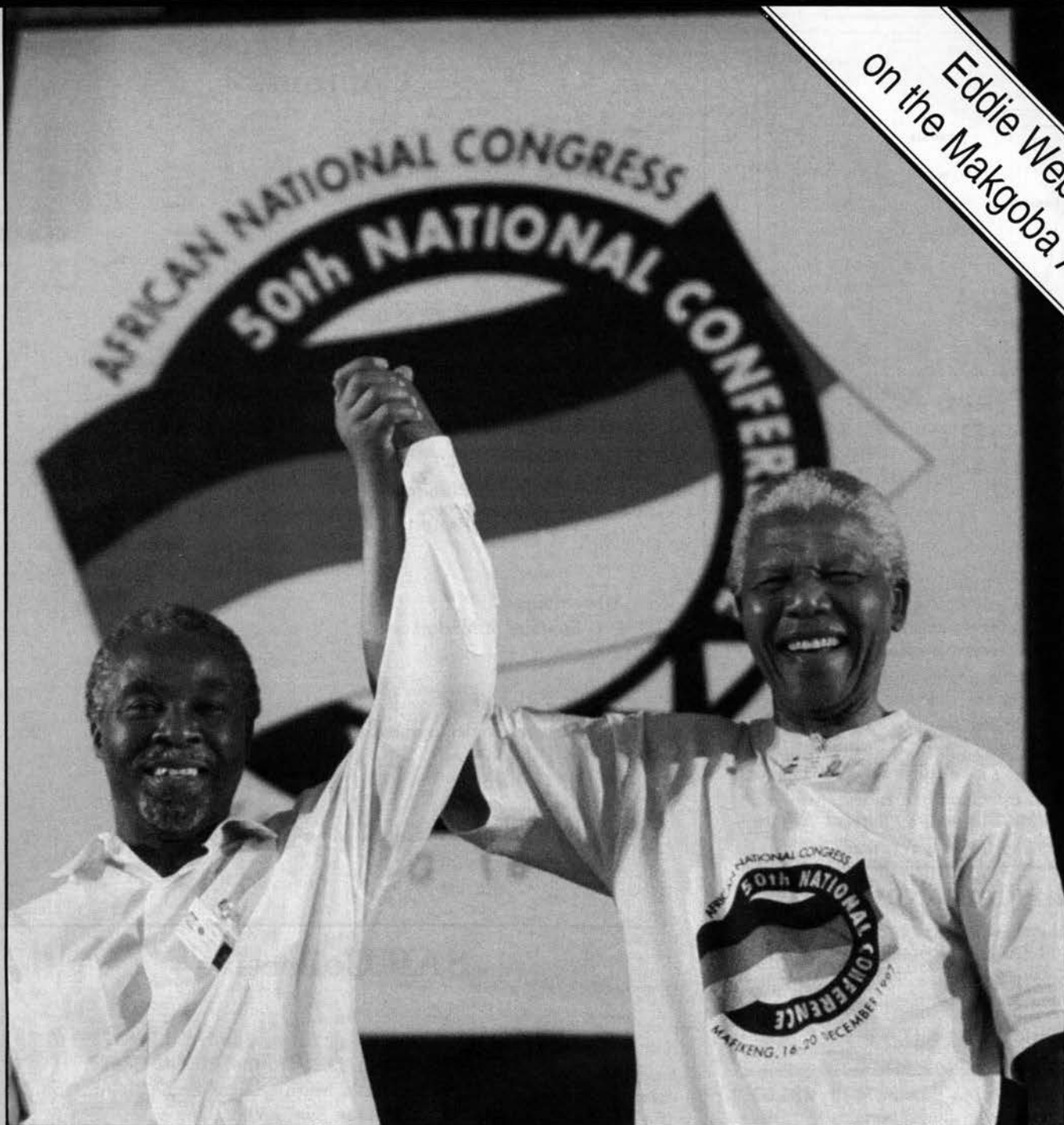


# Southern Africa REPORT

Vol. 13 No. 2

March 1998

Eddie Webster  
on the Makgoba Affair



The ANC's 50th Conference

## What Power to the People?

price: \$4.50

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## Southern Africa REPORT

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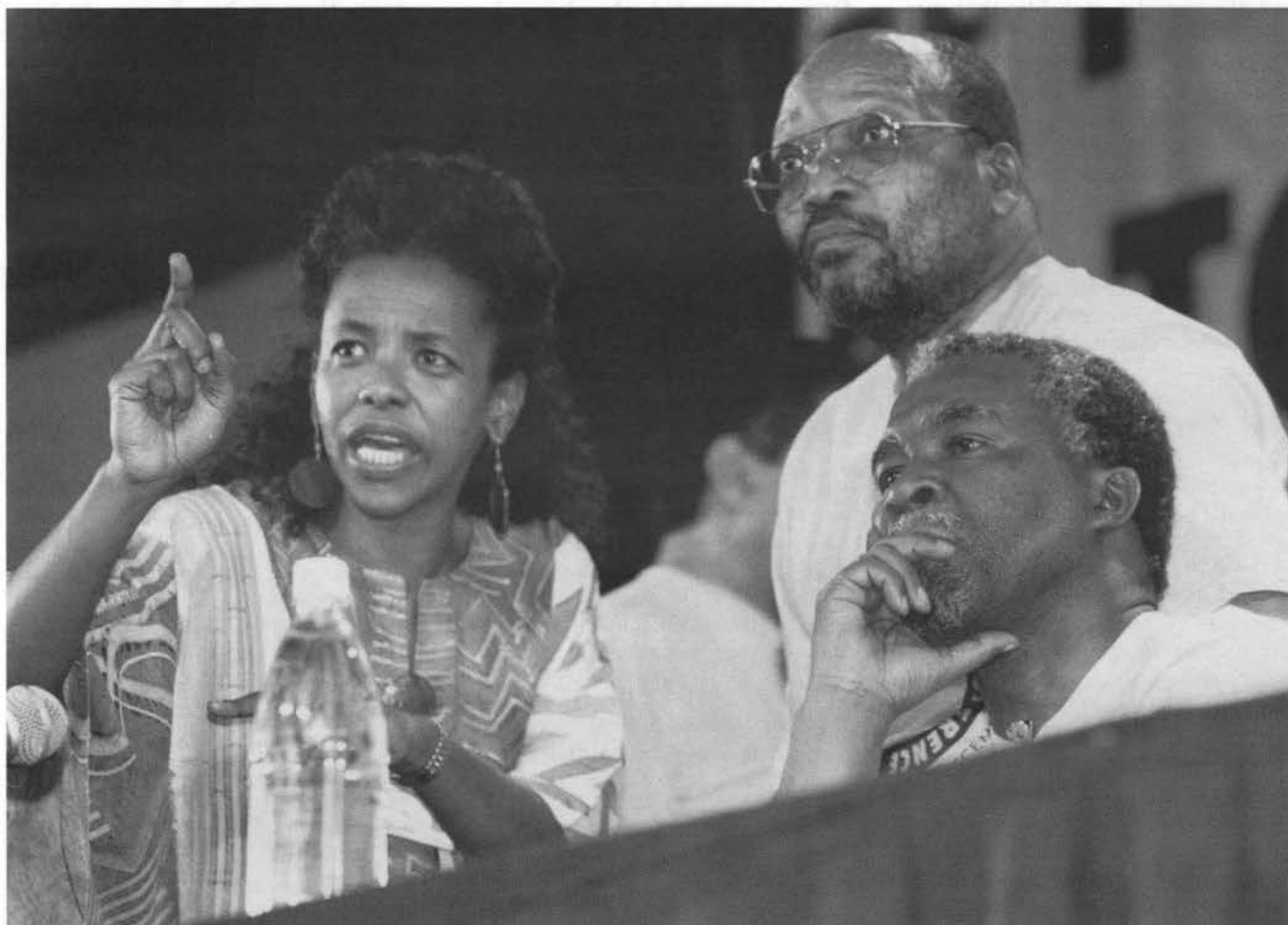
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*Thabo Mbeki (seated) listens to Cheryl Carolus and Jacob Zuma during opening day of the 50th Conference*

## Of Spectres, and Harangues

A spectre is haunting South Africa. A statement by Thabo Mbeki, late last year, catches the tone (from his interview with *Die Burger*, as paraphrased by *Southscan*, November 7, 1997): "South Africa could have race riots in three to five years time if the living standard of black people had not improved. He warned whites that they would have to make sacrifices and asked them to emulate the response of the Chinese in Malaysia, who had voluntarily agreed to a distribution of their wealth." Furthermore, "business leaders should sub-

ordinate their commercial interests to the necessity to give black people a share in the economy." Change is not a threat, Mbeki stated; rather, "too little change is a threat"!

Such statements are double-edged, of course, and potentially ambiguous in their implications. On the one hand, some critics have seen Mbeki as, first and foremost, seeking through them to further facilitate the advance of African entrepreneurs into the circles of capitalist privilege, a modest Africanization of the established economic system, as it were, in the interests of a small

but relatively powerful stratum of the emergent black elite. On the other hand, one cannot doubt that Mbeki and others are aware of larger circles of discontent in the society and of the vast numbers of people whose aspirations for socio-economic change in the wake of apartheid have been far more cruelly thwarted than have those of any aspirant black bourgeoisie. Indeed, *Southscan* takes Mbeki's warning to be "the most direct indication to date of the fears which now prevail in government at the low levels of growth and consequent job creation

and the social instability this may foster."

True – a point we return to below – one can doubt whether the ANC's adoption of a broadly neo-liberal economic strategy can really be expected to ameliorate, rather than exacerbate, such problems. Nonetheless, it need come as no surprise that fear of similar spectres (alongside similar ambiguities about the appropriate response to them) were evoked by Nelson Mandela in his five-hour opening address to the ANC's recent 50th National Conference. This important conference is analyzed in depth in three articles at the heart of this issue of SAR. In particular, the opening address itself – at once valedictory and a sign-post to the ANC's post-Mandela future – is front and centre in each of these articles. We will therefore not attempt to summarize the speech here. Suffice to say that, as regards both this speech and their broader assessment of the conference, our author's perspectives differ widely, albeit in ways that we hope readers will find to be instructive.

Thus, Tom Lodge concludes his careful analysis of the events of the conference by noting, positively, its essentially unifying thrust and outcome. In contrast, Oupa Lehulere and Dale McKinley are far more critical in their shared concern (although from different points on the political compass) that socio-economic inequality was merely "handled," even stage-managed, as an issue at the conference, rather than dealt with in any serious way. In making this case, the latter both cite the relative ease with which GEAR, the ANC's neo-liberal economic strategy, was granted safe passage through the conference, somewhat in defiance of prior expectations as to what might transpire at Mafikeng. What none of the three authors (including Lodge) would claim, however, is that anything very radical in socio-economic terms occurred there.

You wouldn't know this from some of the coverage of the con-

ference generated elsewhere, however. Lodge cites, rather incredulously, the Independent's description of Mandela's speech as being "antiquated Marxist gibberish." Closer to home we find our very own (Toronto) *Globe and Mail* editorializing haughtily against "Mr. Mandela's harangue" (December 19, 1997). Noting that "the South African economy, the strongest in Africa, is owned and operated by whites" the *Globe* slates Mandela for "accusing (the white elite) of clinging to their privilege and conspiring to deny other races their rightful share of prosperity": "His remarks will only encourage those among the new generation of South African leaders who believe that white privilege is the country's main problem and that confiscation and retribution are the solution." "Pure foolishness," harrumph the editors.

Rick Salutin, the *Globe's* admirable house-radical columnist made one essential point about his paper's approach. As part of a critique of the *Globe's* more general "tendency to judge all good things from the standpoint of the rich" ("Of winners, losers and a not so merry Calvinist Christmas," December 26, 1997) Salutin reiterates the paper's reminder to Mandela that his economy is "owned and operated by whites." Salutin's response: "Operated? The mines? The farms? Earth to *Globe* editorial board!"

There's not even the most minimal sense of history in the *Globe's* formulation, of course. If political inequalities founded on racial authoritarianism weren't legitimate, why are socio-economic inequalities – arguably the starkest in the world – that were created by that same racial-capitalist order any more so, or any less worthy of redress? Perhaps, behind all this, lies the *Globe* editorialists' utopian faith – no surprise to faithful readers – in the benign workings of the market as offering some kind of solution to the inequality question. Or perhaps, as Salutin implies, they just don't

care: them as has, keeps. At best, one fears, there is a certain (intentional?) naivete as to just how deep seated and structural South Africa's socio-economic inequalities really are. True, "retribution" is not a particularly promising policy option for South Africa. "Redistribution" surely is.

South Africa's political leadership can't afford to be quite so smug as is the *Globe and Mail*: they can feel the hot breath of reality – those various spectres: race war? class war? or, as sometimes happens when vast inequalities go unredressed, further social disintegration? – breathing down their necks. And yet several of our authors seem to fear that (as hinted above) the ANC's own faith in the magic of the market may be just about as utopian as is that of the *Globe's* editorial writers. Whites to make sacrifices to help overcome the deep inequalities in South African society? But what meaning can that possibly have within the framework of a macro-economic policy choice – hands-off neo-liberalism – that is already producing, and at a fearsome pace, further inequalities along both class and racial lines.

Perhaps we're merely giving aid and comfort to the *Globe* editorialists by allowing our authors to so argue about the "benign" intentions (at least from what we take to be the editorialists' point of view) of the ANC. Cool it, fellas. God's in his counting-house, along with you and the ANC leadership, and all's right with the world. Moreover, the degree of unity of purpose manifested (Lodge) and/or schemed for (Lehulere, McKinley) at the ANC national conference might just hold.

But then again – and here compare recent events in Zimbabwe, the riots and other protests chronicled in this issue by Iden Wetherell and Patrick Bond – it might not. And that would be something for the *Globe and Mail* really to worry about.

SAR

## The ANC's 50th Conference A House of Many Mansions?



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Gertrude Shope (centre left) and Albertina Sisulu (centre right) at the opening session of the 50th Conference

### BY TOM LODGE

Tom Lodge is Professor and Head of the Department of Political Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The ANC's 50th conference, held in Mafikeng, December 16-20, 1997, will be remembered as the occasion on which Nelson Mandela abdicated his political authority to Thabo Mbeki, but otherwise it seemed to herald continuity rather than change. Neither expectations of an African nationalist challenge to leadership policies nor the predictions of a concerted left wing rejection of the government's fiscal orthodoxy proved to be accurate: the African-

ists were almost invisible and the left demonstrated its presence only in the leadership elections rather than in any debate or discussion. More on the mark when it came to prophecies was the ANC's Kwa-Zulu Natal deputy chairperson. Sibusiso Ndebele, who told a *Sowetan* journalist that the ANC would not find itself under siege at the old Boer war citadel: "Instead it will ... be celebrating" (*Sowetan*, 16/12/1997).

