Racism Conference, found that they had “attracted the usual array who earn their keep lobbying, politicking and gaining public notice for some or other cause... The world of the NGO is a cynical yet self-righteous, populist yet undemocratic, sympathetic yet disempowering arena” and, as proof of this critique, the NGOs who were holding an ‘alternative’ conference at the Cricket ground, called the cops to disperse the DSF when they wanted to camp and sleep the night there. And the march of over 30,000 people that the DSF organised ended with an attempt to break through police lines and storm the conference.

Nevertheless, there's a danger that such an umbrella organisation as this can develop tendencies away from such concrete acts and towards being as self-perpetuating as the organisations it denounces, even if it has a different content – organising itself above all as an organisation rather than organising precise activities, which become secondary. Particularly as this organisation is ambiguously conciliatory towards some of the worse aspects of the social movement against apartheid – *“In the process, we had built strong, democratic organizations and elected individuals to lead us whom we trusted as honest and principled people.”* This is a present-day comment about the situation in the '80s without the slightest hint of critical reflection about the subsequent development of such organisations, or of such honest and principled people. It seems obvious – but perhaps it always needs to be re-said: regardless of whether someone appears to be honest and principled, once they have a position of professional elected leader they develop separate interests, particularly as those who want to be led, in their trust, give up their own ability to initiate activity. And this is part of what happened as soon as Mandela was released from prison. Of course we don't mean to fixate purely on individual personalities – Mandela was the instrument and product of the ANC and the larger ruling class-in-waiting, the *collective* perpetrators of hierarchy.

Although it flies in the face of the deeply entrenched ‘commonsense’ logic of this world, the essential question is not to build organisations, strong or weak,

democratic or not, but to initiate different attacks on our misery and organising *this*, rather than organising the organisation as a prerequisite for this, which loses sight of the point of organising: it's a way of developing organisation as an image, a show, an end in itself, which is ultimately the bureaucratic logic of the commodity economy and the State. This organisation question is an inherent pitfall in all struggles of any duration. But in the end, it's a question of constant vigilance on the part of those organising themselves. What might be temporarily practical in one situation can become an obstacle to the progress of struggle in another. The history of class struggle has always involved a tension between, on the one hand, the struggle of individuals struggling for community and, on the other hand, submission to the point of view of a separate specific organisation — proletarian identity versus *collectivist* identity — identifying with a particular collectivity (the history of trade unions is only the most obvious example of this complex dialectic); sooner or later, one must dominate the other.

And what does this quote from the DSF imply?

“Recently, we have come to understand more about the “global village” and are ashamed about the role our government has chosen to play as an induna of the West. We wish to apologize to the people of Palestine, Harlem, East Timor, Congo, Chiapas, Algeria, Burma, Sudan, Iraq, the Dalits of India, the workers in Asian sweatshops, the women down-trodden in Afghanistan, the street-children in Sao Paulo, the political prisoners in the United States, the villagers in the Maluti Mountain Valley, the Aborigines in Australia, the immigrants of Europe and North America, and every other place in our world where injustice is perpetuated while the leaders of our country keep conveniently quiet, or even support your oppressors.”

This sounds like middle class guilt — as if they're kids of the rulers feeling bad about their nasty parents. Do they really expect rulers not to act like rulers? It seems to be something more than an unjustifiable shame for voting for the ANC — after all, the whole world hierarchy advertising the joys of bourgeois democracy coupled with the disappearance of a practical movement was the external pressure to vote. Guilt for believing they would be different is not only useless — it doesn't confront the forces that encouraged such “shameful” illusions and perpetuates the illusion that leaders of countries could somehow be ok. Despite its internationalism, it still implies a strong emotional attachment to the nation, and a belief in the ideal of a Good State — that it could be composed of trustworthy leaders, and hence implies such an ambition on the part of some of the participants of the DSF (the fact that the DSF includes *Keep Left*, a semi-Trotskyist organisation with links

to the SWP, is additional evidence for this attitude: *Keep Left* even told members to vote ANC – because, apparently, that’s where the working class is, something for which they should truly feel abjectly ashamed and guilty about). We are not concerned with whether such people are genuine and sincere or not – probably most of them are. But the essential thing is that this is not merely an illusion that flies in the face of the whole historical experience of all the various States but also an illusion that suppresses the consciousness of history as being something other than hierarchical social relations (to take just one small memorable example of anti-hierarchical self-organisation – the blacks of Alexandra⁴ organising themselves during the ’80s publicly in ‘street committees’ as an open community, where everything – from attacks on collaborators and cops, to how to deal with rapists to stopping men harassing their ex-girlfriends – was discussed and organised by mass meetings). Above all, it implies (though, of course, we’re guessing) the continuation of hierarchical respect in the present, in the DSF itself.

As a contribution to re-examining the past and overcoming it, we offer the following three texts. If anything useful is to come out of the social movement of the past – for these movements not to have been ‘wasted’ – it’s essential to look at what was an inspiration as well as what was weak in the movements – what enabled people to end the revolution and put their faith in the ANC, especially considering how little the ANC had to do with the real movement. Whilst any future revolutionary movement will certainly not put its faith in the ANC, it might well put its faith in some other representation of the revolution. Of course, we’re a hell of a long way from that, though it should be remembered that a few weeks, even days, before the 1976 Soweto uprising, no-one expected such a widespread movement to develop, let alone that it should be schoolkids who initiated it. We’re not saying this simply arose spontaneously out of nowhere: the seeds were already sown in the theory of Black Consciousness, and, moreover, it took place in a global atmosphere of increasing self-confidence on the part of the working class – very different from today. And it exploded precisely because the blacks realised they couldn’t rely on anybody but themselves. It was only later that the ANC, having initially been contemptuously dismissive of the Soweto uprising, opportunistically

⁴ Alexandra is still very much a chronically poor area – lots of shanty towns, intensely crowded – more than half a million people in a very small space – a bewildering maze of smashed-up streets, crammed with people, with terrible housing and an obvious lack of essential services. It has recently opened a ballet school – the first to take young students with plans to train them in a professional way. It has a strict and rigorous regime of tuition – four afternoons a week for 10 years. “*I want to give them the discipline and structure that is needed in ballet. That will help them in all aspects of life,*” says the director. One shouldn’t ignore the extent to which culture in South Africa now serves the purpose of taming the previously untamed, giving them ‘hope’ in a hopeless system, discipline and structure *within* this system. And not only in South Africa.

honoured it a few years afterwards (yes, it took them that long!) and thus could seem to be something people could rely on other than themselves.

On the other hand, we shouldn't ignore the simple fact of class war-weariness after 15 years of desperate violent struggle as a factor in the dominant powers regaining the initiative. Which is another way of saying that if you want peace you've got to *constantly fight* to create the conditions for it. This is why we need to partly look at the past to renew this struggle, for the proletariat to regain the initiative after all these years. This is why we should never forget the incredible moments in the struggles of the '70s and '80s, which, as far as we know, don't compare with anything going on today. Whilst the sick scum who support the ANC smugly claim the end of apartheid as mainly down to this horrendous organisation and its fellow travellers, there are a handful of, equally, if differently, arrogant, ultra-leftist 'revolutionaries' who also put the end of apartheid down to merely a battle between competing bourgeois parties. Such arrogance dogmatically dismisses the complexities of all practical risk in the struggle for freedom by only looking at the eventually victorious weaknesses of such movements, by which criteria one could dismiss the movements of 1848, the Paris Commune, the Russian revolution, the Spanish revolution, the 1984/5 miners strike, etc. In their complacent abstract 'critique' they show their contemptible contempt for the uneven process of any concrete practical opposition to this shit world, as well as a refusal to examine the contradictions of such movements, as if there's nothing to be learnt from them. Such petrified attitudes are willfully ignorant of anything real that happened during the South African revolution of the '70s and '80s.

Take this from the *Daily Mirror* (17/11/84), for example: "Won't pay? Can't pay! More than 2000 blacks were arrested for non-payment of rent yesterday when South African police swamped on compounds near Johannesburg. The blacks said they could not pay because they had burnt down the rent office."

