

# DIRECTIONS DIRECTIONS DIRECTIONS



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*Reeling under the sanctions imposed by the community of nations and heightened internal struggles, the South African white government has begun the historic process of dismantling apartheid. The various democratic forces within the country and their aspirations to build a non-racial society still seem distant. Professors Eric Louw and Keyan Tomaselli from the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies at the University of Natal in Durban describe the turbulent situation in South Africa in vivid detail.*

## S. African Politics: Mapping the Constituency

By P. Eric Louw and Keyan Tomaselli

President F.W. de Klerk's opening address to Parliament on 2 February 1990 radically transformed South African politics. The government unbanned the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan African Congress (PAC), and the South African Communist Party (SACP). It lifted the state of emergency which had been in place since 1986. In the year that followed, De Klerk's National Party (NP) occupied a center-right position, while the ANC located itself left of center.

Ranged against the NP was an alliance which consisted of the ANC, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the SACP. The United Democratic Front (UDF), formed in 1983, was the *de facto* internal wing of the ANC. This coalition advocated a multi-class and multi-ethnic struggle, the end-goal of which was to be a non-racial society in which wealth would be equitably redistributed. The Front was itself an alliance of hundreds of affiliate organizations. The Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) emerged during 1989 in response to government attacks on the UDF and COSATU. First seen on a poster, the acronym MDM succinctly encapsulated the popular democratic discourse generated within COSATU and the UDF, the twin motors of the MDM. The government could not ban the MDM because it did not formally exist.

By the end of 1989, the economy was beginning to crumble under the costs of the civil war, the debt incurred in the

military occupation of Namibia and Southern Angola, a crisis incurred through overborrowing from overseas banks, and a massive flow of capital out of the country. Sanctions were the wild card which threatened to trigger a major financial collapse.

A shift in strategy was required if a semblance of white power was to be salvaged. The Cabinet realized that some sort of alliance between the NP and the African nationalists within the ANC was a more viable option than continued conflict in an unwinnable war. The collapse of Soviet power had lessened the NP's fear of communism, while events in Eastern Europe forced the ANC into a negotiating position, and to abandon the armed struggle.

By the beginning of 1990 the Congress alliance had secured the largest constituency in the country. Most analysts predicted that South Africa's political future would be ANC-dominated. Though the NP's public image had dramatically improved, the Party had still to shake off the legacy of apartheid. The other players, both within and outside of Parliament, had neither the support nor the power of the NP or ANC. However, during 1990 the political landscape was radically transformed by a most extraordinary shakedown of the contending parties. By March 1991, De Klerk's reformed NP was the closest it had ever been to securing a workable formula for entrenching its "white" constituency in power (albeit in a "multi-racial" guise). In

contrast, the Congress alliance, despite the size of its support, had failed to organize either itself or its constituency. The NP thus accumulated power by default. The Party also proved very skillful in outmaneuvering the ANC by "releasing" reform in stages and thereby capturing the world's headlines, notwithstanding the attention demanded by events in the Gulf. The political agenda thus remained under the control of the ruling hegemony. The ANC failed to capitalize on issues that the UDF and MDM had so effectively used to mobilize their constituencies.

How to integrate the ANC, UDF, COSATU, and SACP in terms of organization, strategy, and goals proved difficult in the new context heralded by the government's unanticipated shift of policy in early 1990. COSATU, in particular, began to distance itself from the "politicians." Unionists argued that an *independent* trade labor movement would serve their socialist aims more effectively than direct involvement in an ANC-dominated alliance. Further, UDF activists were often excluded from positions reserved for returning exiles in the new ANC structure internal to the country. This was an error because it marginalized and alienated many UDF activists who had extensive experience and success in developing grassroots political organization inside the country prior to the ANC's return. The former exiles lacked the internal constituencies so painstakingly developed by UDF organizers after 1983. Not surprisingly, the 1,600 delegates (representing grassroots sentiment) at the ANC's December 1990 Consultative Conference expressed concern that the existing ANC leadership was "getting it wrong."