Any potential rebelliousness amongst delegates may have been deflected by Nelson Mandela's opening Presidential address which, however much it may have displeased ex-

ternal observers, certainly matched the mood of his audience. Reports from the provinces before the conference suggested widespread disappointment with the slow pace of government delivery over the last three years. Recent opinion polls have suggested that such sentiments are not simply confined to an activist minority; though other parties are not gaining support significantly the ANC's following seems to have been eroded by apathy. It took Mandela five hours to read an edited version of his valedictory speech, a collectively scripted oration. The content and phraseology of the speech closely reflected the substance of the

ANC's "Strategy and Tactics" circulated in draft several months before the conference. The speech can be taken as an authoritative expression of the political mind-set of Mbeki's future presidency.

### Mandela's speech

The first half of Mandela's speech was largely constituted by harsh invective against what he termed "the anti-democratic forces of counter revolution" ("President's Report, 50th National Conference," p.3).<sup>†</sup> These included "opponents of fundamental change" who "have sought to separate the goals of national reconciliation from the critical objective of social transformation" (p.3). "Various elements of the former ruling group" were conspiring in "a network" to promote a "campaign of destabilization" through weakening the ANC and its allies, through using crime to render the country ungovernable, and through eroding popular confidence in government (p.4). Members of such a network were located in the civil service but they were helped by "white parties" who had "essentially decided against the pursuit of a national agenda," "foreign funded NGOs" working "to corrode the influence of the movement," and "the bulk of the mass media" which had "set itself up as a force to oppose the ANC" (p.7).

Within the ANC's own constituency there were also problems caused by "students in higher education ... driven by self serving anarchist activism"; "infantile radicalism" directed against traditional (chiefly) leadership; corrupt or elitist "careerists within our ranks" (p.31). A scant five pages of the speech were taken up with a discussion of the government's reconstruction and development policy, beginning with a restatement of its commitment to reducing the pub-

<sup>†</sup> The various reports cited in this article have been published by the African National Congress under the collective title *All Power to the People* (Marshalltown, Johannesburg, 1997).

lic deficit. The main thrust of this section emphasized the necessity for "the deracialization of productive property" and the institution of a "system of social accountability for capital" through the establishment by the state of regulatory mechanisms to counteract the inequalities generated by globalization (pp.22-27).

Though the speech's authors were careful to buttress social criticism with supportive quotations



African National Congress

from such authorities as George Soros, Nelson Rockefeller and Lyndon Johnson this did not prevent foreign journalists attending the opening session from characterizing Mandela's arguments as "antiquated Marxist gibberish" (*The Independent*, London, 18/12/1997). To be sure, Marxists inside the conference hall may well have been pleased at Mandela's criticisms of the market, albeit criticisms filtered through the qualified language of international financiers [see, however, the accompanying article on the 50th conference by Dale McKinley in this issue - the editors]. But they may also have been disconcerted by his concluding remarks about the alliance.

Thus, while ostensibly reaffirming the ANC's continuing commit-

ment to a "further strengthening" of relations with its allies, he stated that such a commitment should acknowledge the existence of differences. "The SACP is a political formation which has a responsibility to mobilize for its own political support." How such a mobilization would relate "to the issues of the SACP's membership of the Progressive Alliance and the ANC's leadership of this Alliance are precisely the difficult questions which have to be answered" (p.47). Meanwhile, trade unionists had every right to represent the interests of their members, but these were not identical to those of the ANC's broader constituency and the unions should remember that their following occupied "a relatively privileged position" (p.49) when compared to the unemployed.

Fierce rhetoric against opponents of social change might reasonably be assumed to presage a stronger future commitment by the government to transformative policies. As Pallo Jordan explained to journalists after Mandela's oration, tensions in South Africa were expected to heighten as transformation of society and the economy accelerated: "The purpose of the speech is to prevent the attribution of those tensions to the new leadership" (*Business Day*, 17/12/1997). The speech does refer to the "urgency of achieving decisive movement forward with regard to the creation of a democratic state"; such movement should be premised on "the necessary theoretical framework relating to the nature and role of such a state" (p.22). Still, from the text of the address it is unclear what this might involve other than the exclusion from the bureaucracy of unreconstructed apartheid functionaries. State promoted affirmative action, corporate unbundling, and social investment by big business, laudable as these may be, hardly constitute "fundamental transformation of all sectors of society" nor do such measures require the cadres made in the

“metal of revolutionaries.” Rhetoric aside, the programmatic dimension of the presidential address was fairly anodyne.

### Authoritarian reflexes

What about the criticisms Mandela directed at civil society? Should they too be taken with a pinch of salt, as merely “conference hyperbole” (*The Star*, 20/12/1997), to quote a phrase used by Pallo Jordan in the subsequent press briefing? Certain ANC leaders may believe that a conspiracy links reactionary civil servants, white opposition parties, NGOs, and the newspaper industry in an orchestrated “counter revolution” but neither Mandela’s speech nor the subsequent conference proceedings revealed any serious intentions to curb the activities of the government’s critics. The kind of language used to describe the ANC’s opponents is partly attributable to the movement’s continuing adherence to “national-democratic” and “revolutionary” phraseology which makes it difficult to view opposition as legitimate or patriotic.

Even so, after making allowances for the immediate context of the speech and the intellectual traditions which helped to influence its form, the antagonism Mandela evinced towards “foreign funded” NGOs was worrying. This was a theme which was reasserted in the Secretary-general’s report when Cheryl Carolus accused NGOs of being constituents in “a concerted effort to halt transformation” (“Secretary General’s Report,” p.17). She noted “a proliferation of reactionary, very well resourced NGOs,” moving “into the new democratic spaces with vigour” and dominating parliamentary hearings. Carolus’s remarks seemed to be mainly directed at liberal organizations which have assumed a lobbying function, including the SAIRR and IDASA. In his comments on NGOs “as instruments of foreign governments,” Mandela referred to a report written by US Republicans which re-

viewed (critically) USAID’s support for “old struggle organizations” in South Africa. USAID funding recipients include SANCO, still a formal ANC ally but increasingly predisposed to assert its political autonomy. Of course, it would be odd if the opening address at a ruling party political conference offered praise for the governments opponents and critics, but the ANC’s characterization of such bodies as IDASA or the civic movement as reactionaries and foreign instruments suggests a fairly deep seated distrust of independent organizational life.



Cheryl Carolus

African National Congress

Outside of the ANC and its traditional allies, only Inkatha earned any praise from the president, this for its role in the governing coalition and in Natal peace initiatives. In a press conference the day before the speech Mandela went so far as to call for an IFP/ANC merger, noting that “both parties shared the same vision of a free market economy and the importance of traditional leaders” (*The Star*, 15/12/1997), a perception which has since become a repeated refrain in statements by other ANC leaders. This may come as a surprise to the thousands of trade unionists and civic activists who have been assaulted by Inkatha imps over the last decade but presumably Mandela’s warm words for his coalition partners were mainly earned through their supine performance in parliament. *Le Monde’s* correspondent may have been overstating the case when he interpreted the speech as an agenda for “silenc-

ing the left” but certainly in Mandela’s discourse the ANC’s authoritarian reflexes were more in evidence than any of its democratic predispositions.

### Delegates in GEAR?

The apparently unanimous approval of each of the conference resolutions, all three volumes of them, might be thought by some observers to signal an obedient conformity with leadership prescriptions amongst delegates. The reality was more complicated. Kader Asmal claimed in the wake of the conference that the occasion was “lively and vital, stimulating and tiring” and Pallo Jordan felt that delegate endorsement of policy was not without reservations but that generally “the conference was an occasion for people to discuss the government’s policy, and to understand it better” (*Mail and Guardian*, 24/12/98).

In fact many of the resolutions as well as the “discussion papers” which supplied their justifications themselves embodied compromises which had been reached in earlier meetings which had been much more contentious. One month before the conference, for example, the Eastern Cape provincial ANC was reported to be in rebellion, with its secretary, Humphrey Maxegwana promising to “actively campaign for GEAR to be reviewed” and with a nomination list for the ANC’s top six positions in circulation including Winnie Madikizela Mandela and excluding Jacob Zuma. The more fervent critics of GEAR may have believed that by the time of the national conference they had extracted as much in the way of concessions as they were likely to achieve.

This might explain the discernibly more conciliatory language employed by COSATU spokesmen with respect to government macro-economic policy in the days before the conference. Thus, just before the conference, Zwelinzima Vavi, COSATU’s Deputy Secretary-General, had confined himself to ob-

serving mildly that COSATU would "provide its input on how the Government's GEAR policy could be refined," and his superior, Sam Shilowa had noted that "the issue" was "not how the ANC and COSATU had differed on GEAR, but how as an alliance we can work towards socio-economic transformation of our country" (*Sowetan*, 17/12/1997). SACP chairman Blade Nzimande also seemed determined to be diplomatic: "the party" did "not want the conference to degenerate into a war over GEAR" and was "approaching the meeting in a spirit of unity."

The report of the Alliance Summit held on August 31st, and distributed at Mafikeng, helped to explain the conciliatory mood characterizing these statements. There Mandela had conceded that "it was wrong for any party to adopt a non-negotiable stand" ("Report of the Alliance Summit," p.1). The summit had agreed that "a democratic state needs to be active and interventionist," not *laissez faire*. The National Democratic Revolution was "a transformational engagement with the continuous tendencies of capitalist accumulation to exploit and oppress" (p.5), and hence the government and the ANC should work "with and against the profit seeking logic of private capitalism," an ambiguous formulation which supplied a carefully calibrated intellectual justification for the continued association of socialist and non-socialist forces in the Alliance.

COSATU would have been especially pleased with this report's concession that "coherent transformation" would still "require state ownership" (p.16) of productive assets as well as a "large scale programme of land redistribution" (p.19). A call for a "social plan . . . to deal with the consequences of labour restructuring" (p.18) touched on another vital trade union preoccupation. GEAR "did not replace RDP," it merely represented an elaboration of one of its facets, fiscal policy, and the Al-

liance needed "to look at alternative approaches to the budget, the budget deficit (to) the approach adopted in GEAR"; these might include implementing a pay as you go system in the pension fund (p.26).

The "Economic Transformation" resolutions reflected some of these arguments as well as the findings of a policy conference held by the ANC's Commission on Economic Transformation on 1-2 November. Its report ("Challenges and Programmes



Pallo Jordan

African National Congress

of Transformation into the 21st Century") detailed various kinds of state intervention to promote industrial policy, acknowledged the "gravity of unemployment" was such "that the economy cannot rely on trickle down effects for it to be resolved" - state measures should include an expansion of public works and "the redistribution of assets to the previously marginalized." Black "collective empowerment" should include a change in workplace relations. The resolutions emerging from this commission acknowledged the "interaction between GEAR and the RDP" and emphasized "the basic objective of macro economic stability." "GEAR provides the basis for achieving such stability," though "it will be monitored and ad-

justed through the policy processes adopted at this conference" (p.37).

The resolution was adopted unanimously after a bare fifteen minutes discussion at the plenary session, this despite an earlier expression of reservation by Trevor Manuel who felt that "the level of detailing (in GEAR) is disempowering to people" and that "the ANC conference should not be asked to endorse GEAR" (*Business Day*, 19/12/1997). The adoption of the resolution had come after two days of commission sessions; five hundred delegates had broken up into ten groups to discuss economic policy. Apparently delegates with recently acquired municipal council experience played an especially important role in such discussions: local government financial administration has given the ANC rank and file a new degree of competence in debating economic policy, as well as, perhaps, an understanding of the fiscal limitations which confront social reformers.

Even so, the voting unanimity was surprising - Tito Mboweni, chair of the Commission confessed as much afterwards. It may also have been partly attributable to a perception within the left that the language in the summit and commission report leaves plenty of room for manoeuvre in the future, especially in an ANC executive in which the left has a strong presence and in an organizational context refashioned in such a way, in the words of one of the commission reports, as "to enhance the control of the democratic movement over policy development."

#### Other business

Contrary to expectations expressed by some ANC leaders, including Popo Molefe, who predicted that the proceedings would be dominated by "a battle to get the GEAR policy adopted by the ANC" (*Sunday Independent*, 30/11/1997), economics did not monopolize the conference. A lengthy report on local government concluded with ar-



guments favouring the abolition of "two-tier" metropolitan authorities which will upset opposition parties which favour decentralized municipalities. Nor will Inkatha be pleased with the ANC's determination to reduce chiefs to advisory and ceremonial functions, removing from them their exclusive control over communal land allocation. Newspaper editors may well be alarmed by a proposal from the International Relations Commission that "the state needs to consider its relationship with the media which is largely foreign owned, and which seeks to project us in a negative light."

Amongst the more consequential alterations to the ANC's constitution delegates accepted a revision to the requirement that conference should meet every three years - in future such assemblies will be held every five years. The constitutional changes also included provision for the appointment of a "National List Committee" of 5 to 9 members, chosen by the NEC which would have final authority over the election of parliamentary candidates, another significant addition to the scope of leadership authority (in the last election candidates were chosen through a process of nomination and balloting though the subsequent lists were adjusted by leadership).

If the last of these decisions signalled an expansion of executive power within the ANC, the NEC and officeholder elections were an illuminating demonstration of the limits of leadership authority. If leadership got its way over policy, left wing critics of economic "neo-liberalism" could claim gains from the elections. Despite behind the scenes pressure on candidates to stand down, two of the six top positions were contested, the posts of National Chairman and Deputy Secretary General. Both these contests were won by the candidates supported by COSATU and the SACP, Terror Lekota and Thenjwe Mthintso, in the case of Lekota, overwhelmingly against Sports Minister and ANC National Organizer

Steve Tshwete. Lekota's victory may have owed something to delegate displeasure with Tshwete's public censure of Winnie Madikizela Mandela three weeks before the conference as well as sympathy for Lekota engendered by his removal from the Free State premiership after attempting to punish corruption within his cabinet. Gender Commission Chairperson Mthintso is known to be an outspoken opponent of GEAR; she won a more narrow



Cyril Ramaphosa

African National Congress

victory against Mavivi Myakayaka Manzini, Thabo Mbeki's "eyes and ears" in parliament.

Three of the ANC's national offices would have been contested because up until the elections themselves Winnie Madikizela Mandela considered herself to be a candidate for the deputy presidency against the executive's favoured Jacob Zuma. Energetic canvassing by the leadership in the months preceding the conference had persuaded the provincial executives to nominate Zuma, and a constitutional amendment increased the proportion from ten to twenty five per cent of delegate nominations from the conference floor which Mrs Mandela needed to stand. Two weeks before the conference it was increasingly evident that her support even

within the Women's League was slipping; her outspoken criticism of government "delivery" shortcomings and the testimony offered to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had helped to alienate members of the League's executive. In the event only 125 delegates were willing to second her nomination and she stood down. A secret ballot may have demonstrated more support - nomination was through a show of hands - but her slide to fifteenth position (2,059 votes) in the NEC elections, from fifth in 1994 was a telling indication of her declining influence in the organization. The NEC ballot was secret, and administered by the Electoral Institute of South Africa. 3,064 delegates voted, each of sixty of a possible 131 candidates.