Or take this from a small pamphlet written in 1984, *The Third Day Of September*, an account of the uprising against rent hikes in Sebokeng by Johannes Rantete, a 20 year old son of a factory worker who, as a result of writing it, was 'disappeared' by the South African police:

"There was no roof of the business buildings that remained tall after the strikes except the well-planned Mphatalatsane hall, Perm building and various churches. In Zone 11, all the shops were burnt down. The rent office, the bottlestore and the beerhall were burnt. Three houses were burnt, including a brand-new Honda Ballade. The petrol station and the soft-drink cash-andcarry wholesale were also attacked. The roadhouse cafe was broken into and goods were taken away... Roads in this zone were blocked with stones, boxes, and anything else that was easy to carry. The Sebokeng Post Office was attacked and burnt, not surprisingly. All the shops in Zone 12 were burnt down, too. The rent office, the bottlestore, the

beerhall, a doctor's surgery and the house of a councillor were destroyed by fire. The tarred roads in this zone were blocked with stones and pelted with bottles and burning objects to hamper the passing of vehicles – especially police vehicles. Zone 13... not a single shop kept its original shape. Everything was ashes. Here again, the rent office was attacked, but the library and two clinics were spared. A house near the shopping centre was burnt. Roads used by buses were pelted with stones and broken bottles. Zone 14... carries public buildings and other large buildings which are not found in other zones. There is the... Mphatalatsane hall, the Perm building, Texido supermarket, the banks and building societies (Standard, Barclays, Volkskas, United, Allied) and the long frontage of the P & A Drycleaners building. Fire raged through all these buildings. All the shops – a "Hire a TV" shop, a Kentucky, a beerhall, a bottlestore – were burnt. Zone 7... the rent office and a petrol station burnt down. Zone 3... A bakery, shops, a beerhall, the rent office and a bottlestore were burnt... The strikes spread as far as Sharpeville, Boipatong, Evaton and Residensia... Strikes also erupted in the Sebokeng's mens hostels... a lounge had been burnt, all the shops, the administration board office... The strikes really proved to me that unity is alive and strong among blacks... What is most fatal to black unity is the numerous parties formed, that often lead to hatred and mistrust... The strikes took four days and afterwards 31 people were dead. More than 50 were injured and about 8 policemen, while 37 were arrested. The police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the rioting crowds... the count of police victims will probably never be known, because of news clampdowns. Some of the victims of the strike can be identified. The Zone 11 councillor, Mr. James Mofokeng, was killed; Councillor Caesar Motjeane was killed after shooting two youths, and on his corpse read the placard, "Away with rentals! Asinamali!" Ntomba Majola (12) was killed... Evaton's deputy mayor died in the hospital on Tuesday. Evaton's mayor had to remain homeless after his house was burnt down. His gown was worn by an elderly woman who danced down the streets and called herself the first mayor. On Monday... Sharpeville councillor was killed by an angry mob... When the schools reopened on 26 September no student in the Vaal area was seen in the school yards, nor seen wearing a school uniform. What was the cause of their staying away, whereas the strikes were simmering down?... The answer from one..." It will be too difficult for us to go to school when some of our mates are languishing in jail for unspecific infringements."

A lot more could be said about this period, especially by those who lived it. For ourselves, we'll confine ourselves to the reproduction of these two excellent texts:

1. South Africa 1985: The Organisation of Power in Black and White (August 1985)

2. Reflections on the Black Consciousness Movement and the South African Revolution (August 1979)

Stop Press

At the end of June 2005, we've had news of further developments in South Africa. Namely, a variety of confrontations over miserable housing conditions, in the last week or so of May and the first week of June, with burning barricades of tyres and rubbish in different parts of Cape Town, and attempts to block one of Cape Town's major highways, the N2. In Gugulethu, the whole of NY1, the township thoroughfare, was blockaded every 100 metres with piles of burning tires. Residents were expressing anger at the lack of service delivery in terms of houses as well as water and electricity for informal settlements. ANC-aligned representatives from the city council and provincial government were booed and chased from meetings when they tried to pacify angry residents with appeals for patience. Police repression has been brutal, including the use of live ammunition and stun grenades, with one protester, Tebogo Mkhonza from the Free State, being killed. Town 2 residents graphically illustrated their discontent when they dumped the excrement from their buckets in the house of Ward Councillor Phakamile Kula. An illustration of the intensification of social conflict is that Cosatu, the largest trade union federation, has announced a programme of rolling mass action including a general strike on 27 June against job losses; of course, we have no illusions in Cosatu, but if they have to call a general strike that's in order to recuperate the beginnings of a potentially explosive social confrontation.

Thanks to Z at *Prol-Position* for some of the information here.

Chapter 2. South Africa 1985. The Organisation of Power in Black and White. By Sam Thompson and Norman Abraham.

Originally written in August 1985 c/o PO Box 4502, Berkeley, CA 94704, USA This version produced in November 1985 by BM Combustion, London

Introduction

The police stations are surrounded by sandbags and barbed wire. They look like trenches in a battlefield. The police buildings are flanked by Saracens and Hippos.

Black and white policemen, armed with automatic rifles, come in and out. There are massive vehicles; army vehicles adapted to riot conditions. There are funny looking tear-gas machines.

Many shops have gone up in smoke. Houses have been destroyed. The burnt-out shells of cars, lorries and buses litter the streets.

Black policemen no longer live in their homes. Those who have not been killed have fled, living either on police property or elsewhere in hiding. All local black councillors are objects of attack because of their collaboration with the state.

Being a town councillor is like committing suicide. Those who have not yet been killed live in constant fear. When they move around they are escorted by soldiers.

Every day there are clashes between soldiers and police on the one hand and the people on the other. Tear gas explodes in the sky. Rifles crack. Rubber bullets and bird shot fly. People are injured. People are killed. Crowds of hundreds, often thousands are scattered and dispersed. Then they play cat and mouse with the authorities; shouting slogans, throwing stones, hurling petrol bombs, looting cars, burning shops, killing anyone they suspect of collaboration with the government or even white business, or anyone who disobeys the mood of the people on the streets.

The soldiers are everywhere. So are the police. They attack people indiscriminately. They have the guns and ammunition. They ride in armoured cars. They have batons, whips and tear gas. The people are not cowed. They get angrier and angrier.

This is the situation in Langa, NewBrighton, Kwa Nobuhle, Kwazakhele, LittleSoweto, Fort Beaufort, Lingelihle in the Eastern Cape. This is the situation in Duduza, Daveyton, Sebokeng, Evaton, Tembisa, Kwathema and Katlehong in the Transvaal.

The army and the police have a massive presence in these townships. UDF (United Democratic Front) organisations are very active. Its leaders have taken a high profile and they have paid the price by being cut down left and right by the system and its paid assassins. On a lesser scale, but no less aggressively and desperately, AZAPO is taking militant steps. Even some ANC infiltrators are operating clandestinely. But in reality no one controls these townships.

The army and the police intimidate and cordon using everything from dragnets to death squads to provoke fear and uncertainty. They do not attempt to establish order. UDF and AZAPO organise tirelessly, but fail to establish these areas as zones under their leadership.

The townships are battlegrounds between the system and just about anybody who is on the streets on any given day. The people of the townships are fighting because they are bitter and angry, because they want to end their oppression, but mostly because they have to. If you are on the streets when the police and army arrive you have three choices: to collaborate with the system and then face the risk of a violent death at the hands of people in the community; or you can run away and hide in your home where you are still not safe from the bullets, the teargas, and the spies; or otherwise, you go with the flow and you fight back, in whichever way you can – with rocks and with petrol bombs, with fists and with fire.

The situation makes people defiant and courageous. They are not armed, but they are the toughest, most politicised, most rebellious proletariat in the world today. The youth are engaged in a potlatch, flaunting their fearlessness, dancing and gyrating through the ruins of their ghettos, in an effusion of intensity, defiance and libido.

This is what is happening on the streets of South Africa's townships. It is shaping the everyday reality of life in South Africa, of life in a country where a revolution is raging.

At the same time another war is being waged. It is a war of ideology and propaganda, It is a battle for hierarchical power, not a battle against it. At the moment there are five major protagonists. Each warrants close examination.