The ANC is experiencing enormous difficulties in developing mechanisms for communicating with, and organizing its potential constituency, and for communicating beyond its constituency. A number of factors gave rise to this. First, the marginalization of key activists impeded organizational capacity. Second, the ANC's constituency and political structures failed to adjust from a liberation struggle to a new style of politics suitable for normal political interaction. Chanting "Viva Viva" at every opportunity is no substitute for basic organizational work and the need to actively build support. Third, by losing the "image game" through a refusal to speak to the political center through tactical use of appropriate discourse and choice of media, the ANC lost much middle ground support. This support had been forged during the 1980s to a Congress-position by UDF activists working in the political middle-ground. As a result, the Congress was generally outmaneuvered by the NP both locally and internationally.

The ANC had relied heavily upon the Soviet Bloc for financial support. Once this was terminated, the Congress experienced enormous problems funding its organizational programs. Most seriously, sections of the ANC's constituency are beyond control. "Socially psychopathic" groups and individuals crossing all races and political positions have been bred by a decade of brutal civil war. Black township youth, in particular, are highly radicalized, alienated from all authority, and prone to extreme political violence. Further, some disruption of the ANC by right-wing elements within the military and police who want to sabotage reform has consistently undermined peace talks

among the warring factions. In other words, the state also lost control of sections of its security forces.

The NP has no choice but to press on with reforms as it faces the prospect of defeat in another whites-only election. Currently, the government seems to be repeating its previous strategy developed with regard to the Namibian Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). This created a multi-racial coalition of conservative-centrist parties. The center-right DTA (with South African assistance) won considerable support in the 1989 Namibian elections. The NP apparently hope for a similar success in South Africa. The Party's biggest problem in 1991 is to entice credible black partners into such an alliance. Its most likely allies, such as Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party, the "colored" Labor Party and the "white" liberal Democratic Party, cannot deliver the huge black constituencies De Klerk needs. However, De Klerk has several important factors on his side. First is a pool of highly skilled political organizers within a functioning national network. Second is access to financial resources from the business sector (which wants to prevent the ANC from gaining power, and which supports De Klerk's pro-"free enterprise" position). Fourth is a generally sympathetic press and a totally supportive broadcasting network. Fifth, the ANC's organizational weakness translates into an NP strength. And lastly, because the ANC has lost the political middle-ground, it alienated most of the liberal English press, particularly with regard to the ANC's early calls for nationalization of certain industries, and its refusal to condemn the abduction and intimidation of witnesses testifying against Winnie Mandela in her trial.

The alternative-progressive newspapers like *New Nation* and *South*, read by black leftists, remain supportive of the ANC, but these papers are not read by whites, or non-leftist blacks or Indians. The social-democrat press, the *Weekly*

#### Legend

ANC: African National Congress  
 AWB: Afrikaner Weerstand Beweeging  
 AZAPO: Azanian Peoples Organization  
 BCM: Black Consciousness Movement  
 COSATU: Congress of South African Trade Unions  
 CP: Conservative Party  
 DTA: Democratic Turnhalle Alliance  
 HNP: Herstigte Nasionale Party  
 MDM: Mass Democratic Movement  
 NP: National Party  
 PAC: Pan African Congress  
 SACP: South African Communist Party  
 UDF: United Democratic Front  
 WOSA: Workers Organization of South Africa

*Mail* and *Vrye Weekblad*, which have mainly white intellectual readerships, however, are becoming increasingly critical of the ANC's inability to resolve its internal contradictions, and its failure to respond to dynamics ripped open by the government's unbanning of the organization.

Though the NP and ANC are the key political players, there are also other contenders. The Pan African Congress (PAC) has outflanked the ANC on the left through its radical, somewhat Maoist, rhetorical posturing—it accused the ANC of “selling out.” The PAC originally broke away from the ANC in the early 1960s because it claimed the ANC was dominated by whites. The PAC's policy is to “intensify the struggle,” including armed struggle. The slogan popularized by the PAC's most radical (youth) wing is “one settler, one bullet.” (“Settler” means “white.”) The PAC demands a return of “Africa to the Africans” (or “Africanism”) and refused to participate in any multi-party conference with the NP. Whether or not the PAC has the organizational capacity to implement its stated policy of mass action has yet to be demonstrated. Lacking a financial resource-base, with a shortage of skilled political organizers, and no media, it seems unlikely that the PAC will be able to translate its rhetoric into action.