Peter Mokaba, another key figure in "populist" or "Africanist" ANC circles also lost ground in the elections, only just claiming a place in the top twenty in comparison with his third highest tally in the 1994 poll. Discouragingly for those who shared Mokaba's view that "non-Africans" and Communists share disproportionate influence over the movement, only three "Africans" were among the ten who received most delegate support and each of these three, Cyril Ramaphosa, Tito Mboweni and Pallo Jordan are at odds with the Africanist/populist camp.

### Many mansions

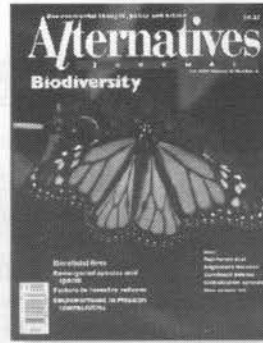
If the Africanists did not carry the day, however, it would be almost equally difficult to claim that the left had done so. Moreover, "the left" itself represents a pretty disparate coalition. Cyril Ramaphosa is believed to continue to enjoy SACP support but as South Africa's leading black businessman he can hardly be counted within the socialist camp. Nor is this the case with respect to Lekota whose candidature for the chairmanship was favoured by the party and COSATU. Trade unionists may derive some satisfac-

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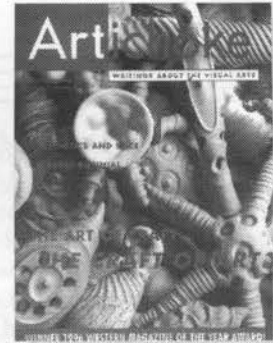
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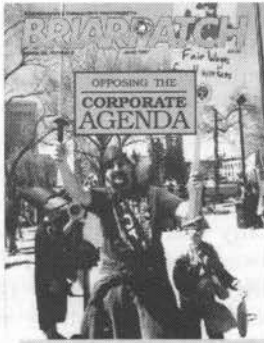
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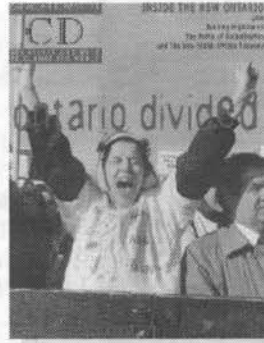
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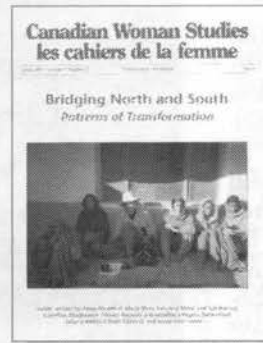
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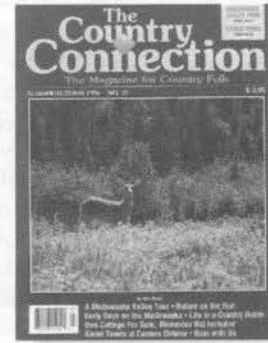
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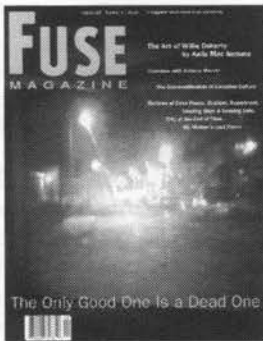
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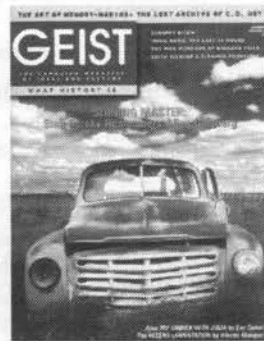
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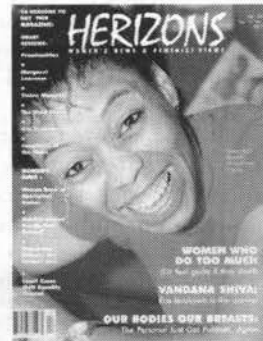
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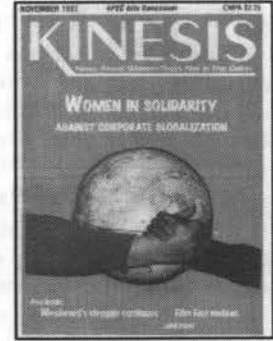
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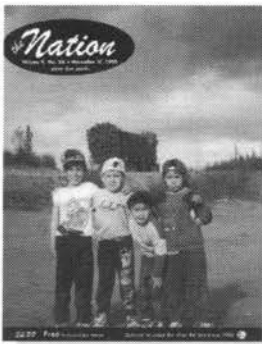
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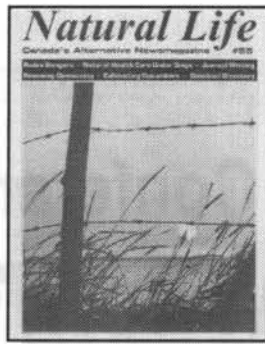
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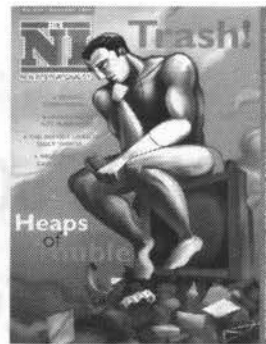
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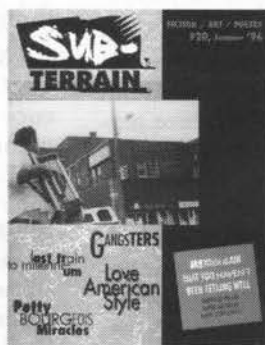
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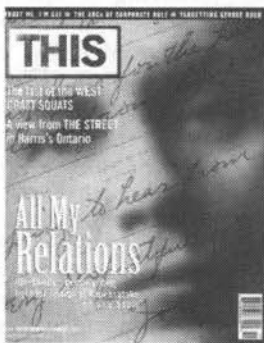
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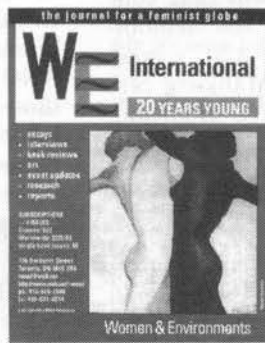
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# The ANC's 50th Conference Power to Whom?

BY DALE T. MCKINLEY

*Dale T. McKinley presently works at the Head Office of the South African Communist Party and is author of the recently published book The ANC and the Liberation Struggle: A Critical Political Biography (Pluto Press).*

After reading local and international press reports on the ANC's 50th National Conference (16-20 December 1997), one could be forgiven for thinking there had just been a joyous family reunion in the dusty provincial town of Mafikeng. If only it were that simple. Despite descriptions of the Conference as "miraculous," with delegates emerging "invigorated and united against all odds," the harsh reality is that the ANC - as a political organization representing the majority of South Africans - is more contested than ever, post-Conference appearances and utterances to the contrary notwithstanding.

Like past Conferences, the Mafikeng gathering confirmed that the ANC's "unity" is not predominately derived from ideological or strategic harmony amongst its members. Rather, the "success" of the 50th Conference was the result of the leadership's mastery of political management. Such management was clearly applied in the slick hand-over of leadership from Mandela to Mbeki (something of an obsession of the mainstream press and sections of the progressive international community). However, the real source of the ANC's ability to appear "united," derives from the leadership's power to manage the contradictions between Conference discussions on the one hand and the practical implementation of ANC (governmental) policy as guided by

Conference resolutions on the other. The fact that the (ideological) battles around key issues of ANC (as government) economic and political strategy were not reflected in Conference resolutions only serves to confirm the success of the leadership's political management capabilities.

Set against the backdrop of the ANC's two previous "post-apartheid" Conferences (1991 and 1994), the Mafikeng Conference represents, above all, continuity. At both of those gatherings there was heated debate around the political strategies and organizational character of the ANC. For example, at the 1991 Conference most delegates argued the need for a strengthening and consolidation of revolutionary mass mobilization to re-assert the mass-led character of both the ANC and ongoing political negotiation. And yet, watered-down Conference resolutions were followed by little change in the way in which the ANC leadership approached the negotiations. It was just such elite-led political management that contributed decisively to the demobilization of much of the ANC's mass base. In this sense, Mafikeng certainly continues an ANC tradition, but it is not the one that most observers think it is.

## "Open debates"?

Delegates at the Mafikeng Conference have described the debates in the various commissions as "spirited" and "open." Indeed, the ability of the ANC leadership to generate (and more recently to encourage) relatively lively internal debate whilst containing and channelling the political (policy) implications of such debate has always been one of

its major strengths. As could be expected of an organization holding the reins of government, discussion at the Conference covered a wide range of issues. And yet, a cursory glance at the resolutions adopted at Conference gives practical content to the old adage that "the more things change, the more they remain the same."

Nowhere is this more clear than in the centrally important Conference resolution dealing with "Economic Transformation." Despite the overwhelming opposition by the majority of the ANC's own constituency to the ANC-led government's neo-Thatcherite macro-economic strategy adopted in 1996 (called Growth, Employment and Redistribution - GEAR), the starting point for the resolution's implementation of economic policy remains "a competitive, fast growing and developing economy." The resolution goes further to state that GEAR "aims at creating the environment of macro-economic balances required for the realization of the RDP" (referring to the Reconstruction and Development Programme formally adopted by the ANC's 1994 Conference). For those with short memories, the RDP explicitly stated that economic "growth" is dependent on the radical redistribution of wealth!

Following a similar path of transforming clear political and policy mandates from Conference participants into often unconnected (and unintelligible) policy, the resolution on "Poverty" offers an interesting version of what needs to be done. It resolves that: "inefficiencies in markets, institutions, spatial structure and delivery mechanisms that prejudice those who are underprivileged

should be identified and removed." A strange way of carrying out the core mandate of the ANC to "fundamentally" transform the political economy of the most unequal society in the world. But then again, if the ANC's 50th Conference clarified anything it is that most of the top leadership have wasted little time in becoming avid followers of a technocratic "market democracy" which has little to do with "fundamental transformation."

The "success" of the leadership's political management skills at Mafikeng thus obscured the true political and ideological character of the Conference. As a result, there has been an all-too-predictable concentration on the outcome of leadership challenges and lively, but relatively peripheral debates around the racial and organizational make-up of both the Alliance and the ANC itself. However, much more central politically was the fact that - despite whatever more substantive differences of perspective there might be amongst them - the majority membership of all components of the Alliance (ANC, COSATU, SACP) came to unite around a common theme: that the Alliance must remain intact (at least through the 1999 elections).

### Unity ... and Sorosism

But what lay beyond this "politics of the lowest common denominator"? If there is any one event/document that reveals the core strategic-cum-ideological message that emanated from the ANC's 50th Conference, it is Mandela's opening presidential report. For it provides the philosophical premises for the existence and functioning of the ANC, as laid down by the leadership before Mafikeng through its actions in governing the country.

Leaving aside the much-publicized attacks on the media, NGO's and rival political organizations contained in the first half of Mandela's report, it is these more philosophical matters that are

of central concern. Thus, reading through the report, Conference delegates must have been a bit surprised to find out that it is the views of capitalist financial speculator extraordinaire, George Soros, that now provide philosophical and ideological sustenance to the historic mission of the ANC. Arguing for the need to create a "system according to which the owners of capital would, willingly, understand and accept the idea that business success can no longer be measured solely by reference to profit" Mandela quotes Soros, at length, on "what is to be done":

*By taking the conditions of supply and demand as given and [by] checking government intervention, laissez-faire ideology has effectively banished wealth redistribution. Wealth does accumulate in the hands of its owners, and if there is no mechanism for redistribution, the inequities can become intolerable. The laissez-faire argument against income redistribution invokes the doctrine of survival of the fittest. There is something wrong with making the survival of the fittest a guiding principle of civilized society.*

As if that were not enough, Mandela proceeded to inform delegates - and an audience of millions more - that Soros' perspectives (including his criticism of the fact that "people increasingly rely on money as the criterion of value"!) were just what was needed for the "moral renewal of our country" and for reaching "our objective of creating a people-centred, humane and caring society." Taking at face value what, in the context of Soros' original writings, is merely a flabby, charity-inflected rationalization for capitalism, Mandela summed up this newly discovered philosophical foundation-stone by throwing out the following challenge to the ANC:

*What this all says is that we will have to travel a difficult road before we can truly unite the majority of our people, without regard to race,*

*colour and gender around a common patriotism, one of whose critical elements must be the establishment of a caring society.*

As hard as it might be to take seriously the hypocritical philosophizing of a man (Soros) who almost single-handedly ruined the lives of millions of workers in Asia in a frenzy of speculative profiteering, the important point is that the ANC leadership does so. The reason is simply because this leadership views the ANC's mission of carrying out the oft-mentioned "national democratic revolution" as theoretically and practically consistent with capitalism (albeit a capitalism that is at once deracialized and "more humane"). All the debates at Mafikeng, however genuine the intentions of the debaters might have been, were fundamentally concerned with the specifics of how the organization will proceed within this strategic framework. To reiterate: the "success" of the 50th Conference lies precisely in the leadership's ability to politically manage the contradictions inherent in such an undertaking.

What the leadership of the ANC (and sections of other Alliance leaders) can not so easily accomplish though is an extension of these managerial skills beyond the confines of a Conference hall. The strategic path chosen (which is, at best, a kind of a rehashed "third world" Keynesianism pursued within the context of an increasingly arrogant and predatory economic imperialism), combined with massive domestic class oppression, ensures that the ANC will remain a battle-zone of ideological contestation. Politically managing the search for a false unity in the face of real contradictions may provide some short-term "success," but it is certainly not a solid basis for giving revolutionary content to the central slogan of the ANC's Strategy and Tactics document: "All Power to the People."

SAE

# The ANC's 50th Conference Exiles and Homecomings

BY OUPA LEHULERE

*Oupa Lehulere works as a labour educator for the union support organization, Khanya College, in Johannesburg.*

The 50th conference of the African National Congress (ANC) held in December 1997 in the North West Province town of Mafikeng has been billed as the conference of the "changing of the guard." The town of Mafikeng has two claims to fame in South African history.

Firstly, it's known for the siege of the town during the Anglo-Boer war at the turn of the century. It was the compromises struck at the end of that war that led to the exclusion of blacks from South Africa's parliamentary politics for the best part of this century.

Mafikeng's other claim to fame is one that binds it to the history of the ANC and now to its future. The town is the home of the first secretary-general of the ANC, Sol Plaatjie. Plaatjie, a literary man and intellectual, spent the early part of this century campaigning against the land dispossession of the African people. Out of that experience he has left one of the most memorable records of the trauma of dispossession in his classic *Native Life in South Africa*.