The State

As beleaguered as it might be, the white apartheid government is still very much, in power.

Most of the faces in the government, with a few important exceptions, are the same today as they were a decade ago.

The state has effectively dealt with the military threat from outside its borders. In spite of increased terrorist attacks this year, the ANC was dealt a severe blow militarily by the Nkomati Accord signed in 1983. South Africa has rendered the ANC guerrilla war even more ridiculous than ever before. It has simply bullied into submission the frontline states, on whom the ANC is dependant for bases and for launching pads for its attacks.

Inside its borders the state has sporadically stumbled upon the path of some reforms required for the improved functioning of large capital. The expansion of a black middle class was not exclusively a political creation, but also responded to a real need for a stable skilled workforce in the private sector.

Despite obvious reluctance, complete disinclination, and having bitten off more than it could chew, the state legalised black trade unions, giving capital a more predictable context in which to operate. At the same time this answered a pressing political need from black workers who were already forming unions, legally or not.

In short, the state has adjusted its methods of control.

Internationally, the battle against external pressure has, for the most part, resolved itself in a stalemate. A stalemate is exactly what Pretoria wants, and, at any rate, is the best it can hope for. Minor statutory and social concessions are broadcast at full volume internationally, in order to promote the image of reform. But beyond this, the attitudes of foreign governments are relatively low on the state's list of priorities. First and foremost, it must stop revolution. Satisfying the needs of domestic capital is second in line. Foreign capital already in the country is far more important than Pretoria's popularity rating in the capitals of the western world, and is even expendable if the 'worst comes to the worst.'

The current international outcry against the South African regime is presented to the western public as a moral reaction. Since World War II virtually every nation in the world except South Africa has rejected racism as official policy. Power has discovered that there is more mileage to be gained from criticising racism than there is from organising it. The international sympathisers, motivated by a moral outlook, sooner or later evoke the same plea as their heads of state; if something isn't done, things will get really bad. They say they fear bloodshed, which they propose to stop by asking some authority or other to do something. What they all really fear is revolution. And not only in South Africa.

Internal revolution is the arsenic in the government's boerwors. It can try whatever it likes. A point has been reached where just about any step the government takes, either by means of increased repression or by means of reform, merely incurs the wrath of young black South Africans. The state sets up a tricameral Parliament; all participants from the coloured and Indian communities instantly lose credibility. It gives more power to local black councillors in the townships. More power doesn't save the government lackeys from petrol bombings and from lynchings.

The police and the army march through the townships in a show of force shooting and arresting people virtually at random. All that does is increase the anger in the black community, galvanising into action people who were previously unpoliticised.

The declaration of a state of emergency on 20th July did not give the police and the military much in the way of new powers. It simply gave them the go-ahead to freely use the powers they already enjoy, and which, as a necessary complement to reform have built up to an unprecedented level over the last ten years.

The mass arrests and intensified intimidation have most definitely had a serious impact on the affected black communities.

The shaky balance between reform and repression has, for the present, been tipped towards the latter.

The state of emergency also gave some foreign bureaucracies a convenient opportunity to suspend relations, and at the same stroke to expunge the bad image of having been there in the first place.

“There are, of course, two characteristic snags with which we are constantly confronted; the conflicting requirements of a total strategy and a democratic system of government. The fact is that strategy is dynamic and requires constant and continued adaptation. A ‘game-plan’ is, of course, the theoretical ideal. We are working towards something like it within the restrictions inherent in our democratic institutions... The time for a ‘rethink’ of all our national resources is now. This ‘rethink’ definitely does not mean changes in the Constitution or social system, but it aims at a reorientation of activities within the framework of the prevailing order... For whites, moderate blacks and cooperative tribal leaders, the issue at stake is survival...” — *General Magnus Malan, South African Minister of Defence*

The Clergy

Certain denominations of the church in South Africa are trying to make miracles, but no one who makes a practical difference is taking them very seriously. South

Africa's holy trinity of Desmond Tutu, Byers Naude and Allan Boesak rattle their teeth throughout the land, preaching non-violence at the daily funerals of black people killed by the police.

Strictly speaking these three clerics are enemies of the South African State. But in every crisis they exert themselves to dissuade violence, and sometimes even to prevent it. From the government's point of view this means dissuading or preventing any effective action whatever. Besides, they are calling upon whites to repent or be damned, Tutu emphasising the repentance bit because he is Anglican, Boesak and Naude stressing damnation, a predeliction they share because of their Afrikaans background. Surely the government and the whites find these men a lot less dangerous than the people all three of them are urging to be non-violent.

“Obviously, those who advocate peaceful change will have their credibility very drastically eroded because they have nothing to show for all their advocacy. We ought to be jettisoned very quickly. We are merely saying that our people must accept they have to be victims of this vicious policy.”

— Bishop Desmond Tutu

In the summer of this year (1985) Tutu was acclaimed by the international media for intervening amongst an angry crowd to save the life of an informer. Not for nothing is this cop in shepherd's clothing known by other blacks in South Africa as 'The Clown of Exploitation.' In the summer he promised to leave South Africa if the anti-State violence didn't stop; unfortunately Nobel Peace Prize winners, and other celebrity specialists, never keep their promises. Meanwhile, the only real influence this clown has is on those outsiders who con themselves into believing he could possibly have some influence on the real struggle in the townships, the streets and the factories.

The African National Congress (ANC)

“We want Johannesburg to remain the beautiful and thriving city that it is now. Therefore, we are willing to maintain separate living until there are enough new employment opportunities and new homes to allow blacks to move into Johannesburg with dignity.”

— *Nelson Mandela*

For the past quarter century, the ANC has been the foremost surrogate government of South Africa. It has earned a name for its rhetoric and its ravings, and has

been over-generous with its praises for the Russian bureaucracy. But beneath the ideological bombast, it has developed a bureaucracy more capable than any other of replacing the apartheid state and of successfully negotiating in the international corridors of power.

For decades, the ANC advocated guerrilla war as the only viable salvation for black South Africans. During the uprisings of 1976–7 and 1980, the ANC was conspicuously absent from the heat of struggle. ANC even went so far as to minimise the importance of these struggles as leaderless, anarchic and even infantile.

The events of the last year have led ANC to abruptly change its tune: it now recognises internal revolt as the threat to the white state, and the only viable avenue for an ascent to power. This recognition coincides with an admission by the State that the centre of its problems lies within the country, not outside.

A number of factors combined to allow ANC to keep its hat in the ring despite its ineffectiveness.

No small credit can be given to the South African government, which, for 20 years defined the ANC as the enemy, both for self-serving reasons and because of the government's own illusions.

The prestige of being the oldest liberation movement, with well-known figures and martyrs, played a part.

The hope of blacks for an outside solution, similar to the hope of religious people for salvation from on high, also had a role. Along with this often went the constantly frustrated desire for arms. Weapons came not in a flood but a trickle always in the hands of loyal cadres, and mostly squandered on terrorist acts. But although desperate people saw no significant delivery of the goods, ANC remained the only potential game in town.

Though the build-up of a bureaucracy inevitably goes hand in hand with calcified, hierarchical thinking, the ANC managed to avoid the fate of the Pan-African Congress, which committed suicide by choking on its own dogma.

The ANC has not lost sight of its sole real practical objective: the seizure of power in South Africa. This is the fundamental requirement of an effective Leninist organisation. ANC has crossed many bridges but burnt very few. One example of this is that, despite its relationships with the Stalinists of the eastern bloc, it has remained foremost a nationalist group. There is no doubt that the ANC would be internally Stalinist in the unlikely event of a coup, negotiated or otherwise. But that an ANC government would become a simple Russian satellite, along the lines of MPLA in Angola, is rather implausible.

It is wrong to say that events "forced" the ANC to do anything. The new ANC outlook is an opportunistic move, notable not for being opportunistic, but for being successfully so.