The Workers Organization of South Africa (WOSA) is a left-wing group comprised mostly of middle class intellectuals in Cape Town. WOSA see themselves as “independent socialists.” They hold that the SACP is unable to articulate a socialist position because of “ANC domination,” and argue that the ANC has been co-opted by NP machinations. WOSA has no intention of organizing as a political party to oppose the ANC but acts as a small vocal left-wing “conscience” for the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance. In this role, WOSA seems set to exercise an influence out of all proportion to its size.

***BCM combined American Black Power principles with the Marxism of the Algerian Franz Fanon.***

The Azanian Peoples Organization (AZAPO) represents the remnants of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Closely associated with the ideas of Steve Biko, BCM was the central internally-based anti-apartheid force during the 1970s. BCM combined American Black Power principles with the Marxism of the Algerian Franz Fanon. The basic BCM position was that South Africa needed a “black revolution” from which whites would be excluded. However, during the early 1980s many BCM cadres were won over to the UDF's “non-racial” position. The importance of BCM thus began to fade. Then, at the end of the 1980s, many of the remaining BCM cadres joined the reviving “Africanist” wing of the PAC. AZAPO is all that remains of BCM, its purist position having cut it off from possible alliances. For this reason AZAPO is not at present a real political force.

The Inkatha Freedom Party grew out of Buthelezi's political organization based in the Kwa-Zulu bantustan. Buthelezi used his position as Chief-Minister of this homeland to build an impressive power-base on the back of an economic patronage network: the apartheid-based bantustan structures (such as the

Kwa-Zulu Education department, police and civil service) were staffed with Inkatha supporters. Inkatha represents a Zulu-nationalist constituency, mostly located in rural Natal. A violent conflict which began in the early 1980s raged between Inkatha and non-Inkatha based groupings, especially the UDF, COSATU and ANC. This conflict has essentially been a clash between the African traditionalism of Inkatha's constituency on the one hand and the modernizing impulses of the ANC's constituency on the other. Inkatha will play a significant role in the future South Africa as a key component in De Klerk's DTA-type center-right alliance.

The far-right consists of a fragmented set of parties which split from the NP over the past two decades. The largest of these is the Conservative Party (CP), and is the official opposition in the whites-only parliament. The CP's policy is to return to grand apartheid as formulated by Hendrik Verwoerd in the 1950s. The Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP) (“Reconstituted National Party”) represents a more openly, but miniscule, neo-fascist constituency. The Afrikaner Weerstand Beweeging (AWB) (“Afrikaner Resistance Movement”), highly publicized in the US media, is a para-military neo-fascist movement. It has close ties to the the HNP and some links with the CP, and has organized armed commandos to fight for “white liberation.” Although the AWB represents a very small constituency, it is likely to become a serious security problem as it has support from significant numbers in the state's security forces. Another small far-right group is the Boerstaat Party (“Party for a Boer State”). This group is campaigning for an Afrikaner homeland to become independent from a non-racial South Africa. They went so far as to buy up a whole town during 1991 and expel all blacks from their property.

The far-right represents a significant factor in “white politics.” In a whites-only election they would constitute a threat to De Klerk. However, within the total framework of South African politics they represent a small, underfinanced, beleaguered minority with little capacity to seriously put apartheid back on the agenda.

The future battle will be between the ANC and NP. Both have to push forward with the reform process because neither can return to their old positions. De Klerk abandoned significant sections of the NP's former white constituency, while the ANC has lost its support base from which to wage an armed struggle. Both of the main parties are thus forced to make a deal with the other. Hence, the shape of South Africa beyond apartheid is likely to be a compromise, and even a possible “working alliance” between their two agendas.

#### FURTHER READING

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