But Plaatjie also represented a particular phase in the evolution of the politics of the ANC. He lived during a period in which the ANC, then a party of (tribal) chiefs and educated Africans, called for equal opportunities for these groups in a world created by rapid industrialization. The political issue of the time was equal opportunity for educated Africans in a world created by the mining magnates, or Randlords, as they were known.

It was to this theme that Nelson Mandela, outgoing President of the ANC and soon to be outgoing President of South Africa, returned in his last speech as leader of the ANC. Quoting United States President Lyndon Johnson's speech at Howard University in 1965, President Mandela argued that "we seek not just freedom, but opportunity; not just legal equity, but human ability; not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and as a result."

The Mafikeng conference was one of homecoming to the ANC of the first half of this century – to the ANC of Sol Plaatjie. But homecomings like this one take a long time to prepare.

The road to the Mafikeng conference was paved with political confrontation between Cosatu and the ANC, organizational manoeuvres, and by a process of self-sanitation worthy of the party of the ruling class that the ANC has become.

## The ANC adopts GEAR

The runup to the ANC conference generated intense public interest in the deliberations on economic policy. This conference was, after all, the first ANC conference since the government adopted its controversial neo-liberal economic policy known as the Growth, Employment and Redistribution, or GEAR in 1996. When GEAR was adopted, the ANC as an organization was presented with a *fait accompli* by the ANC cabinet. Indeed, the ANC's highest decision-making body was only convened to endorse GEAR after the government had announced its adoption. It thus came as no surprise that the Eastern Cape, a historical stronghold of the ANC, announced it intended to use this

opportunity to question the GEAR strategy.

The rumblings in the ANC were, however, not the principal reason for public interest in the GEAR debate. Three months earlier, the country's largest trade union federation, Cosatu, published a report which called GEAR a programme of "financial capital." At its congress in September, Cosatu leaders and members had a heated exchange with President Nelson Mandela and made clear their rejection of GEAR, a position not held by Cosatu alone. The South African Non-Governmental Organization Coalition added its voice to the rejection of GEAR, and a leading anti-apartheid cleric accused the government of "unleashing a rampant capitalism on an unsuspecting population." All this, and Cosatu's participation at the ANC conference, added up to an expectant mood around the GEAR debate.

As it turned out, the mountain brought forth a molehill. GEAR was adopted by the conference without any serious objections. The leadership's claim that the GEAR was merely a tool to implement the RDP must have played a part in smoothing the adoption, but it was the format of the conference discussions that played the most important role. After a number of presentations to delegates by the Ministers of Finance, of Trade and Industry and of Labour, a request by delegates to hear a presentation by Cosatu on why it rejected GEAR was turned down. Ironically, it was the SACP Deputy General Secretary, Jeremy Cronin, who in his capacity as overall convenor of the resolutions committee, turned down the request. Without a formulated

counterview, Minister of Finance Manuel's view at the conference that "the level of technical detail [of GEAR] ... is of such a nature that it is disempowering for people" became a self-fulfilling prophesy.

### Imposing leadership from above

The manoeuvres during conference, however, were preceded by manoeuvres outside conference. The runup period saw a determined attempt by the ANC national leadership, and as rumour would have it, by the new ANC president, Thabo Mbeki, to fashion a leadership after its own image. In three provinces – Free State, Northern Province and Gauteng – the national leadership tried to impose its own choice of leaders against resistance by members. In Gauteng, this led to a long drawn out battle, on the one hand, between provincial cabinet ministers supported by the national leadership, and on the other, an overwhelming majority of the provincial membership. After postponing elections, rewriting election rules and orchestrating character assassinations in the press, the candidate of the ANC national leadership lost by a large margin.

Although the national leadership lost the battle, it was able to win the war. In the heat of the battle against attempts to impose new leaders from above, a battle which is by no means unimportant, the political orientation of the *people's candidate* was lost from view. As it turned out, Gauteng ANC's new leader, Mathole Motshega, does not represent a serious political challenge to the national leadership of the ANC. In a twist of irony, the organizational defeat of the national leadership in Gauteng, as also in the Northern Province, served to confirm its unchallenged political hegemony in the organization.

Notwithstanding their importance, the organizational manoeuvres tell only part of the story of GEAR's adoption, and a secondary one at that. A more important reason was that the ANC that went to conference in 1997 was a much

changed one from the ANC of April 1994.

### The fusion of the ANC with the state apparatus

Organizational weaknesses, falling membership and non-functioning branches also conspired to smooth the victory of the new right in the ANC. The Eastern Cape province, once the strongest ANC region, had its delegation to the 1997 conference reduced by half (compared to 1994) because of falling membership.

GEAR's passage was not only smoothed by an ill-prepared membership, weak organization and declining membership. It was also smoothed by changes in the fortunes of the membership. When the ANC went to conference in 1991 it had no access to bureaucratic power and privilege. The 1994 conference came too soon after the April elections to reflect changes in membership and local government elections came only in 1995.

In Mafikeng, the number of cell phones and fancy cars told a different story. So in evidence was the new elite that an anecdote is told that at one point the air conditioning system in the conference hall failed because the power was overloaded with delegates charging their cell phones! The 1995 local government elections connected the last tier of the organization with the machinery of power. In addition to Members of Parliament, Members of Provincial Parliaments and municipal councillors now also formed a significant part of delegates. With a parliamentary system based on party lists, for the first time in the history of the ANC, leaders at lower levels owed something to those at the top: their positions.

The close synchronization of the ANC with the state apparatus was taken a step further with an amendment to the ANC Constitution that set the conference and the tenure of the national leadership at five years. This was in order that the cycle of ANC conferences would coincide with that of the government.

The fusion with the state, and dependence on it, will be taken a step further by proposals calling for political parties to be funded by government. Given that the ANC already gets substantial funds from external donors, financial independence from its traditional base will ensure that the ANC will be less and less responsive to the needs of the working class.

### Recreating the ANC

In the years before the ANC was driven into exile, and before the student uprisings of the 1970s brought into the ANC a generation of militant youth, the ANC had by and large been led by the aspirant black middle classes and (tribal) chiefs. The years of militant mass politics, coupled with the destruction of the black middle class by apartheid, saw many militants from the ranks of the working class ascend to the leadership of the ANC. Now, with the 1997 conference, the pendulum has begun its swing back to the aspirant black middle classes.

The leadership succession was fought out, although largely symbolically, around the national leadership's attempts to prevent Winnie Mandela from running for the Deputy Presidency. The methods used were not only politically vile, but also historically significant. After an intense campaign within the organization to ensure that none of the provincial structures would nominate Winnie Mandela, the national leadership proved that it had learnt from its defeat in the Gauteng leadership battle. At the beginning of the conference, the constitution was amended in a way that prevented Winnie Mandela's nomination from the conference floor. In the pre-conference constitution, 10% of conference delegates could nominate a candidate for high office from the floor. At the beginning of the conference, this figure was raised to 25%. The new president had not been a long-serving member of the politburo of the Communist Party for nothing.

The anti-Winnie campaign reached its height with the hearings by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which were held a few weeks before the conference. These hearings involving Winnie Mandela's activities could not have come at a more opportune time. The hearings, the longest single hearing for an individual, were given full television coverage. By distancing itself from Winnie Mandela's 'reign of terror', the ANC was in effect distancing itself from its history of militancy and violent struggle against apartheid. In South Africa's black townships, and indeed among the amnesia-prone ruling classes of the old order, it is common knowledge that Winnie Mandela's strong arm tactics, even against anti-apartheid political opponents, was a feature of the highly charged atmosphere of the 1980s. This combined with the dominance of Stalinist politics to produce the kind of political intolerance that Winnie Mandela was called to answer for. With Winnie Mandela's TRC hearing, the ANC was recreating its image as an organization that is peace-loving, gentle and tolerant.

In any event, Winnie Mandela declined her nomination from the floor, and so the 25% rule was not tested. The significance of the Winnie Mandela saga lies not in whether she represents a serious political challenge to the orientation of the ANC. In fact, she has been unable to offer a serious political critique of the ANC, and has shown her acute lack of understanding of the key issues being debated in South Africa by publicly trying to convince "foreign investors" that she does not represent a threat to them! The significance of this saga lies in the fact that the ANC leadership was sending a strong signal to any potential opposition from the ranks of the traditional leadership that such opposition, no matter what its basis was, will not be tolerated. There was, however, another level at which the Winnie Mandela saga was



Carolyn Bassett

significant: it was in the choice of methods in sending the signal.

As with Winnie Mandela, so also with Mathole Motshega, digging up old dirt was the preferred political instrument used to fight present battles. This practice forms part of the ANC's inheritance from the old order, and is further evidence of its integration into the South African ruling class. This use of past transgressions found its most celebrated usage in the struggle for succession between the "conservative" faction of the National Party led by B.J. Voster and the "enlightened" faction led by P.W. Botha in the late 1970s. With methods like this, the ANC is not only going back to the politics of accommodation with the capitalist ruling classes; the ANC is being 'culturally' integrated into the politics of the old ruling class.

Besides returning all the cabinet ministers, the composition of the new National Executive Council incorporated not one serious critique of the ANC in government. In the desperate search for a "left

faction," the only representative that the local media could find was ... Terror Lekota. On the contrary, the leadership elections revealed the delegates' comfort with the new elite. The country's leading black businessman, ex-ANC secretary Cyril Ramaphosa, was returned with the highest votes. And Ramaphosa is not alone in this achievement; many ANC MPs and leaders, or their relatives as proxy for them, are being integrated into many corporate boardrooms and directorships in South Africa. It is this integration that accounts for the stench of "grave train" scandals that engulfs the South African nation at the moment.

Like so much of the conference, the leadership struggles and elections represented a return to Sol Plaatjie's ANC - here too we had a kind of homecoming.

#### The IFP coming home?

Next to the sustained uprisings by blacks in the 1980s, a prominent feature of black politics was the violent struggles between ANC supporting organizations and the Inkatha



Freedom Party, led by Mangosuthu Buthelezi. These struggles, and their toll in human lives, continued right up the 1994 elections and beyond. But it had not always been so. Indeed, the IFP was the creation of the ANC in exile.

Even after being driven into exile by the apartheid government, the ANC did not abandon its politics of accommodation. Even as the black trade union movement rose in the early 1970s, the ANC turned its attention to the bantustan leader Buthelezi, and this led to the formation of what is now the IFP. According to ANC strategists at the time, the IFP was to utilize the bantustan structures – dummy governments for blacks set up by the apartheid government – to advance the struggle for majority rule. The student uprisings of 1976 sounded the death knell for this policy.

The 1976 generation swelled the ranks of the ANC and they brought with them a total rejection of anything associated with the apartheid government – and this included Mangosuthu Buthelezi and his party. The break-up of relations with the ANC in 1979 ushered in the bloody war that was to be a landmark of black politics in the 1980s.

The 1997 conference marked a return to the pre-1979 period. In a speech that delivered a tongue-lashing to all opposition parties, in particular the white parties of the old order, President Nelson Mandela singled the IFP out for praise. Indeed, in the runup to the conference, senior ANC leaders in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, Buthelezi's stronghold, waxed lyrical that "when ... Buthelezi ... says publicly that we need to unite ... we know that the spirit of Dube and Luthuli [former ANC presidents] is stirring." At the conference itself, President Mandela personally introduced the IFP delegate to loud applause. Beyond the conference, the ANC public is being prepared for a possible merger of the two organizations, and the accession of Mangosuthu Buthelezi to the position of Deputy President of South Africa under an ANC government.

For the IFP, too, the 1997 conference represented a kind of homecoming, even if the road is just beginning.

#### Exiles and homecomings

From its beginnings as an organization of elites and chiefs in the early

part of this century, the ANC dedicated itself in policy and practice to pleading with white authority to admit educated Africans into the world the Randlords made. The end of this phase began with the massacre of 69 Africans at Sharpsville, which led to the ANC being driven into exile. The radicalization which began in the 1950s was completed with the student uprisings in 1976. From then on, the centre of ANC politics shifted away from deputations to the dusty streets of the country's industrial metropole: the Gauteng region, and to its industrial proletariat.

The ANC's return from exile, and the release of the leaders incarcerated on Robben Island, was the beginning of exile from its politics of exile. It is significant that since its return from exile, not one of the ANC's three conferences have been held in what is without doubt the country's most important region: Gauteng. As with Leningrad and Shanghai, physical distance from the centres of the militant proletariat is a sure sign that the elites have begun coming home from the austere, hard and militant exile. At Mafikeng, the ANC elites completed their homecoming.

SALE

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# Mugabe under Siege

## Ending the Plunder?

BY IDEN WETHERELL

*Iden Wetherell is assistant editor of the Zimbabwe Independent, a national weekly.*

Food riots that convulsed Zimbabwe's capital Harare in late January reflected the growing desperation of a social underclass marginalized in a mismanaged economy and denied political openings to express their discontent. Downtown Harare resembled a war zone as thousands took to the streets protesting against rising prices, looting stores and bringing business to a halt for nearly a week from January 19-22.

While the violent mass action focused on a 21% rise in the cost of the staple maize meal - subsequently withdrawn - it was at the same time a powerful expression of popular dissatisfaction with President Robert Mugabe's 18-year rule which has seen a privileged elite benefit from its iron grip on power at the expense of the urban poor.

The protests, which soon spread to other centres, were only contained when the government called in the army.

Things looked very different a year ago. The economy was experiencing solid growth with a booming stock exchange and robust agricultural output after good rains. Investors were showing a strong interest in the country's potential, and despite missed fiscal targets the government appeared concerned to get the burgeoning budget deficit down.

### Things fall apart

Then it all fell apart as President Robert Mugabe dealt a double blow to output in moves that were



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so ill-judged they had economists gasping for breath. Firstly, he decided in August to award veterans of Zimbabwe's liberation war large gratuities - Z\$50,000 each plus monthly pensions of Z\$2,000 - without any apparent thought as to where the money was going to come from. Then hard on the heels of that announcement came the decision in

November to seize half the country's commercial farms.

The reaction was entirely predictable. The Zimbabwe dollar collapsed in a frenzy of speculation - by up to 70% against the US dollar on "Black Friday," November 14 - and investors fled the Harare stock exchange in droves. It was an unmitigated economic disaster compound-

ing a growing impression of inept fiscal management.

But the damage didn't stop there. In order to fulfil Mugabe's promise to war veterans – who had embarrassed the president on a number of public occasions with their noisy protests which they had taken to the gates of State House – the government introduced swingeing new taxes and levies to raise the estimated Z\$4.5 billion required. Sales tax was hiked from 15% to 17.5%, new duties slapped on fuel and a 5% levy imposed on all taxpayers and companies.