The success has been spectacular. After years of hollow claims and dirty deeds, all is forgotten and ANC is very much in the running again. It is gaining confidence almost to the point of euphoria. For the first time, there is evidence among those actually fighting the Police of a significant spontaneous support for ANC. Passive support is at an all-time high. It is the only oppositional organisation with a highly developed bureaucracy and wide-scale international recognition. Best of all, it must only prescribe activities to the masses *after they have already happened* in order to maintain its position. The townships have become ungovernable? The ANC must only announce the slogan, "Make the townships ungovernable," and its popularity skyrockets.

ANC will continue to conduct terrorist activities and even intensify them if it can. It must maintain a visible profile, and keep up morale and dedication amongst its armed wing. But for most of those in the ANC military camps, the future after the glorious event, if it comes, is more mundane: as the elite of the ANC police.

As is the case with the State, ANC does not know where it will be swept in the course of revolution. In spite of a definite growth in support, ANC finds events out of its control. Wild speculation abounds about navigating from London and Lusaka to Pretoria. But some basic points can and must be made.

In a particularly revealing moment, the mystical Nelson Mandela, jailed demigod of the ANC, recently said:

"We want Johannesburg to remain the beautiful and thriving city that it is now. Therefore, we are willing to maintain separate living until there are enough new employment opportunities and new homes to allow blacks to move into Johannesburg with dignity."

Though bitter enemies, with profoundly opposing interests, the ANC and the white state are united in at least this: the infrastructure of the economy must be saved. Ownership, personnel and the style of administration are what is at stake here.

For the ANC to come to power in South Africa then, at some point in time and preferably somewhere, the revolution must stop.

The Black Consciousness Movement

The history of AZAPO and UDF, and the reality of what they are today cannot be understood without recalling the origins of Black Consciousness, whose legacy AZAPO claims to inherit, and whose form of organisation and whose political prominence UDF has usurped.

When Steve Biko launched Black Consciousness with the proclamation, “Black man you are on your own” he came up with a master stroke of strategy. The impasse of fifteen years of waiting for the ANC was thrust aside. Biko restored radical subjectivity to the revolutionary terrain by switching the focus from the passive waiting for liberation from outside to the realm of individual consciousness.

Clearly, this was not consciousness according to the academic notion of what you think when someone asks you. It was inseparably linked to action, on the level that is accessible to everyone: that of his or her own daily life. Political struggle was not denied, but rather, put back on its feet. Action in daily life was posed not as a substitute for political action, but as the foundation that makes contesting power conceivable. Biko posed a simple question: how can one oppose apartheid and the white State when one, everyday, gives in to the most basic humiliations? How can a person who is constantly ready to say, “Ja, my baas,” effectively confront the entire social system?

The initial Black Consciousness decision not to co-operate with white opponents of apartheid must be understood in this precise context. Though Biko and his associates recognised that certain whites had come to play a role in, for instance, the Congress of Democrats leadership far out of proportion to the Congress’s constituency, this was not the primary focus of their decision. The point was not to create an ideology, tactic or programme that was attractive to blacks, or even to create an all-black leadership. Rather, it was a by-product of the very centre of Black Consciousness thinking, its focus on the individual black man and his need to begin from a positive self-definition, based on his own situation as he himself determined it.

The early Black Consciousness organisations, e.g. SASO (South African Students Organisation), were limited in scope and were often specific to particular projects, as in BCP (Black Community Programmes). No sort of comprehensive organisation which might compete with ANC was envisaged. It is worth noting in this context that Biko himself made a continual effort to avoid any sort of personality cult, any role that would make him indispensable to the fulfilment of the outlook which he did so much to develop.

This is not to say that the partisans of Black Consciousness definitively broke with the notion of a hierarchical, Leninist-type organisation. It is more accurate to say that they proceeded not against it, but without it. This was in large part a tactical choice, to avoid leaders being singled out and eliminated by the State.

During the early 1970s, a Black Consciousness organisational framework began to take shape. The number of Black Consciousness organisations increased. Some of them grew out of the struggle itself. Existing groups increased rapidly in size. Coordination of these groups was loosely formalised in the notion of an ‘umbrella’ structure. Each member group was allowed to conduct its activities free of cen-

tralised control. But though explicitly not monolithic or dogmatic, the umbrella notion added a decisive new element to Black Consciousness.

One began to hear more and more of the Black Consciousness *Movement*. This referred at once to the general social unrest sweeping the country and to the organisations formally united in the Black Consciousness umbrella. A tension between these conceptions emerged and in time developed. On the one hand, Black Consciousness was a “way of life,” reflecting and, in some vague sense, uniting the actions of autonomous individuals in their struggles at all levels. On the other hand, Black Consciousness was becoming a separate entity, not merely the general movement but a distinct, organised part of it. The tendency became for the BCM leaders to see the unorganised movement *in the terms* of the organised one, where what was ‘autonomous’ was no longer the individual, but rather, the various *organisations*.

The duality between the two conceptions of Black Consciousness was solidified with the BCM leaders’ new ideology of “mass support.” This ideology developed something like this. First, there was the fact of parallel and even joint action between the organised and unorganised elements of the “movement.” Second, in the general upheaval, the division between formal BCM activists and the actions of others blurred to the point of invisibility, notably in the eyes of the State. Third, there was widespread popularity of the notion of Black Consciousness in the broadest sense.

The ideology of “mass support” turned these realisations upside down. While apparently reaffirming the non-authoritarian nature of Black Consciousness, it recast the “masses” *in the terms of organisational forms*. No longer were the actions of unorganised blacks merely distinct from the organised BCM, in importance if not administratively.

Biko said, in one of his “Frank Talk” articles, that as the struggle progresses, we need to talk more and more of blacks and less of whites. But by the time BCM was banned, the watchword had become, we need to talk more and more of organisations, and less of individual blacks!

This was roughly the situation at the time the BCM was banned in 1977. When the State cut things short, the Black People’s Convention was already setting itself up as an elite of cadres, the bureaucratic centre of BCM both administratively and in terms of establishing an implicit ideological programme.

AZAPO

AZAPO was founded in 1977, after the existing Black Consciousness groups were banned. Many BCM activists joined AZAPO then. If AZAPO is in some sense

what it claims to be, the inheritor of Black Consciousness, then it is in this sense: AZAPO assumed the legacy of the *bureaucratic tendencies* that were developing in BCM at the time of the banning.

With the gradual restoration of order in South Africa in 1977, any number of superficial critiques of What Went Wrong emerged. One of the most frequent and vocal of these was the struggles of '76-'77 lacked organisation, and more specifically, a professional, disciplined leadership. This is a predictable response that has followed almost every proletarian explosion the world over, made mostly by aspiring bureaucrats who have at best led nothing.

The actual formation of AZAPO, with its cadres of committed and unswervingly loyal militants, was the practical crystallisation of this sad outlook.

One of AZAPO's appeals was, no doubt, that it scrapped some of the baggage that had been awkwardly carried along in the loose umbrella structure of BCM. Whereas sheep in wolves clothing like Buthelezi and Motlana had been able to dress their sorry reformism in Black Consciousness attire, AZAPO sent them packing.

Already in 1977, the Black Consciousness philosophy had lost much of its initial practical basis. Thousands upon thousands of black South Africans had in the past two years become prepared to fight the State, angry and amazingly conscious of their situation. *Today, in 1985, the black man who says "Ja baas" to the white man's face and then curses him in the toilet belongs to an endangered species.*

"Black Consciousness" in the hands of AZAPO has become a simple programmatic label. It provides a reassuring link with past struggles, with which many people identify in some sense. But, most of all, it serves to distinguish AZAPO from other organisations with whom it is engaged in a power struggle for the imagined proprietorship of the South African revolution. AZAPO clings to black exclusiveness not from theoretical strategy but for tactical reasons: it figures this will have a broad appeal. It also counts on this exclusiveness to help maintain commitment and militancy within its ranks of believers.

AZAPO's ideological programme, in keeping with its practical outlook, is slightly more militant and daring than those of its principal rivals ANC and UDF. It is basically an amalgam of shopworn Leninist phraseology, heavily emphasising the working class, with the usual paeans to anti-racism and anti-imperialism. It explicitly calls for popular control of the means of production. Black Consciousness reworked into an anaemic pan-Africanist nationalism. But all this has little practical impact. AZAPO is at root an organisational form in search of a content. All in all, there are no goals in the AZAPO programme that UDF or ANC could not comfortably live with. If UDF and ANC tone down their propaganda a bit it's because of different tactical approach not a different theoretical one.