The government displayed the same arbitrary and clumsy approach in its handling of land redistribution – widely regarded as a necessary reform requiring sensitive handling given its possible impact on an agriculture-based economy. Ignoring assurances that only underutilized farms would be taken, the ruling Zanu-PF party's acquisition teams were clearly unable to resist the temptation to designate some of the country's most productive estates among the over 1,400 farms earmarked for acquisition.

With appeals to the courts expressly precluded by constitutional amendments in 1993, Mugabe's government clearly hoped the initial storm of protest emanating from the farming community, many of whom had at one stroke been deprived of their livelihoods, would soon die down. After all, here was a privileged sector of society that, despite its record of productivity, was irretrievably tarnished by its association with the colonial past – "Britain's children" Mugabe called them when inviting the British government to pay the compensation he declined to offer himself.

His government would not pay a cent for the land, only improvements on it, he vowed in defiance of clear requirements for compensation provided in his government's own Land Acquisition Act of 1992 and the constitution.

While the government had anticipated the opposition of the white farming community to its land policy, it had not calculated on the reaction of its own constituency to the arbitrary tax imposts. Having got away with a variety of levies in the past, most notably the Tobacco Levy on the country's most profitable export earner and a Development Levy on taxpayers, all gobbled up by recurrent expenditure, clearly the government had thought it could ride out the storm that followed.

### Resistance

It miscalculated. First, normally supine members of parliament rejected the measures when they were submitted for approval, and then, to Mugabe's chagrin, delegates to a special Zanu-PF congress in early December publicly repudiated the levy. "Hatidi (we don't want it)," they chorused when Mugabe put the proposal to them.

But that wasn't the end of the matter. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, recovering from a lengthy malaise which had seen wildcat strikes overtake institutional responses to steadily eroding incomes, had already summoned its members to a nationwide protest on December 9. ZCTU leaders were unimpressed by Zanu-PF's stand which they felt the government could easily circumvent. They wanted to ensure that Mugabe got the message the country was sending out loud and clear – no more taxes!

Despite warnings from police commissioner Augustine Chihuri that the demonstrations were "unnecessary" because Zanu-PF had decided against the war veterans levy, hundreds of thousands of workers gathered in centres across the country as all business ground to a halt.

Apart from the violence that ensued in Harare when police illegally tried to break up the demonstrations by attacking groups of workers, the day of protest was peaceful in other towns and a major success for the ZCTU which found

itself for the first time occupying the national high ground. One protester who spoke to journalists summarized the mood: "Mugabe is trying to please his ruling clique for their own ends, not for the benefit of the nation as a whole," he said cheered on by his friends. "Mugabe has no support among the real people so he is going to buy the war veterans' support at the expense of the working people. The central committee is a clique which suppresses the masses."

A poster carried by a group of people put it another way: "Don't blame the whites for your failures," it said.

The government's response was to blame the workers for starting the violence in Harare, a claim unsupported by evidence which clearly showed police units laying into workers with teargas and batons. Equally insidiously, the Orwellian Ministry of Information disseminated a story that white farmers and businessmen, embittered by land designation, had engineered the strike by ferrying workers into the towns.

### Turning point

This was greeted with universal derision and marked a turning point of sorts. The official line handed down to state media and news agencies was no longer able to secure any credible purchase on the public mind.

But the government, for all its bluster, had got the message. With the exception of the sales tax hike, the new taxes were withdrawn and ways found to raise the funds needed by speeding up the sale of state assets. The government's response to January's food riots has been to set up a cabinet task force to recommend ways of dealing with "profiteering." This completely ignores the role of state borrowing and spending in stoking inflation. Nor does it recognize the contribution of state monopolies which have led the way

in increasing prices, most notably the Grain Marketing Board which supplies grain to millers.

More manipulatively, the Minister of Information, Chen Chimutengwende, who so impressed Mugabe by his denunciation of "animal lovers" opposed to the culling of elephants at last year's CITES conference, has merely trotted out the familiar line that white farmers and industrialists were once again behind the disturbances.

Church and civil society groups immediately put out a strong joint statement laying responsibility for the food riots at the door of government's fiscal mismanagement - stated to have forced up the cost of living for the majority to intolerable levels - and condemning attempts by ministers to find scapegoats for their own failures.

#### Donor power

While the mood in the townships remains volatile, Mugabe still finds himself in a fix on the land question. Firstly, the Blair government in Britain proved unexpectedly firm in declining to accept responsibility for its colonial legacy while making the point that confiscation of productive farms, when state land already acquired lay idle, would do nothing to improve the condition of Zimbabwe's poor.

Further, it was pointed out, the Zimbabwean government could expect no assistance with rural resettlement until it agreed on fair and transparent measures which addressed productivity and poverty alleviation. Mugabe's policy of ad hoc seizures and redistribution to political allies had met its Waterloo, it seemed.

Thus, a meeting with European Union commissioner João de Deus Pinheiro in Brussels in January did persuade Mugabe to take up an offer he had earlier rejected from the Conservative government in Britain for a donor's conference on land reform. But far from endorsing Zimbabwe's arbitrary and

opaque land acquisition policy, the conference will clearly be one in which donors will be able to examine Zimbabwe's proposals and set conditions under which aid would be made available.

Mugabe has been reminded in all this that his current programme contravened solemn undertakings his own government had only recently made to international investors regarding the protection of assets. Whatever the historical justification for land redistribution, few investors were likely to be enticed to a country where the head of state and his associates were the chief pillagers of private property.

Minister of Finance Herbert Murerwa has now given written undertakings to both the World Bank and the EU that the government's land programme will not jeopardize agricultural production. Furthermore, the government has undertaken to abide by Zimbabwe's constitution and laws in proceeding with land reform.

This in effect means land reform will now proceed on a more orderly basis and in close cooperation with affected parties including donors. It also means compensation for land taken. Mugabe admitted as much speaking to business people at a National Economic Consultative Forum on January 22. At the same time, the International Monetary Fund has moved towards resuming the balance-of-payments support it suspended in 1995 when Mugabe's government repeatedly failed to meet economic reform targets because it persisted in spending money on its own upkeep rather than on national development.

Gross distortions in the pattern of public expenditure which underlie the country's poor economic performance have by no means been eliminated. In large part they explain the latest eruption of violence. But despite the recent acquisition of yet another fleet of new Mercedes Benzes for the ministerial car pool there

are signs that the government is responding to growing pressure for it to spend less money on itself.

In its assurances to the EU, a major donor, the government has said that its latest package of measures to cover the costs of payments to war veterans will not result in any reductions in planned expenditure in the social services or any increase in charges for the provision of public health and education.

\* \* \*

Beyond this there is now a palpable sense that a government and party long accustomed to regarding the country as a prize of war to be plundered at will is beginning to discover the hard way the meaning of accountable governance. In part this is evidenced - as argued above - in an increased vulnerability to donor pressure. But recent events have also seen a further strengthening of the country's fledgling civil society. In particular, Zimbabwean workers and the seething lumpen proletariat in the townships have learnt that the power of the people pays: the government surrendered to civil service strikers in 1996; to a whole variety of protesters last year, including war veterans and trade unionists; and now to mass action on prices.

In short, even if the latest protests may not be quite the turning point some observers are reporting, there is, palpably, a growing resistance to Mugabe's hitherto unassailable grip on power. Will the recent bout of civil unrest prove to have sent a timely reminder to a government still locked in the ideology of a one-party state that, unless adequate constitutional mechanisms are devised to allow political pluralism and popular protest to find expression, the street and not parliament seems likely to remain the central forum of public discourse?

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# Mugabe under Siege

## Behind the Protests

BY PATRICK BOND

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In the waning weeks of 1997, Zimbabwe's citizens suffered an economic nightmare punctuated by terrifying financial meltdowns. Surface-level symptoms included a spectacular crash of the currency (55% for the year as a whole, but 75% in a few hours on "Black Friday" – 14 November – requiring a temporary central bank bail-out); dramatic increases in interest rates (6% within one month); a plummeting stock market (down 46% by the end of the year from peak August 1997 levels); renewed inflation, especially for food; and unprecedented fiscal stress.

Ironically, last year's financial calamities occurred at the tail end of a long-awaited economic revival (more than 8% GDP rise in 1996 and 3% in 1997). Yet that brief upturn on Zimbabwe's roller-coaster business cycle mainly reflected how extraordinarily far, on the one hand, the economy had plunged during the first Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (a 40% drop in the volume of manufacturing output from 1991-95, for instance), and, on the other hand, how mired Zimbabwe was in a long-term capitalist crisis dating to the mid-1970s. Not even the relatively

high fixed capital investments of the late 1980s and early 1990s, following the stagnant, misnomered "socialist" era immediately after Independence, could undergird a financial superstructure that loomed spectactively out of control. Thus the 1997 financial and currency turbulence set the stage for a long and potentially quite deep slump in the real economy.

Orthodox economic commentators were universally despondent. For them, the roots of Zimbabwe's late 1990s socio-economic crisis were to be found nearly entirely in the political sphere. Bucking strident advice and monetary arm-twisting from international financial institutions, President Mugabe had, after all, sustained his controversial October 1997 decisions to pay off a challenge from thousands of liberation war veterans – who received Z\$50,000 each (plus a Z\$2,000 per month pension) – and at long last to begin implementing the 1993 Land Designation Act (1,500 mainly white-owned farms were identified for initial redistribution).

The pensions were transferred to the bank accounts of 50,000 combatants in late December, following justifiable hand-wringing about how the deal was to be financed. There were approximately 60,000 combatants from the ZANU and ZAPU armies, of whom fewer than 36,000 were given demobilization pay of Z\$2,420 in 1983. With high-profile exceptions, such as cabinet ministers and other high-ranking officials whose dubious disability claims plundered government's limited pre-1997 allocations, most veterans were needy povo. They were successful essentially because their 1997 demonstrations in Harare caused the ZANU government acute embarrass-

ment. After the payout, however, intense popular resentment emerged given that a sales tax (and indeed initially an income tax and petrol tax increase) was imposed to partially cover the costs.

As for the white farms, the plan was that there would be only partial compensation, but again this raised the likelihood of fiscal convulsion. The damage to the commercial agricultural sector (and related industries) would be heightened by the fact – as conceded by the Agriculture Minister in a subsequent radio broadcast – that the recipients of the farms would be wealthy politicians not land-starved peasants. Patronage was the point, at a time other routes were closing. Government was once again apparently not serious about thorough-going redistribution, which would require vastly greater resources, support structures and administrative staff than were budgeted and planned, not to mention a shift in class power away from the emergent bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Nor was it likely that the ambitious designation exercise could be successfully brought to fruition even on its own terms; more feasible would be case-by-case compromises with only the most indebted designees agreeing to depart. The IMF and World Bank effectively vetoed the land grab in January, as part of the conditionality on two new bailout loans.

### Political unrest

At the same time, rancorous political background noise rose inexorably. There were vociferous demands from an indigenous business lobby still often shut out of white-controlled markets and financial institutions. Organized labour became increasingly militant, both in

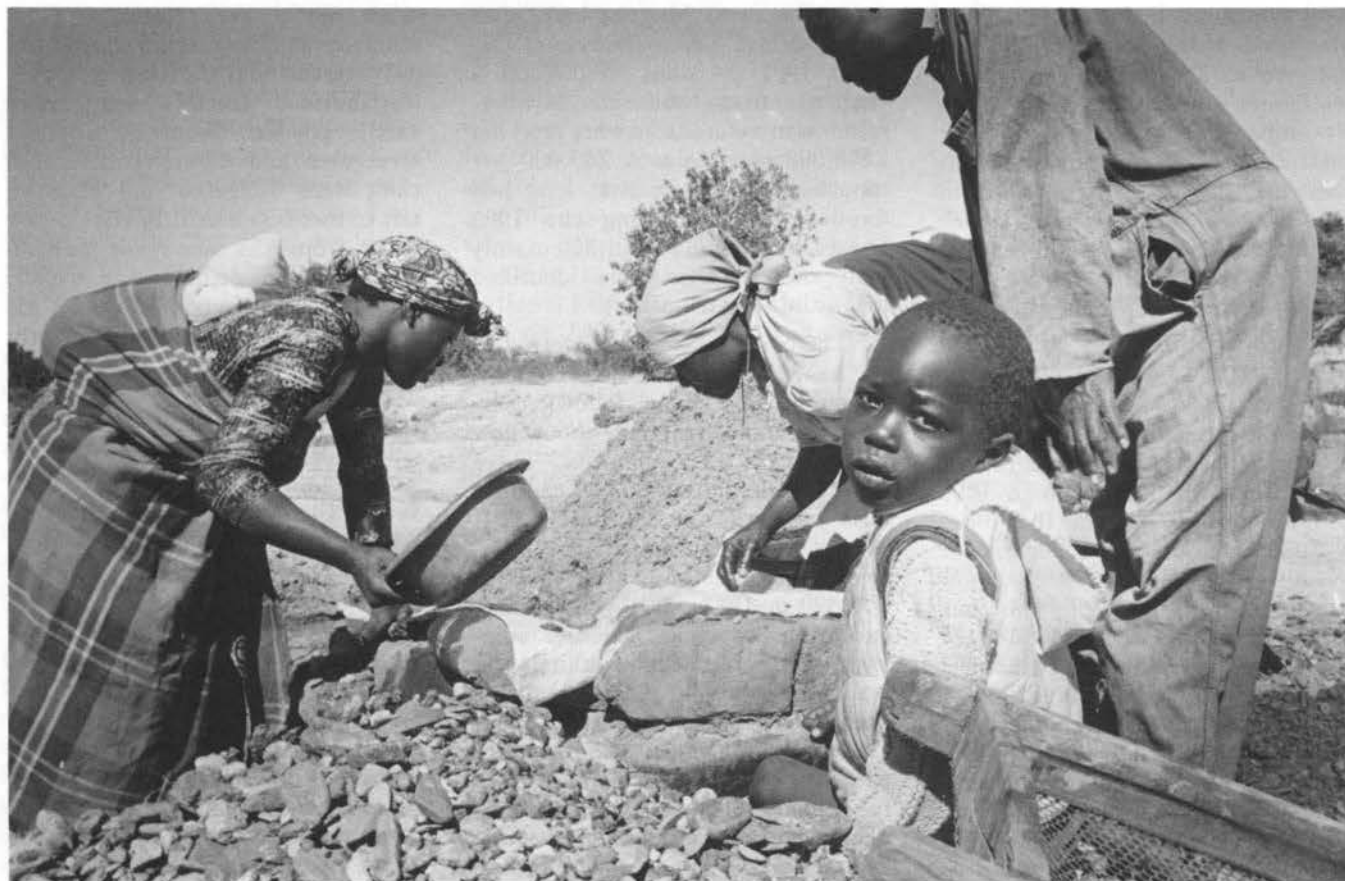
the public sector (where in mid-1996, 160,000 employees walked out and a general strike was contemplated) and around private sector wage struggles (in mid-1997, 100,000 workers were involved in strike action, even extending to poorly-organized agricultural plantations). Autonomous, shopfloor-based actions outran the ability of national union bureaucrats to control or direct the membership, and the corporatist strategy mistakenly pursued during the mid-1990s by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) quickly became irrelevant.