The widely publicised attacks by AZAPO militants on UDF militants and vice versa initially served the interests more of AZAPO than UDF. This is simply because UDF is by far the stronger organisation, which is graphically demonstrated by the fact that the State of Emergency has seen hundreds of UDF militants rounded up by the police and almost no members of AZAPO. One on one battles give AZAPO the appearance of being on a more equal footing with UDF than is actually the case. For a period of time, the relative militancy of AZAPO cadres can, in direct battles, compensate for the far greater number of UDF supporters.

Almost everyone who has publicly commented on the matter has pointed out that the UDF v. AZAPO attacks have as their main beneficiary the white State. In the sense that this has allowed the State to murder UDF members and blame AZAPO, this is tragically true.

But in general, those who decried the attacks have done so from the point of view of a hollow black unity. This viewpoint contains a fundamental misunderstanding. The proletariat is not weak because it is divided it is divided because it is weak. Though perhaps stronger today than ever before, the South African proletariat has still not yet shown itself strong enough to throw off the chains of bureaucratic opposition to capitalism. The greatest tragedy of the UDF-AZAPO conflict and the violence that has accompanied it, is that it hasn't brought the oppressed one millimetre closer to greater clarity, to new forms of struggle, to the critical self-evaluation that is needed so desperately. It's all been lost in a power struggle between rival bureaucracies.

The United Democratic Front (UDF)

In January 1982, a steering committee was setup to establish the United Democratic Front. This had been prompted by a call from Dr. Allan Boesak, president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, for progressive forces to unite in resistance against the government's constitutional plans.

In the months of May, June and July, general councils of the UDF were established in Natal, the Transvaal and the Cape Province.

The aim of the UDF was to achieve maximum unity among "all democratic peace-loving people," as a response to the government's plans to divide people and entrench apartheid.

At a press conference in early August, the national interim executive of the UDF emphasised that while it articulated the view point of a broad cross-section of people, it accepted that the main burden of exploitation and discrimination fell on the working class.

On August 20th, the UDF was launched nationally when a thousand delegates, representing some 575 organisations, met at Mitchell's Plain in the Western Cape. Many highly visible organisations were in attendance. These included:

AZASO (Azanian Students Organisation), TIC (Transvaal Indian Congress), COSAS (Congress of SA students), SAAWU (SA Allied Workers Union), Federation of SA Women, Black Sash, Soweto Committee of Ten, DPSUC (Detainees Parents Support Committee), Release Mandela Committee, SASPU (SA Student Press Union) and hundreds of youth organisations and action committees.

“The principal of organisation does not lie in a determined accord between determined activities; it does not translate the really organisable element of individuals' activity, but is the inversion of this point of view: it is real and potential global activity, the very substance of individuals, working to organise the organization.”

— *Daniel Denevert, 1976*

The UDF conference adopted a declaration which stated as its aim the creation of a united democratic South Africa, free of bantustans and group areas and based on the will of the people. The need for 'unity in struggle through which all democrats, regardless of race, religion or colour shall take part together' was recognised.

The UDF pledged to organise community, women's, students', religious, sporting and other organisations, to build and strengthen these organisations, to consult with people regularly to represent their views, to educate people about the 'coming dangers,' and to 'unite in action' against the constitution and other day-to-day problems of the people.

As a front rather than an organisation UDF exerts an ephemeral control over its affiliates, and does not make them tow a particular line. Nevertheless, a common ideological thread that more or less binds all UDF groups together is the tacit acceptance of the Freedom Charter as a policy manifesto. The Freedom Charter serves several important functions for the UDF. It gives some ideological content to the UDF's organisational form. It is sufficiently diluted to appease the moderates in its broad coalition, and just vaguely socialist enough not to be rejected by the more militant. Since the Freedom Charter was a Congress of Democrats manifesto, and the ANC belonged to the COD, by waving it as a banner, the UDF enforces its image of following in the line of historical liberation movements. The UDF does not claim to be the same as the ANC simply because it isn't. It does, however, want to make it quite clear that it is of the same pedigree, and it is true that both organisations have to some degree relied upon *the image of the other* for their current credibility.

Unlike its immediate historical predecessor, the Black Consciousness Movement, which was rooted in the activity of the masses at the level of their everyday life, UDF starts out at the level of the organisation. UDF is the product of a more classical form of organisation. Its specific form is a federation of active and visible mini-parties, many of whom enjoy an intimate and immediate interaction with their constituents. Superimposed upon this umbrella structure is a bureaucracy with no other reason for existing other than to supervise the unity of the front.

Since UDF has, until recently, operated in a *relatively* tolerant political climate, it has used ritualised symbols from an earlier epoch as an ideological glue. Much of this symbolism does not belong to the history of the proletariat as much as it belongs to the history of the ANC. UDF is not a screen for the ANC, but by trotting out old ANC symbols and by using these symbols to help set itself up as mediator between anti-government groups, the UDF has given the ANC a desperately needed shot in the arm.

The adoption, implicit or otherwise, of the Freedom Charter was not the first tie that bound together affiliates of the UDF. The first alloy was a far more pragmatic one. It was opposition to the government's constitutional proposals. That, however, was an organisational tactic, destined at birth to be short-lived, since the issue of constitutional dispensation was to be resolved practically.

By the time the campaign against the constitutional reforms was over two of the most pathetic bunches of Uncle Toms the world has ever seen were exercising their vocal cords in the nonwhite Houses of Parliament, as well as the 7%¹ mandate given them by their respective coloured and Indian constituencies.

The original rationale for the creation of a united democratic front was dead and buried in two tiers of the South African government. But UDF did not dissolve. New and more permanent reasons for its self-perpetuation were already in place.

The Black Consciousness Movement was able to lay claim to all revolutionary acts during 1976/7 because all blacks who were willing to oppose the system could identify immediately with its message which was pitched at the level of daily life. UDF, on the other hand, did not have any popular philosophy which it could use to claim the right to become *the* liberation organisation of South Africa. What it did have was a reformist political climate in which to operate. This enabled it from the start to use symbols, tactics and allusions that no-one would have dared to use in the 1960s and the 1970s.

It is impossible not to be angered by the spine-chilling fate that UDF leaders have experienced at the hands of the State and its cohorts. There is a barbarism to the acts of detention, disappearance and death that no string of adjectives can

¹ Endangered Phoenix note: Officially the turnout was 21%, but then probably only a third of those entitled to vote bothered to register.

describe. The intention is not to downplay the agony of the victims. Rather the point is to refuse to make them into something more than they are. If the State of Emergency has shown anything, it is just how dispensable UDF is. The momentum and intensity of the struggle against apartheid is not being generated by the leaders of UDF.

* * *

Out on the streets is a mass of young rebels. Growing up in the townships, they have never known a "normal existence." Rebellion has been a way of life from the earliest years. They have little interest in ideology. They do not think of revolt as a political or economic act, but rather as a necessary and unavoidable response to the constraints imposed upon them by power.

For the past ten years the children of the townships have shown their maturity. They have zeroed in on their enemies with uncanny accuracy. They attack with equal vigour the state and its collaborators. They show no respect for private property. They do not allow leaders to control their actions. They refuse to participate in a dialogue with power. They set no goals for themselves other than their total emancipation.

Many obstacles remain. The frantic optimism expressed by the ANC, for example, is precisely the kind of attitude that must be done away with. The process of proletarian revolution is not neat and even. Mistakes are made. Hesitations occur. Impasses are met. The enemy is formidable and not only in arms. The state is being increasingly intelligent in defending its stupidity.

Criticism is needed. Not grandiose treatises or manifestos, but practical consciousness that will put the pitfalls behind; and develop forms of struggle that will overcome odds which seem to overwhelm those who gamble on freedom.