More general popular alienation from government intensified during the late 1990s, as civil service corruption was repeatedly unveiled, as officials continued to rig tenders (e.g., construction of a new Harare airport), as shady and incongruous international investment partnerships (especially with Malaysian firms) were ar-

anged, and as the political elites enjoyed conspicuous consumption (e.g., the extravagant presidential wedding) though not without the danger of socio-cultural delegitimization (e.g., of former president Canaan Banana, accused of serial sodomy and rape). Occasional but vicious police clampdowns did not, as of late 1997, deter growing public dissent. The opposition press continued to harangue government, the early 1980s Matabeleland atrocities were constructively publicized by human rights groups, and there were inklings of electoral challenges in the emergence of independent (mainly petty-bourgeois) candidates and in a widely-supported human-rights campaign to amend the country's constitution.

By year-end 1997, an anti-government stayaway and several large urban protests on "Red Tuesday," 9 December, were joined by more than a million people [a pat-

tern that continued into 1998, as documented in the preceding article in this issue by Iden Wetherell - the editors]. A cross-class alliance of organized labour, the constrained petty bourgeoisie, sympathetic employers and various other activists had emerged around issues of accountability and abuse of public funds, fuelling a growing sentiment that after two decades in power, Mugabe and his ZANU party could potentially be voted down in the next (2000) general election. Indeed, it had begun to appear that an uneasy blend of divergent ideologies might possibly coalesce to at least threaten such a feat - though it would unlikely be sufficiently influenced by ZCTU advocacy on behalf of its broader constituency of workers and the poor, and bedeviled by the apparent lock ZANU enjoyed on rural loyalties. Would such a coalition replay neighbouring Zambia's early 1990s conversion from stagnant au-



Caleb Kenna - Impact Visuals

thoritarian populism to some initial steps towards the deepening of democratization (albeit with the attendant danger that this might ultimately be joined, as in Zambia – or, for that matter, as in post-apartheid South Africa – to even more rapid neoliberal economic decay)?

### Assessing the conjuncture

There were two opposing ways of looking at the conjuncture. Mugabe's land "reform" and veteran payoff manoeuvres surprised this author and many others who had watched ZANU drift steadily into market-oriented ways of running the government and the economy. Were these reflections of the leader's capriciousness and desire to divide-and-conquer his subjects by addressing the needs of discrete constituencies? Or did they, in contrast, represent the political last-kicks of an economic horse that could no longer perform even mundane functions? In short, did the political crisis set the stage for economic catastrophe, or was the sustained economic failure associated with the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme and, indeed, nearly a quarter-century of falling living standards the underlying cause of the political crisis? (Or was it something of both?)

Political fluidity was certainly evident in the dramatic backlash against Mugabe's two very non-neoliberal turns, reflected in the international and local investor panic in November 1997, the December street protests, and the unprecedented rejection of tax increases (to pay for the war vets pensions) by delegates to a major ZANU conference and by parliamentarians in-between. But perhaps of deeper significance here was the overall global economic trend during the mid- and late-1990s. From Mexico (1994) to Brazil (1995) to South Africa (1996) to Southeast Asia and even South Korea (1997), the semi-periphery of the world economy was subjected to formidable waves of currency speculation, raiding of foreign reserves,

domestic credit crunches and stock market panic. This partly followed from the frenzied, footloose rush of international financial capital, but more fundamentally, from the awesome problem of systematic overinvestment, overproduction and overtrading in the productive sectors of the world economy.

Within this maelstrom, the Zimbabwe government's two emerging neoliberal strategies – "Zimprest" and "Vision 2020" – were taken less and less seriously. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank erratically endorsed and then unendorsed the state's progress during the mid-1990s. By mid-1997, Zimbabwe debuted in the Swiss-based World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report at third to last, out of 55 countries. True, the ineffectual, debt-ridden character of the state helped bring Zimbabwe's rating down. But this was at a time when nearly all other neoliberal advice had been closely followed, and as even foreign investment (mainly mining, retailing and banking) had picked up from minuscule levels of the previous fifteen years.

As a result, a certain frustration must have emerged in Mugabe's inner circle regarding both state capitalism (1980s) and neoliberalism (1990s). One short-term gut reaction was a return to dirigiste methods, including the land grab and the takeover of foreign-currency denominated accounts (at a discount to the unwilling sellers) – thus doing great damage to government credibility on financial liberalization – as part of an initial, vain attempt to protect the value of the currency during the November 1997 tumble. But the medium term would see more dramatic reductions in the state budget, the introduction of Value Added Tax (largely to squeeze an extra 5% or so of the income of rural consumers who had avoided the general sales tax), as well as larger-scale privatizations.

If these aspects of Zimbabwe's political superstructure were related

in any way to an underlying tendency to economic crisis, as has been witnessed so frighteningly in the recurrent financial market upheavals, nevertheless, Mugabe's willingness to discard his mask of investor-friendliness does not necessarily warrant sympathy. Bank-bashing populism, at which Mugabe excels, is often a guise for conservative not progressive politics, based ultimately on slight adjustments to flows of resources for the sake of patronage, not economic transformation.

Contradictory? Yet this is the *cul-de-sac* in which the Zimbabwean political elite now finds itself: the stark realization that there is no way out must by now be upon this regime. Moreover, if any of the argumentation above has merit, this must also be the *cul-de-sac* that any state manager of southern African capitalism – from Mandela to Chiluba and all others in-between – confronts at the end of the 1990s.

Meanwhile, the left's structural weakness in all parts of the African continent means there is no formal political solution on the horizon at this stage. Instead it is in the autonomous, unplanned but hopefully better directed protests than occurred during the January riots, that we can expect a stimulation of popular imagination. That imagination will take forms hardly predictable at this stage. If in undoing the placid reputation of Zimbabwe's citizenry – translated to me once by a Canadian graduate student as "Prozac Nation" – there are many false turns, at least there is emerging a militant sense of larger rights and wrongs, and courage to face the troops in the streets of the capital city. Of course, social justice in the long term will depend, in the short- and medium-terms, on deepening the left critique of a situation that is now too readily being understood as exemplifying merely anti-government sentiment. It is that, certainly, but it is potentially much more indeed.

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# Mozambique: Soldiers of Misfortune

BY CAROL THOMPSON

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The conditions match any of the most terrifying and depraved suffered by past generations afflicted by war. Yet the victims are not only soldiers. At the beginning of this century, 90 percent of war casualties were military; today about 90 percent are civilian. Yet even this sobering UNDP (1994) figure does not name the problem, for the term 'civilian' obfuscates the vulnerability and innocence of child victims. The conditions for children who are forced to bear arms erase the traditional analytical categories of military, civilian and child. An estimated 250,000 children under 18, some as young as five years old, are currently serving in 33 wars around the world right now.

The first question is why children face this new technique of abuse. The military answer is easy: in the last 20 years, modern technology has provided weapons which weigh less than seven pounds, cost about \$6 (or the price of a chicken in Africa), and can be stripped, reassembled, loaded and fired by an illiterate child of 10. Children have been used as cannon fodder, advanced as the first wave of infantry-style assaults with the purpose of inhibiting the enemy, who may be reluctant to fire at children. The social, political and economic answers are more difficult.

The second question asks why Mozambicans have been relatively successful in reintegrating boy soldiers and other children traumatized, exploited and displaced by war. It is community values and community organizing that are reintegrating Mozambican children, not the formal institutions of the state, of opposition parties, or of the economy.



Giovanni Diffidenti — Children of War Project

The third question poses a challenge, 'Where are the girls?'

## Boy soldiers and girl concubines

The origins of Renamo (Mozambique National Resistance) are well

documented and only need brief reference here to remind us of the history, which forms the background for the use of child soldiers.

Documentation over more than a decade concludes that Renamo sys-



tematically kidnapped and forcibly recruited boys to train as soldiers; girls became personal servants, which included providing sexual services, with some remaining with one man or boy for years, later to be designated as 'wife.' Documentation also shows that the government of Mozambique forcibly conscripted some unemployed urban youth (14-16 years). Yet international agencies conclude that the use of boy soldiers for transport of goods and for armed combat was overwhelmingly Renamo, not government, practice.

According to agencies working in Mozambique, such as the Red Cross, UNICEF, and Crianças e Famílias Desenvolvimento, recruitment of children is considered desirable for several reasons. First, children have high energy levels. Second, they are more susceptible to propaganda and therefore, more readily obey. Third, their moral values are still in formation so they can, more easily than an adult, suspend moral judgments. Right becomes one with obedience: according to UNICEF, commanders say child soldiers are "more obedient, do not question orders and are easier to manipulate than adult soldiers." Fourth, with fewer skills and less knowledge about the area, they are less likely to escape successfully. Finally, they don't demand pay.

Complete obedience was required, to the extent that the boys depended on their commanders for any decision such as when to eat, bathe and sleep. Rewards included some use of drugs and being given a girl as a 'wife.' Sometimes the relationship was for a few hours, sometimes more permanent. Practices varied. In the South, only commanders were allowed to bring women into temporary bases, the rest 'attaching themselves' to the civilian population. In the North, large bases included more girls.

Much has been made of the idea that Renamo used different tactics in different parts of the country,

for example, raping women less frequently in northern Mozambique than in the south. While not questioning that military tactics required different approaches in 'zones of control' vs. territory through which Renamo passed, the destruction, brutality and rape were systematic policies of Renamo.

A UNICEF survey (1990) suggests the degree of brutality against women even in areas where Renamo was interested in instilling allegiance among the population. Ivelte Jeichande interviewed 132 'mulheres deslocadas' (women captured by Renamo) in Maputo province, 83 in



Ussene Mamudo - AIM

Zambezia and 76 in Inhambane. Their period of captivity ranged from a few days to over three years; some were moved to as many as six different locations in three years, and over 50% from all three provinces attempted to escape more than once. Of those from Maputo province, 67.5% had experienced death of family members compared to 63.9% in Zambezia and 77.6% in Inhambane. Some were forced to have sex with their own children, "one of the most serious traumas produced by the armed bandits on Mozambican society." In Zambezia, 44.6% reported being tortured, 18.4% in Inhambane.

Kenneth Wilson summarizes Renamo's exploitation of women as more than a tactic of war: "Rape and the use of slave-wives is rather seen by Renamo soldiers as their right of access to women, and a key 'perk' of the job, not a direct tactic of war ... Renamo commanders repeatedly stress their special rights to women and girls, along with the status and prowess that this confers upon them as men of power relative to the Renamo rank and file ... The almost ritualized allocation of women to Renamo soldiers after their initiation has also been reported ..."

The leadership of Renamo consistently denied they were even using boy soldiers, let alone forcefully recruiting girl concubines. In February 1994, however, Renamo agreed with Unicef to transfer child soldiers to non-military transit centres, which took almost a year to accomplish. The very first soldier demobilized under UN auspices, with the leader of Renamo, Afonso Dhlakama, in attendance, submitted his gun and then told the press he was 16 years old, was kidnapped in Gaza at the age of 9 and had been fighting ever since.

## Reintegration and cultural affirmation

Renamo succeeded in destroying people, physically or emotionally, by requiring their violation of cultural norms. Yet it is these very norms, resilient and adaptable to new demands, which have promoted and nurtured reintegration of traumatized children. From 1987 when the first boy soldiers returned from Renamo territory, Mozambicans decided that Western individualistic psychology had only limited insight to offer for healing. In 1983 and 1984, modern techniques were employed in centres, alongside traditional ones, with the traditional proving itself to be more effective. At certain stages, psychologists have been involved to classify the degree of trauma, but healing has not occurred through psychology.

This local policy has now been verified cross-nationally in six regions (Europe, West and Central Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, Asia and Pacific, and Latin America) by the 1996 UN study on the impact of war on children. A combination of approaches is best, with 'normalcy' and engaging in community life essential for healing: "Psychotherapeutic approaches based on western mental health traditions tend to emphasize individual emotional expression ... In-depth clinical interviews intended to awaken the memories and feelings associated with a child's worst moments risk leaving the child in more severe pain and agitation than before. ... Rather than focusing on a child's emotional wounds, programs should aim to support healing processes and to re-establish a sense of normalcy ... including community life."

Thus, from the mid-1980s, Mozambican policy has centred on the community. First, to give material assistance to vulnerable families so they can sustain their children and second, to reunite children with families as quickly as possible.

Folk healers provide psychosocial intervention which builds on the strengths of families, rather than on the concept of pathology. Whole families were affected by the war, with adults feeling guilty for not protecting the child who was captured.

Traditional purification ceremonies which isolate the returned child for a few days are used to reestablish communication with the ancestors. Herbs are used to cleanse, both internally and externally. Harmful spirits are exorcised. The child discards his/her identity and is 'reborn' as a different person. Further, ceremonies call on the ancestral spirits, who are all-knowing; no one can hide what s/he did, what atrocities were committed. Reconnection with the ancestors is the first acceptance back into the community. Thus, the child is absolved of the behaviour of the previous, discarded identity.

Children emerging from purification have been able to recount their experiences, considered by Western psychology as basic to the healing process. In contrast, many of those

treated by Western psychology were never able to recount their stories.

To give one concrete example, in Xai Xai a family decided a daughter could move in only after a house purification ceremony was held. That ceremony is normally held only when a member of the family has died. She was kidnapped when only 11 and forced to serve as a soldier's wife; she became pregnant but the child was still born. After the ceremonies, her family accepted her as a 'new' daughter, totally different from the one who left.

### Location and reunification

The second program of tracing children who had been captured or lost during the long war was only partially successful in its efforts to recover both the boy soldiers and the girl (now women) concubines. Using Mozambican volunteers, male and female, organized via their traditional networks, in coordination with the NGOs, the success rate of locating the boys became very high.

Community groups were formed of 20-30 people. In the cities and at centres, posters were made of about 21 children's pictures per poster. Mass meetings were held in villages where details of the child were given, such as the surname, name of grandfather, village names, places named after events - any detail the child could remember. Quickly, the word would spread among chiefs, traditional healers, traders, and travellers - which led to locating relatives. The UNDP now estimates that 95 percent of the estimated 250,000 affected boys have been reunited with a family member.

However, neither demobilization nor tracing seems to have occurred for the girls, now women, who were forced sexual partners, some now with their own children. There is no data about how many were 'linked to' soldiers, how many went home with them during demobilization to their districts, how many were simply abandoned. The UNDP reports Renamo soldiers boarding



Jonathan Kaplan - Impact Visuals



G. Pirozzi - UNICEF

*Social integration rehabilitation from the war - street children in games & dances*

the vans to return to their home districts, simply leaving the women standing in the road. Women's welfare organizations also reported women and their children being dumped or in other cases being forced to accompany the man. During the exercise to return the demobilized soldiers to their home districts, women were seen trying to get out of the vehicles, screaming, "I want to go to my home!" About 91,000 male soldiers were demobilized, from both sides. How many women were abandoned? How many were coerced into remaining concubines?

It is quite astonishing that Mozambican girls and women still accompanying soldiers at the time of demobilization in 1994 were not counted, or cared for. It appears that no one among either the international or national agencies knows exactly what happened to them. They and their scars remain invisible.

This finding (or non-finding) is not exceptional to Mozambique, however. The international agencies conducting campaigns to censure the use of boy soldiers have not raised the issue of the girls 'given' to the boys as a reward, although the practice appears to occur in every conflict where there are boy soldiers. Can policies that ignore such a social group claim to be 'humanitarian'?

#### Tasks ahead

The economic prerequisites for reintegration of boy soldiers and girl concubines are fundamental, as the two-year world-wide UN study concluded: "The field visits and research ... repeatedly stressed the importance of links between education, vocational opportunities for former child combatants and the economic security of their families. These are most often the determinants of successful social reintegration and, importantly, they are the factors that prevent re-recruitment."

Peace must bring basic economic survival, or there will be no peace.

This study demonstrates why the international community needs to support UNICEF's call for children to be 'zones of peace.' The goal is to outlaw adults from using children as targets or as instruments of war.

What these international campaigns have not highlighted, however, is the forced concubinage of girls and women, treated as 'war booty' and as property to be used or distributed by the highest ranking male. Not exactly new, in fact as old as war itself, it is time that this practice is named and condemned as enslavement. Human rights groups need to begin documenting and writing chapters on 'forced concubinage,' as they continue their excellent work exposing other violations of human rights. The abuse of 'boy soldiers' has attained international notoriety. It is time to add the girls.

SAR



David Chudnovsky

Teachers protest "rationalization & restructuring" in Potchefstroom

# The Big Bungle

## Teacher Redeployment in South Africa

BY DAVID CHUDNOVSKY

David Chudnovsky, a teacher in Surrey, British Columbia, and executive member of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, has worked with the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) on the development of training programmes.

*"To the disadvantaged, rationalization is a long overdue process. It means the redistribution of financial and human resources in order to effect equity. ... Born out of struggle and being part-and-parcel of the cause for the poor, SADTU aligns itself with the ... position - that rationalization must take place to address the imbalances of the past."*

(South African Democratic Teachers' Union General Secretary Thulas Nxesi, SADTU News August 1996)

Apartheid education was a fundamental factor in the success of the old South Africa. It was both an expression of racism towards the chil-

dren of the country, and a key ideological training ground for the perpetuation of apartheid.

The state organized separate ministries of education for each of the so-called racial groups in South Africa - *White, Indian, Coloured, African*. Each of these had its own bureaucracy, curriculum and examination system, and funding. State revenues were allocated inequitably. During the apartheid era, as much as ten times the resources were distributed to *White* schools as were made available to *African* schools. As a result, pupil teacher ratios in *White* schools were often as low as 16:1, while they reached 60:1 or more in many black areas.

Since 1994, a massive program of reform has begun. All of the previous structures have been consolidated into one Department of Education. The entire curriculum - from pre-primary to post-secondary - is being re-written. Both pre-service and in-service teacher

training is changing radically. The law has been changed to require, for the first time, that all young people attend school.

The African National Congress - by far the most popular political party in post-apartheid South Africa, and the senior partner in the National Government - has committed itself to an education system which provides equal opportunity for all children. But the pace of reform is often hesitant and uneven, at times ambiguous at best.

A case in point is the attempt to redress the historic inequality in pupil teacher ratios (PTR). Clearly, dramatic steps must be taken to make PTRs more equitable if the commitment to equality is to be more than a slogan. Granted, there is much more to education than PTR. Indeed, there is much more to education funding and resource allocation than PTR. Nevertheless, analyzing initiatives in this area can shed light in a very practical way

on the resolve of the government, and the ability of the new South African society, to take the concrete steps necessary to improve the lives of the majority of its citizens. On its face, a commitment to redressing historical inequities in the area of PTR seems a simple matter to deal with. However, the legacy of apartheid is everywhere an impediment.

## Constitutional Challenges

During the negotiations for a new constitution which took place prior to the 1994 elections, the leaders of apartheid South Africa searched desperately for a way to secure a state apparatus which would continue to serve their interests. For them, this meant a guarantee that there would be no *purge* of civil service positions, and that the structure of the state would remain substantially unchanged. This objective had two purposes. The obvious one was to attempt to insulate government and state structures from meaningful reform, notwithstanding the imminent victory of the ANC. The second was more practical. The state had been a source of employment for white supporters of the system, and an attempt was made to defend these jobs.

The ANC proposed a total transformation of the state – including the right to reform the government and its institutions at every level in the post-apartheid period. This would mean the bureaucracy could not block needed changes, and would open up jobs to those who previously had been excluded. In the end, a compromise was struck: all those who were in employment were guaranteed their jobs, but once those individuals left their positions, a democratic, non-racial approach would be used in hirings. The new government's right to hire additional employees would not be restricted, and it was expected that those who remained on the government payroll would be offered incentives to leave their positions early.

These agreements later became critical to the issue of reform,

redeployment, and rationalization in the public education system. In addition to this constitutional compromise, the new government pledged when it took power after April 1994 that there would be no layoffs (retrenchments) of state employees, including teachers. This was a personal pledge by President Mandela.

## Rationalizing the teachers

In 1995 and 1996 the government and the teachers' unions negotiated an agreement which, it was hoped, would lead to an orderly rationalization and redeployment of the teaching force based on the commitments that had been made, the needs of students, and the input of teacher organizations. The process was to work as follows. First, a buy-out would be offered to any teacher in the country willing to leave his or her post. Some consideration had been given to making these incentives available only to those educators who taught in areas where there was a relative *over-supply* of teachers (i.e. in white schools). But this was rejected for a couple of reasons. First, in post-apartheid South Africa, a good deal of time and energy is spent on formulating policy which explicitly rejects racial categorization. Second, it was realized that buy-outs offered to white teachers only would simply add to their privileges relative to their non-white colleagues.

The second stage in the process called for teachers to willingly relocate to historically disadvantaged areas. The next step was to be an assessment or audit of the distribution of educators in the country. These analyses would demonstrate the effects of the historical inequities, the buy-outs, and the voluntary redeployments. Finally, there was to be a process of appointing teachers to achieve a balanced PTR, somewhere in the 1:35 or 1:40 range, across the entire country. It was agreed that at the end of the process there would be no fewer teachers in South Africa than at the time of

the agreement. Further, in line with government policy described above, there were to be no retrenchments or *forced retirements*.

## SADTU responds

The South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) is the union representing a majority of teachers and principals in South Africa. An affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, SADTU grew out of the anti-apartheid struggle, and the movement towards unity and consolidation of the former ethnically based teacher organizations.

SADTU negotiated and agreed to the plan for redeployment and rationalization. The union saw the process as a genuine attempt by the government to improve the educational situation of the vast majority of students in the country. Moreover, the plan was consistent with trade union principles: there was to be no coercion (no teacher would be forced to change jobs), there were to be no layoffs, and PTRs for the vast majority would be reduced (so working conditions – and learning conditions – would improve).

Some SADTU members opposed the plan. They argued that to agree to incentives for teachers to leave the profession when millions of students were in very large classes – if they were in school at all – was irresponsible. Moreover, it was argued, the money spent on the buy-outs could be used better to improve the system itself. Nevertheless, ultimately SADTU and the other teachers' unions agreed to the plan.

In practice, however, the process of rationalization and redeployment has been fraught with difficulties and disappointments. Many black teachers working in the most disadvantaged areas have taken advantage of the incentives offered and left the profession. Many of these are senior and experienced teachers and principals, as the buy-outs are most attractive to those with the

most seniority. In addition, after accepting buy-outs, some educators have been hired to senior positions in the system: their very seniority and experience makes them valuable to the education system. This has understandably generated a great deal of bitterness among teachers left in the profession, and the public.

The state (now the nine new provincial governments) has also been unable to determine how many teachers work in the schools. For the most part, this is a result of the underdeveloped structures and processes left over from apartheid days. Several of the provinces have been unable to respond to SADTU's simple request for the number of teachers working in those provinces, for instance. In other cases, the figures provided by the ministries have been so obviously incorrect that they are not reliable for the serious discussions which must take place between union and management.

Instead of implementing improved PTRs, SADTU and the government have spent much time debating the number of teachers currently in place. The situation is more difficult in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, the two provinces which do not have ANC provincial governments. In these cases there is a political motive to delay providing basic informa-



School room in Khayelitsha - 33 teachers 1215 students in the school (1997)

David Chudnovsky

tion and data, and in implementing change, in addition to the other reasons.

To make matters worse, all provinces must address the bizarre phenomenon of *phantom teachers*. It is not clear how many pay cheques are issued each month to teachers who either don't exist, or who only show up at school to receive their cheques but do not teaching, but certainly there are thousands - and perhaps tens of thousands. This situation again is a legacy of apartheid. Administration and organization of the former African schools was so chaotic that it was relatively easy to continue

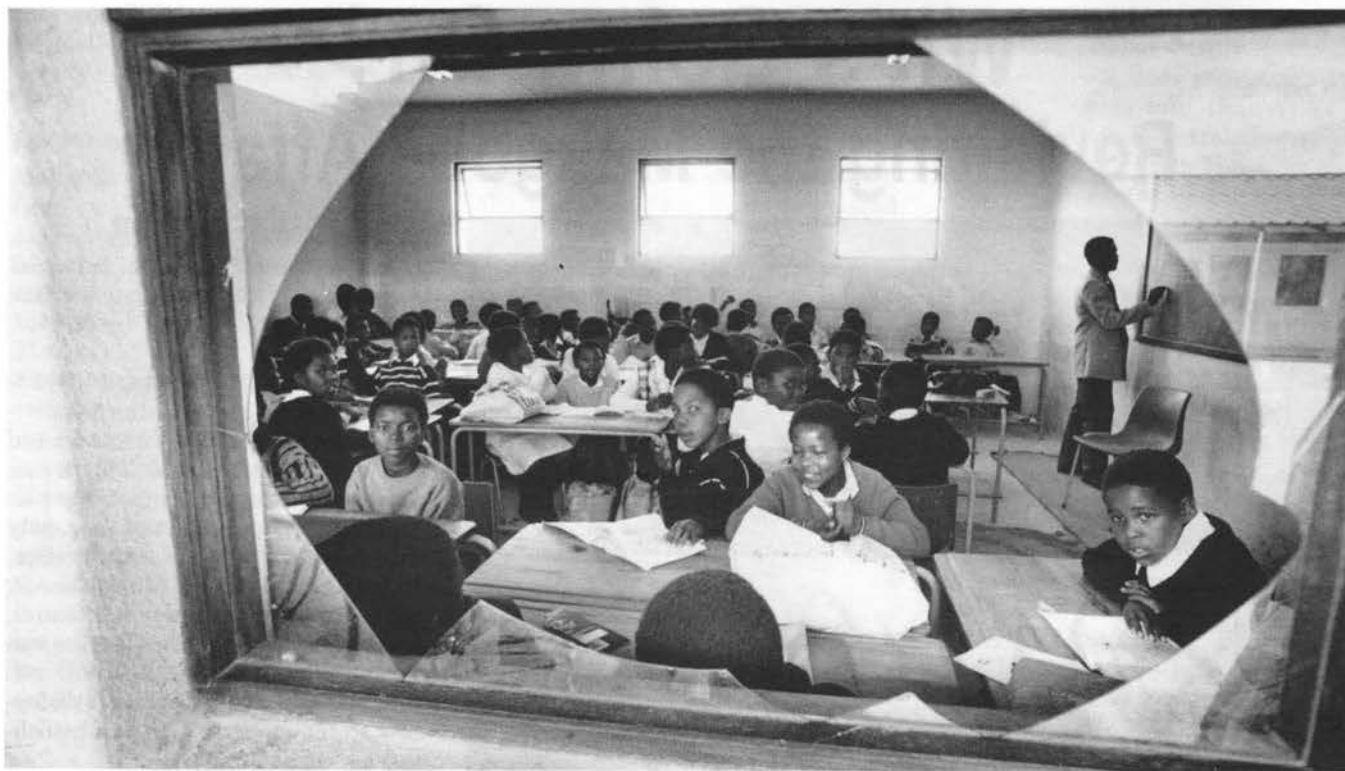
to collect the pay of a deceased teacher or one who had moved or left the system. Moreover, the anarchy in many African schools in the decades leading to the defeat of apartheid, resulted in many emotionally disabled teachers who are unable or unwilling to carry out their duties to this day.

#### Teachers rally

By mid-1997 it was clear that there were serious flaws in the implementation of the plan which was to have substantially re-shaped the teaching resource base of South African schools. In many areas the situation was actually worse than it had been in 1995. Some staff members had taken buy-outs, and were not replaced. This was most often the case in the most disadvantaged areas which had expected dramatic improvement. Though there are no reliable statistics, it is probable that there are fewer teachers today in South Africa than there were in 1995. In April, May, and June, tens of thousands of SADTU members in several provinces rallied and marched to highlight their frustration with slow and bungling progress. In early June, the SADTU leadership took the unprecedented step of writing a public letter directly to the Minister of Education, strongly stating their displeasure with the process.



David Chudnovsky



Eric Miller - Impact Visuals

School room in Khayelitsha - classes with up to 92 students in 1992

Obviously, the issue is complex. What is less obvious is why such disappointments have been encountered. Clearly, the legacy of racism, in its profound and subtle manifestations, is the chief culprit. Other factors are also important, however. It is evident that the redeployment and rationalization process has been flawed.

Also troubling, the current macro-economic strategy of the government provides a difficult, if not impossible, context in which to execute effective education reform. This has been a dramatic change in government policy. Recall the Reconstruction and Development Programme, upon which the Alliance campaigned for the ANC in the April, 1994 election:

*The central objective of our RDP is to improve the quality of life of all South Africans, and in particular the most poor and marginalised sections of our communities. This objective should be realised through a process of empowerment which gives the poor control over their lives and in-*

*creases their ability to mobilise sufficient development resources, including from the democratic government where necessary. The RDP reflects a commitment to grassroots, bottom-up development which is owned and driven by the communities and their representative organizations.*

With the unveiling of a new government macro-economic strategy in 1996, the GEAR (Growth, Employment, and Redistribution), the focus of government policy has changed. The GEAR is characterized by a focus on deficit reduction, conventional monetarist policies (inflation is a principal concern), private sector growth policy, and trade liberalization. This all too familiar approach has had the inevitable effect of squeezing public services, and threatening public sector jobs.