"Society does not develop in a continuous way, free from setbacks, but through conflicts and antagonisms. While the working class battle is widening in scope, the enemy's strength is increasing. Uncertainty about the way to be followed constantly and repeatedly troubles the minds of the combatants; and doubt is a factor in division, of internal quarrels and conflicts within the workers' movement. "It is useless to deplore these conflicts as creating a pernicious situation that should not exist and which is making the working class powerless. As has often been pointed out, the working class is not weak because it is divided; on the contrary, it is divided because it is weak. And the reason why the proletariat ought to seek new ways is that the enemy has strength of such a kind that the old methods are ineffectual. The

working class will not secure these ways by magic, but through a great effort, deep reflection, through the clash of divergent opinions and the conflict of impassioned ideas. It is incumbent upon it to find its own way, and precisely therein is the *raison d'être* of the internal differences and conflicts. It is forced to renounce outmoded ideas and old chimeras, and it is indeed the difficulty of this task that engenders such big divisions.”²

² Endangered Phoenix note: Although the original doesn't say who said this, this quote comes from Anton Pannekoek.

Chapter 3. Reflections on the Black Consciousness Movement and the South African Revolution. By Selby Semela, Sam Thompson, and Norman Abraham.

Originally published in August 1979 c/o PO Box 4644, Berkeley, CA 94704, USA

The 1976/77 Insurrection

“The school for the oppressed is a revolution!”

— *Soweto pamphlet, 1976*

The manner in which the violent uprisings that swept South Africa in 1976/77 have been defined by the international spectacular society and its pseudo-opposition exposes their willful determination to misinterpret, misrepresent, and misunderstand what was a decisive event in the history of proletarian struggle in that country. Everything emanating from established circles — from the Nat regime in South Africa to the racist white man or woman on a Johannesburg street and from the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress (ANC and PAC) to pseudo-oppositional leftists the world over — has not only undermined but also distorted the events that occurred in South Africa.

For a start; what happened in South Africa cannot be encapsulated in alienated notions of time and space. It was not isolated to June of 1976. It was not restricted to Soweto. It was not merely the act of students. Nor was it simply a revolt, rebellion or unrest. It was creative revolution in the making, in the desperately clear moment of confrontation.

The events that shook the entire edifice of white South Africa, and threw into stark relief the notion of total revolution, began with relative inconspicuousness. A group of Soweto junior high school students at a single school protested the use

of Afrikaans (the official language of the oppressors) as a medium of instruction. The revolt of high school students against the enforcement of learning in the Boer language was significant in itself. It marked, from the outset, a highly advanced struggle to the extent that it was a rejection of the colonisation of consciousness which triggered off the insurrection, even when so many other material reasons for resistance existed.

Initially, however, the Soweto student protest followed the traditional defeatist lines of oppositional politics: the students boycotted classes. But in a community such as Soweto, where any contestation immediately brings down upon itself the entire repressive apparatus, symbolic protest cannot be contained to the symbol, but must overflow into the realm of real struggle. For a community that is all too well acquainted with lumpen criminality and with unrelenting brutality on a daily basis, violence is always a ready-at-hand implement to pit against the contradictions of daily life. The striking students were no exception. Not for them the “ponderous” problem of morality and constraint. A teacher who ignored student demands was stabbed by screwdriver-wielding youths. Police were stoned. Two government officials were killed by a young man from Soweto.

In a matter of days the students had gained the support of their parents, and had coerced the teachers into backing their demands. The authorities still refused to concede. Afrikaans remained as a medium of instruction.

At this point the confrontation between the students and the state (in the institutionalised form of the school) was contained to, at the most, a handful of campuses. How was the transformation made so that these grievances ignited the fury of all black South Africa? Those who sought the answer in the form of an effective and extensive centralised organization — be they the South African state on the search for scapegoats, or the international humanitarian conscience on the search for superstars — were in for a rude surprise. (Eventually the South African state was able to fabricate its scapegoats whom the international opposition was then able to turn into superstars. Thus symbiotically, the state and its pseudo-opposition succeeded in fooling themselves and almost everybody else except the real participants in the struggle, by recreating the events that began on June 16, in their own image.)

But there were no leaders — only a handful of militant individuals (prior to June 16), inspired by their frustration in the face of unyielding authority, who with the help of friends set out to organise something, the content of which, let alone the consequences, they were in no position to anticipate.

A group of students from Orlando West Junior High School — the first school to boycott classes — and some of their friends from other schools such as Morris Isaacson High School — as yet unaffected by the Afrikaans issue — arranged a general demonstration in protest of the state’s design to use the language of the oppressor as a language of instruction.

Once again the tactics, the form of protest — a demonstration — was a symbolic one, albeit more dangerous, since demonstrations of any kind in South Africa are, by statute, punishable offences. The organisers of the demonstration — the embryo of a later-to-be self-proclaimed leadership — proceeded to visit all local schools to gather support.

The response of the Soweto students who attended that demonstration on June 16 far exceeded the expectations of the organisers. As opposed to the anticipated couple of thousand demonstrators expected by the organisers, about 30,000 students gathered at Orlando West High School.

The placards carried by those gathered already portended things to come. There were slogans not only denouncing Afrikaans and Bantu Education, but such slogans as: “Power,” “Smash the system,” “Away with Vorster,” “We’ll fight until total liberation.”

In festive mood the students took their protest to the streets. Inevitably they were confronted by the brute force of the South African state, who, by ruse of history, understood the implications of the students’ actions even more clearly than most of the students themselves were able to at that time. Without warning the police opened fire on the singing and marching students. The students at the front of the procession began to retreat, but their flight was halted by the act of one person. One young woman stood her ground, then defiantly walked towards the police shouting: “Shoot me!” Inspired by this incredible act — so incredible that the police did not shoot — the students’ retreat turned into a regroupment and frenzied counterattack. Rocks were torn from the ground and hurled at the police. After a second volley of shots had left more students dead and wounded, the leadership suddenly reappeared, in the form of one Tsietsi Mashinini, who stood up on an overturned vehicle and exhorted his fellow students to disperse. He was promptly forced to scuttle when the students turned their rocks on him. While the leadership was thus “left in the bush part three,” so was their newfound style of contestation — demonstration; for the students did disperse, not to seek refuge at home from “inevitable” suicide, as the self-proclaimed leadership had urged, but to rampage through the streets of Soweto in a potlatch of destruction.

Within days spontaneous rioting had broken out in every major area of the country. The South African blacks launched a vicious attack on apartheid, commodities and state power. The original grievance was quickly superseded, not because it was insignificant, but because the extremity of the insurrection put everything else in question along with it.

By August 1976, the white state was being forced to retreat on all fronts.

- Almost all schools had been attacked and many had been burnt down. The students were in almost daily confrontation with the police.

- Almost every beerhall in the black townships had been razed to the ground.
- Collaborators within the townships had been severely attacked. Not a single “respectable” black community figure was able to come forward as mediator.
- High school students and young “ex-thugs” prevented workers from going to work in Johannesburg, threatening taxi-drivers, blocking trains and sabotaging railroads. Workers quickly responded, and even after coercion had abated, strikes in Johannesburg and in Cape Town were 80–100% effective. Some of the workers who went to work went, not because they were intimidated by the system, but in order to sabotage white-owned technology and commodities.
- Coloureds and Indians had been drawn into the struggle, thus bridging an historical gap among the oppressed that had existed for generations.
- The Bophutatswana (a government-created black “homeland”) houses of parliament had been razed to the ground. All government appointed black leaders were in danger of losing their lives. Many lost their houses.
- Numerous black policemen had fled the townships. Several were killed. After nightfall one-time “lumpen criminals” joined with students and workers to attend to community needs.
- The worker stay-aways drew the adult population into the struggle. Before then they would leave to work in the white cities in the early morning and return after nightfall, while the students squared off against the state. During the stay-aways, the workers were drawn into the confrontation, being forced by the sheer magnitude of the bitter struggle to join the youth in their battle against the system.

For the remainder of 1976 and through to June of 1977, violence continued across the country. Within four months of June 16, about two hundred black communities had been swept along by the tide of revolution. Major areas like Soweto, Guguletu, New Brighton, etc, are still shaken at times by new revolts.

Let the moralists and the humanitarians pretend the students were always peace-loving, and mere victims of the violence. The events in South Africa have exploded that insipid myth. In a situation in which state violence is institutionalised on such an overwhelming scale, one affirms one’s humanity not by “turning the other cheek” and suffering with dignity, but by willfully and consciously accepting one’s share of violence and by understanding that brute systematic force can only be destroyed by the creative violence of the masses.

In June 1977, the executive of a student organisation, whose credibility as a vanguard emerged out of the hero and/or agitator seeking of the South African press, was detained by the South African police. The recent trial of these individuals along with a great many others of the same type are important to note, for by means of these sham efforts of justice the South African state has attempted to delineate in time a quasi-official ending to the period of open class struggle in South Africa. The logic is: *arrest the leaders, arrest the revolution*. This official self-delusion of the state is mimicked by many of its opponents in exile. The exile's lament, in spite of his real anguish and homesickness, his glum belief that "the revolution has been suppressed again," is pitifully vacuous. It is designed only to convince his listeners that despite his present passivity he remains committed to a struggle in which his past participation is often very dubious anyway.

But the struggle has not been suppressed as is witnessed by the consistent reports of unrest and sporadic violence in the South African press. Such events *underline* the ongoing ferment that sustains the revolutionary spirit from day to day throughout South Africa.

The Soweto Students Representative Council

"The repulsive absurdity of certain hierarchies and the fact that the whole strength of commodities is directed blindly and automatically towards their protection, leads us to see that every hierarchy is absurd."

— Situationist International, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacular Commodity Economy" (1965)

If any organisation had grounds on which to ascribe itself a vanguard role in the 1976/77 period of the struggle, it was the Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC). The SSRC, which emerged from the zealous superstar scouting of the South African press more than anything else, has since then laid firm claim to the dubious honour of the avant-garde party. Internationally this claim has been contested by the old spinster/huckster organisations: the African National Congress (ANC), the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). At home in South Africa, and among exiles in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, the bidding of the old league nationalist-Stalinists have largely fallen on deaf ears. Unfortunately not so the pretensions of the careerists who were one-time leaders of the SSRC and who now parade under the title of the "Third Force." There are many exiled students who seem quite contented to submit to the spectacle of their self-styled leadership and titillate themselves with the memory of their past par-

ticipation in the struggle. Too bad for those in search of a shepherd that the hunt for a vanguard party will only find a fleeting shadow.

As for the leadership of the “Third Force,” it is one of the most hideous hierarchical freaks ever spawned by revolutionary experience, and history has never been lacking in grotesque examples. Concocted in the fashion of a passively consumable item, at a time when its later consumers were far from idle, it had to wait for exile before it could raise its ugly head. From outside South Africa the “Third Force” has joined the ANC and PAC in perpetuating the self-same myths that have always crippled proletarian struggle, and even indulges in the same ruthless and coercive tactics when it comes to dealing with others who do not subscribe to its own stupidity, and when it comes to expanding its tiny ranks.

The SSRC grew out of an organisation known as the South African Students Movement (SASM), although its relation to that organisation was extremely dubious. In the heat of the first week of the uprisings, a number of the earlier coordinators of the June 16 demonstration, wanting to lend legitimacy to their claims of leadership, hijacked the controls of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) organisation, SASM, from its elected executives who were based in Cape Town.

How could an open struggle that raged for almost two years, and spread the length and breadth of the country, involving at least two hundred cities or towns and hundreds of thousands of active participants, have been under the control of an *ad hoc* committee that only emerged full-fledged in August, almost two months after June 16, and a fortnight or so before its first selfappointed leadership went into exile?

All revolutionary history shows the part played in the defeat of popular struggle by the appearance of an ideology advocating popular struggle. Within the BCM the ideology of “mass action” lay latent almost from the start. With the uprisings that began in Soweto, the ideology of “mass action” found the SSRC as its vehicle and came to the fore. The black proletariat’s spontaneous organisation of its struggle assured its early successes; but this gave way to a second phase in which the “fifth column” worked from the inside in the form of the SSRC as the vanguard movement. The mass movement sacrificed its reality for the shadow of its defeat.

Even though the SSRC did have widespread support amongst the Soweto high school students and gained international recognition, to justify it on the strength of its allegiance is to miss the point. Popularity of a hierarchical organisation does not condone the organisation, but exposes the degree to which the consciousness of its supporters has been colonised.

The most important point to recognise is that the SSRC owed its reputation to the very organisation of South African daily life, to institutions compatible with apartheid and the white state, which the proletariat in action was out to destroy. It was the press that gave it a name both literally and metaphorically. It was an

intellectually intimidated community both at home and abroad which was highly susceptible to advertisable commodities that gave it pride of place on the stage of revolution.

Inside Soweto the SSRC's ability to stabilise itself and to advance its vanguard aspirations at the very time that the struggle intensified, and when all other organisations were key Black Consciousness organisations (ANC and PAC having all but disappeared), is not testimony to its indispensability. On the contrary in Soweto the SSRC enjoyed a deep degree of very bourgeois respectability, being recognised by moderates (who highly condemned the folly of the struggle), as the only visible and legal organ still operable, and which seemed to be the only possible starting point for some sort of detente. High ranking officials in the South African Police shared the same opinion.

A concrete example of the SSRC's moderation is to be found in one of its press releases in October, 1976. In this statement the SSRC leadership condemned anonymous leaflets which had been circulated in Soweto and which incited people to violence. Small wonder that as a result senior police officers in Johannesburg as much as thanked the SSRC for its collaboration, when the police issued a press statement immediately afterwards, in which they said that they felt that the township would be peaceful and lawabiding because the SSRC had repudiated the leaflets.

In acknowledging its authority, the police confirmed the SSRC's legitimacy. To be legitimised by one's immediate enemy is a sure sign of one's fundamental conciliation.

A look at the organisational structure of the SSRC is helpful in that it exposes with clarity the alienated and stultified social relations that characterised the "vanguard of Soweto." The selfappointed executive, dictatorially controlled by its chairman, deliberately distanced itself from its supporters until a group of several students under the chairman's direct control were elevated to the position of national leaders. The more their reputation grew, even amongst the students themselves, the less they participated in the struggle. Their activities revolved around the traditional and banal specialisations of the administrative and the propagandistic, while the masses they pretended to lead were out on the streets in their thousands. Where the leadership avoids the line of battle, its claim as supreme leaders rebounds invariably upon itself in the form of ridicule at its own cowardice. Not surprising then that the great SSRC leadership steers its bastard "party" from the safe helm of the Nigerian state.

In exile there are a barrage of students who in many cases have fled hot from the struggle at home. Everywhere they are captives of the ideologies of the world their revolution has demanded they destroy. There are those who have joined the old liberation organisations and sit in army camps in Stalinist countries throughout the world, being fed the cynical lie of a victorious return. There are those who

still pay obeisance to the superficial power of the SSRC. They are merely museum pieces in different museums, all marked “revolutionary.” Everywhere revolutionaries, but what has happened to the revolution? Everywhere the same alienation is preponderant, everywhere the spectacular consumption of ideology, everywhere obedience to hierarchy and the veneration of the past. To hell with the ideological variations, and the different names and faces. Under all the rhetoric there is nothing.

For those students who have evaded the pitfalls of those of their peers who have made their unhappy ways into the voracious jaws of either ANC, PAC, or Third Force, there awaits another odious misconception — the pitiful glorification and mimicry of the defeated revolutionary projects of the past. Once courageous participants in their own revolutionary history, they now content themselves with being dazzled by the pseudo-revolutionary glitter of the revolutions that have been lost, invariably in dedication to the solid temple of names radical — Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, Guevara, Cabral and all the rest.

Black Consciousness and the Black Consciousness Movement

Ever since June, 1976, much has been said of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).

The more perceptive, less dogmatic cretins of the left, who ever-predictably impute vanguard explanations to every struggle, have used BCM as a surrogate vanguard to explain the events of 1976/77, seeing that there is not a single established party which could credibly fit the bill. Some even go so far as to blame the continued existence of the whole South African state on the fact that BCM was not sufficiently elitist, professional, organised: bureaucratic. Some take the opposite tack, and announce the BCM’s vagueness as its greatest virtue: it is promoted in the image of a non-sectarian proletarian base up for grabs on the market of international constituencies.

It is high time that the miserable use to which the BCM has been put ever since 1976/77 be put to an end, that justice be done to its achievements. Which is to say, the BCM’s shortcomings must now be *criticized pitilessly*. Its principal contribution to the struggle in South Africa is, at this point in time, mere dead weight; the more it is eulogised, the more a critical analysis of an experience laden with revolutionary lessons is suppressed. It is not enough to heap shit on the self-serving actions of those who praise it and of the exiles who continue to act in its name: the ideas and

the activities that gave Black Consciousness and the BCM their life must be held responsible for allowing room for all the post-1977 BCM bullshit.

The main accomplishment of Black Consciousness had very little to do with elaborating the necessary goals and methods of the South African revolution; its main accomplishment was much more to leave in the dust the false goals and methods of the struggles of the forties and fifties, and at the same time to expose the ineffectual strategies of the traditional “liberation” organisations.

Because of the conditions forced upon it by the state, Black Consciousness deliberately side-stepped the whole question of what in fact its goals were. Pronouncing itself as revolutionary could serve no purpose other than to bring down the wrath of the police. To openly favour violence or to attempt to lead people into any direct confrontation with the state could only have led to failure. On the other hand, although BCM claimed itself to be nonviolent, it did not engage in the impotent acts of civil disobedience practiced in a previous generation by the ANC and PAC (as well as by the American civil rights movement). “Non-violence” was simply a means of self-defence; it certainly was not a strategy, as is shown by any perusal of Black Consciousness literature, which constantly stresses the absurdity of expecting any significant changes by the state in response to moral pressure.

Organisationally, Black Consciousness took the entire logic of Leninism — the “enlightened” party (“theory”) and the passive base (“practice”) — and turned it upside-down. Everything was staked on the activity of the masses at the level of their everyday life. This was extremely ingenious and absolutely necessary: not only as a means of self-defence against the State, which would, as a matter of course, seek out and destroy the leadership of any “revolutionary” group, but for the advance of the struggle itself.

As an organisational framework, the BCM had only one practical goal: the popularisation of the philosophy of Black Consciousness, either by word or by practical example. What is at the core of this philosophy? That the individual black man must recognise clearly his situation, overcome his intimidation, and *decide upon his own solution*. That in other words he put himself in a position where he has no need for an organisation.

The political groups that came into being out of Black Consciousness — most significantly the Black People’s Convention (BPC), South African Students Organisation (SASO), South African Students Movement (SASM), Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU), Black Community Programmes (BCP) — expressed the fundamental absurdity of vanguard organisation in South Africa — and in fact are a concrete case of the reality of avant-garde organisations in general. As organisations, these groups had no reason for existence other than to exist. They had no role to play as mediators between the masses and Power (the South African white rulers don’t negotiate with blacks), and in any case rejected that role. They had no role as medi-

ators between theory and practice because they did not really have a theory — or, if you will, their theory was that the theory of struggle is made by those in struggle, not by a leadership elite. They took up the role of mediators against mediation.

The BCM did not really break with the logic of a hierarchical, avant-garde type organisation, but simply put off the question because of national circumstances. This is evident in the umbrella structure of the Black Consciousness Movement. While dealing with the “unorganised” blacks, the BCM heralded the *individual*; but when dealing in organisational terms, it put forward the ideology of the federation of autonomous *organisations*. A distinct hierarchy of those “organised” and those unorganised is implied. For those who are unorganised, the essential referent is “the system’ But when one becomes organised, the referent becomes a matter of building the organisation. The organisation does not spring from a determined agreement of individuals on common activity, from defining what is really organizable in their activity, but rather acts to publicise itself — the organisation.

Black Consciousness, defined in as really broad and really vague terms as it was, had run, from the start, the risk of becoming an apologist for all the actions taken by those who claimed to be a part of it: stooges like Nthatho Motlana and Gatsha Buthelezi still pose as Black Consciousness advocates to legitimise their campaigns for better scraps at the white man’s trough. At the time when the best of Black Consciousness theory was put into practice *in the streets* (and when the BCM organisations were left in the dust) — 1976/77 — the use of Black Consciousness as an apologia for specialists became the rule rather than the exception. The movement which claimed to have “analysed, assessed and defined the black community’s needs, aspirations, ideals and goals” was never so stagnant as in the period when the black South African community was starting to do these things for *itself*.

Certainly, the point is not — according to the faded Leninist dream — that the BCM was not there in 1976/77 to “lead” the struggle. Nor is the point that certain BCM members did not make important contributions in the struggle itself: some undeniably did (though one has seen in this and the preceding chapter the quality of the contributions made by others!) The point is rather that when it came to analysis, the remaining spokesmen of the BCM showed themselves capable of originality only in the sense of choosing which clichés most gloriously describe the struggle and their own participation in it. *Nationalism* re-emerged, less as a developed ideology, than out of wholesale approval of *everything* done by their black countrymen. Criticism of all but the most obvious targets — whites and sell-outs — became scarcer than threelegged dogs.

The conspicuous decline of the BCM into isolated groups of radical cheerleaders did not stem from a sudden eclipse of intelligence, and even less from the absence of things to criticize, analyse and precise. Rather, it stemmed from the fact that a

radical analysis of conditions by the black proletariat in action necessarily implied the correction of numerous aspects — theoretical as well as practical — of *Black Consciousness itself*; and it was precisely before the critique of its own house that Black Consciousness trembled.

With the visible return of open struggle to South Africa, Black Consciousness was confronted with the choice of either *shattering its entire petrified organisational edifice* or of denying that this organisational edifice was both an edifice and was petrified. Faced with the amazing capacity of the masses for spontaneous organisation the BCM chose the alternative of presenting the *movement in the streets* as though it was simply an adjunct to the Black Consciousness Movement, with a capital “M” for movement. The distinction between BCM leaders and the masses — a distinction made in practice by the BCM leaders — was concealed by pretending that everyone who acted intelligently in struggle was an honorary leader of a “movement” which had been left behind. The *real history* made by the masses was hierarchically accorded a *substitute history* — the history of mass support for the BCM; and it was this substitute history that the partisans of BCM proclaimed as the black proletariat’s essence and truth. “Mass support,” the BCM’s own corrective to hierarchical leadership, in fact became a rubric by which the really hierarchical leaders of the BCM affirmed their success and their authority in just about everything. This “success” and “authority” became an abstract standard for *measuring all struggle*.

Thus the Black Consciousness Movement found a refuge in the *myth* of its power, which was inversely proportional to its practical effectiveness. The further it became separated from practical contestation, the more important the myth became. The BCM never claimed to be a monolithic organisation; in actuality it was premised on the fact that it was not a monolithic organisation. The myth that Black Consciousness incorporated the activity of every rebellious black South African was exactly what became the semantic substitute for the monolithic organisation toward which the BCM logically tended, but whose inevitable symptoms of stultification the BCM leadership was sophisticated enough to want to avoid for as long as possible.

In mid-1979, however, the tireless bureaucratic work-mules in various BCM bureaucracies, realising that the ideology of mass support could no longer suffice now that the organisations were banned in South Africa and visibly decaying in exile, steered the BCM to its logical conclusion. The reality of organisation as a substitute for real struggle could no longer be diffused, and instead was affirmed openly. The BCM was made into an official liberation movement, with headquarters in Gaborone, and chapters in London, Bonn and New York. And the ideological *raison d’être* for its existence? To mediate, but not in a traditional leninist style, but rather in the wishy-washy fashion of a UN peace-keeping force. To mediate

not between theory and practice, or between the masses and power, but to mediate between the ANC and the PAC. From the sublime to the most absolute form of cretinism! All the worms have crawled out of the corpse. The BCM's official proclamation as an organisation spells out unfailingly that in its true colours as ideology and hierarchy, it is an enemy of real black proletarian struggle in South Africa.

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What 'Appen to South Africa? 1976–2005. Defiance to Apartheid, Neoliberalism,
and Recuperators of Defiance
2006

Retrieved on March 18th, 2009 from zinelibrary.info
Published by One Thousand Emotions

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