\* \* \*

In November and December 1997, the education departments of all the provinces announced massive layoffs of teachers. They were responding to budget constraints im-

posed by the national government, but the retrenchments were in direct contradiction to the commitments made by the ANC and by Mandela, and the agreements negotiated with SADTU. SADTU threatened to go to court to get an injunction to prevent the retrenchments. On January 16, there was a breakthrough in negotiations between the union and the Minister of Education, Sibiso Bengu, when seven of the nine provinces agreed to rehire the teachers or postpone plans to allow their contracts to expire. Discussions with the other two provinces (Gauteng and Western Cape) were still continuing.

Given current government policy, these flare-ups seem inevitable. What is heartening is the commitment of teacher unionists to press for a thorough reform of the education system, to serve the needs of the children of South Africa. SADTU's leadership, and its ability and willingness to mobilize its membership, will be an important factor as this issue continues to development.

SADU

# Wit's Going On?

## Revisiting the Makgoba Affair

BY EDDIE WEBSTER

*Eddie Webster is Professor of Industrial Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand.*

From late 1995 until April 1996 – a period of more than six months – the University of the Witwatersrand was engulfed in a crisis. The immediate source of the conflict was the credentials and conduct of the newly appointed Deputy Vice-chancellor, Malegapuru William Makgoba. A group of thirteen senior academics, led by social historian, Charles van Onselen, accused Makgoba of administrative incompetence, disloyalty to the university and embellishing his curriculum vitae.

The conflict was eventually “resolved” when Makgoba resigned as Deputy Vice-chancellor but stayed on as a research professor in the medical school. But the events took a high toll – one of the signatories, Etienne Mureinik, a brilliant young law professor, committed suicide at the height of the conflict, others resigned. Most of the signatories have since withdrawn from involvement in university governance.

The conflict – what became known as the Makgoba Affair – polarized the university along racial lines. Makgoba’s supporters, drawn largely from the black staff and students, saw the allegations as concrete evidence of institutional racism. The first black person to be appointed to a senior administrative position, his supporters argued, was being publicly vilified and his character assassinated, his undoubted academic reputation rubbished and his plans to “Africanize” Wits dismissed. How, black staff asked, can a black person advance at Wits if this is the way a distinguished scholar is treated? Wits,

# MOKOKO

## THE MAKGOBA AFFAIR

*A reflection on transformation*



**Prof M.W. Makgoba**  
*Foreword by Thabo Mbeki*



they concluded, will never be transformed into a genuinely African university.

**Under attack**

Makgoba's critics, drawn largely from white staff and students, argued the opposite. Many whites felt that far from lagging behind, "transformation" at Wits had gone too far and standards were dropping. Makgoba, through his attacks on Eurocentric education, was himself a racist who was not committed to the university's long standing non-racial principles. Many were disgusted by Makgoba's public attacks on Wits and felt that he showed a lack of appreciation of its history of liberal opposition to apartheid. Above all, it was felt that he was not doing his job properly; he missed meetings, was indiscreet and was siding with student and worker militants.

This latter concern gets to the heart of the matter. The demographic composition of Wits had profoundly altered over the preceding decade as classrooms changed from white middle class to increasingly black and working class. Led by the South African Students Congress (SASCO) and National Educational and Health Workers Union (NEHAWU), a variety of forms of mass action - hostage taking, trashing of the campus and vandalism - had become common in the early nineties. At the core of these conflicts were a set of legitimate demands for financial assistance, greater attention to teaching and learning, and the need for institutions of higher learning to become more representative of the population of South Africa.

In order to meet this latter demand, Wits had begun searching for a black person to fill the vacant post of deputy vice-chancellor. Two candidates had been interviewed - Sam Nolutshungu, who turned down the offer, and Mala Singh, who came up against strong opposition because of her past presidency of the left leaning staff association,

the Union of Democratic University Staff Association (UDUSA).

In 1993, it was decided to appoint a search committee to ensure that a suitable candidate was appointed. It was rumoured in the corridors that Wits had found in Makgoba a "black Charlton" - a reference to the Vice-chancellor, Robert Charlton, also a medical man.

Makgoba seemed ideal for the job. He had grown up in the Northern Transvaal. He earned his medi-



M.W. Makgoba

cal degree at the University of Natal where he had performed brilliantly, topping the class in some of his courses. He had completed his PhD at Oxford and proceeded to establish an international reputation as an immunologist. What the university establishment found especially attractive was that he had not been active politically while a student or while he lived abroad.

**Mokoko**

Why did things go so horribly and tragically wrong? *Mokoko: The Makgoba Affair, A Reflection on Transformation* (Vivlia, 1997) is William Makgoba's explanation of what happened at Wits. The univer-

sity, he argues, is an inherently racist institution and, in setting forth this case, the book does provide an invaluable insight into the obstacles facing institutional transformation in South Africa. But Makgoba also links such concerns to a telling of his own life story that is worth noting in its own right.

Thus the book begins with an intriguing account of his upbringing in Sekhukhuneland, his ancestry as a direct descendent of the famous Chief Makgoba, who defended his people against the Boers a hundred years ago. Makgoba discusses, with refreshing frankness, the customs and rituals of rural African life; practices that continue to shape his behaviour today and of which he is very proud. He writes warmly of his experiences at Oxford, Birmingham and London where he was accepted as a scholar and a colleague.

The tone of the book changes dramatically after his arrival at Wits in October 1994. Within weeks, just before he was to chair his first selection committee, the Vice-chancellor summoned him to resolve a hostage taking incident. However, when he wisely suggested mediation, his advice was ignored, the police were summoned, the door kicked down, and the students and workers were arrested.

Lacking proper support and thrown in at the deep end of a racially polarized campus, Makgoba began to publicly criticize the university. This made him an identifiable target for what he calls "the conservative liberals." A secret and systematic investigation on the accuracy of his CV was unofficially embarked upon by Van Onselen. Unable to establish any significant inaccuracies, he widened his search to include Makgoba's job performance and mobilized senior members of the university to support his claims.

The rest of the book is a convincing defense of Makgoba's academic credentials, but not of his response to this attack. Deeply wounded

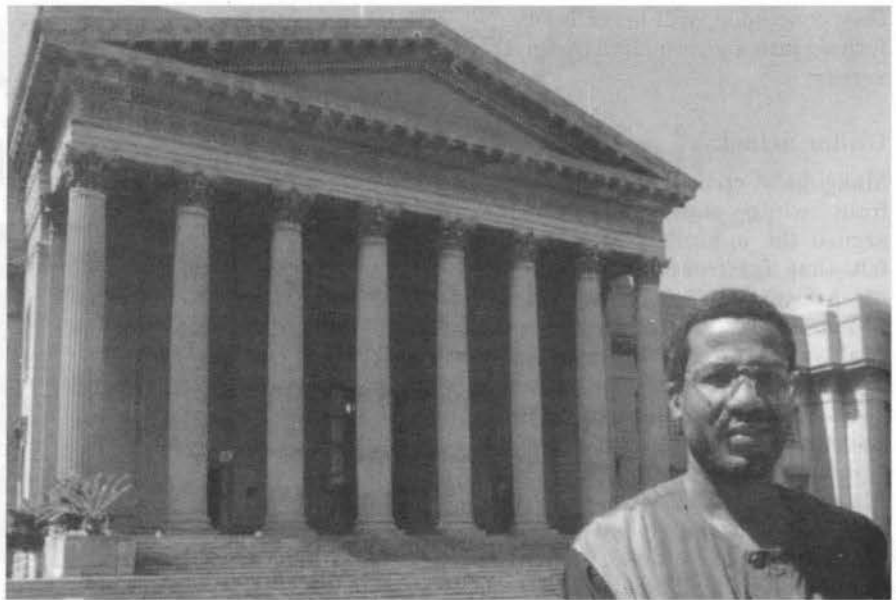
Robert Tshabalalo - Mokoko

by the questioning of his academic credentials and offended by the secret way it was conducted, Makgoba delved into the confidential files of his accusers and made them public. Put simply, two wrongs do not make a right and Makgoba lost the moral high ground. Instead of accepting an impartial commission of inquiry where he could have openly cleared his academic reputation, Makgoba inexplicably agreed to a privately brokered settlement.

Underlying the Makgoba affair was another, more simple agenda. Robert Charlton was due to retire at the end of 1997 and Makgoba's opponents were afraid that he might succeed him. They were keen to promote their own slate of candidates with June Sinclair, Deputy Vice-chancellor at the time and a major opponent of SASCO and NEHAWU, as Vice-chancellor. They failed badly. Instead, in reaction to the Makgoba affair, a strong progressive caucus developed in the selection committee between students, workers and academics that led to the appointment of first Nolutshungu, and, after his tragic withdrawal, Colin Bundy, as Vice-chancellor.

#### What next?

In his conclusion to the book, Makgoba claims that the power of the conservative liberals at Wits has been broken. While it is true that Sinclair was not appointed Vice-Chancellor and a new University Council has been appointed, Senate – the centre of academic power in the university – remains in large part unchanged. The number of black professors in the Senate has hardly changed since I became a member of Senate ten years ago. A lot of work lies ahead if Wits is to regain the ground lost over the last few years of divisive politics. The lesson I draw from the Makgoba affair is that institutions such as Wits remain deeply entrenched in the ways of the old South Africa and institutional change will take a long time.



Mokoko

*Makgoba at the Great Hall, Wits, early 1996 at the height of the turmoil*

William Makgoba has written a moving book that is deeply troubling in its implications for transformation in South Africa. But it is also an incomplete book as it portrays the conflict as one between conservative liberals and Africanists. Although the progressive academics at Wits were marginalized during this period, the University has a long and proud progressive tradition going back to the forties when Joe Slovo, Ruth First and Nelson Mandela were students and Harold Wolpe was SRC president. Indeed student politics has tended to be dominated by an alliance between

the left and liberals. In the seventies and eighties, this was strengthened by the emergence of a group of progressive academics such as David Webster and the formation of UDUSA in 1986.

Transformation in the late eighties and nineties was led by SASCO, but SASCO failed to reestablish an alliance with progressive academics thus clearing the way for the conservative liberals. The undisciplined behaviour of SASCO allowed the conservatives to demonize the students. This led to the transformation discourse being dominated by a thinly disguised racism. The result was fatal for Makgoba. When he arrived at Wits in 1994, he not only entered a racially polarized campus: there was also no coherent progressive presence and, lacking direct experience of the collective nature of the democratic struggle, he failed to rebuild the left/liberal alliance.

In the end, Makgoba's vision for Wits – and for higher education more generally – does not differ all that much from the conservative liberals. They both hold on to a notion of the university as an autonomous institution, somewhat divorced from the pressing socio-economic issues that surround it. Of



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course the difference lies in their attitude towards race. Conservative liberals do not believe that Wits was one of the beneficiaries of the apartheid system and they reject the notion of institutional racism. Makgoba, on the other hand, sees Wits as a central institution designed to maintain and perpetuate the privileges of the white minority. For him race is not irrelevant to an understanding of Wits: it is, in fact, his only explanatory category.

This race reductionism is problematic in as much as it is unable to account for those – admittedly small numbers – of staff and students who were actively engaged in resistance to apartheid and retain a commitment to an egalitarian South Africa. It thus offers an incomplete understanding of Wits as an institution.

At the same time, Makgoba's failure to recognize the contradictory nature of Wits is not itself racist. In the concluding chapters of the book, Makgoba argues for the Africanization of Wits, an approach endorsed by Deputy-president Thabo Mbeki in his preface to the book. However, in doing so – and we must assume Makgoba does not disagree – Mbeki cleverly appropriates the discourse of "Africanism" while also expanding its definitions: he supports the idea of pan-africanism but locates it in the context of the African National Congress' commitment to non-racialism and cultural pluralism.

\* \* \*

The Makgoba affair provides a deep and tragic insight into the South

African transition. As with the rest of South Africa, black and white are struggling to find a common project. Many, of all races, see a way forward but have not yet found the most effective way to realize it. In the case of Wits, 1998 begins with a new Vice-chancellor, Colin Bundy, who has an established reputation as a progressive scholar with a commitment to transformation. While the Makgoba affair revealed the dark side of Wits, there is also an alternative legacy of genuine non-racialism grounded in an active and scholarly commitment to the creation of a more participatory and egalitarian society. Fortunately Wits has been given a second chance to reclaim this legacy and to take its rightful place in the new South Africa.

SAR

## A House of Many Mansions?

continued from page 7

tion from the movement of NUM leader Kgalema Motlanthe into the ANC secretary general's office. It should be noted, though, that the NUM is among COSATU's affiliates, one of the most politically loyal to the ANC. One person who expressed regret at Motlanthe's elevation was Stella Sigcau, Minister of Public Enterprises. She was overheard praising Motlanthe for his helpful role in privatization negotiations "in getting the unions on board" (*Business Day*, 19/12/1997). Sigcau, incidentally, was the only cabinet minister who failed to obtain a seat on the National Executive.

Most members of government fared well in the NEC elections, though, calling into questions pre-conference reports concerning activist displeasure with government performance (though it may be significant that those personalities widely believed to be particularly indebted to Thabo Mbeki for their elevation fared comparatively badly in the NEC elections – the Pa-

had brothers and Housing Minister Sankie Mthembu-Mahanyele were cases in point). Trevor Manuel's high seventh ranking was especially noteworthy given his identification with unpopular fiscal policy.

A final consideration in any effort to assess the ideological mix in the ANC top echelons after the conference should be the organization's increased financial dependence on black business: the Treasurer's report noted that black businessmen who used to donate R250,000 can now be approached for donations of R2 million. In an organization with declining membership and dwindling sources of foreign finance, this group is likely to command increasing influence. Peter Mokaba's contentions about capitalism's place within the ANC's ideological traditions may have found little favour within the community assembled at Mafikeng but they may not have been so far ahead of their time [see also, on the this point, the accompanying article by Oupa Lehulere – the editors].

\* \* \*

When the history books about the new South Africa are written it is unlikely that the assembly at Mafikeng will be understood as constituting a turning point. Trade unionists signalled that despite their displeasure with the government's commitment to economic liberalism they still have more to gain from partnership within the alliance than opposition outside it. Rank and file delegates in their voting demonstrated an impressive adherence to the ANC's traditional non-racialism, despite this being a more visible part of its life in leadership circles rather than at the grass roots. The ANC leadership were sustained in their conviction that they could continue to function as a liberation movement and not a more sharply defined political party, a house of many mansions, accommodating the rural poor, organized labour, the emerging black "patriotic bourgeoisie" and the rainbow coalition of liberals and radicals which have for so long distinguished it from nationalist movements elsewhere on the continent.

SAR

# Canadian Research Consortium on Southern Africa

## ANNOUNCEMENT OF SPRING WORKSHOP AND CALL FOR PAPERS

**May 28 - 30, 1998**

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Kingston, Ontario, Canada**

All of those planning to attend are encouraged to offer either full papers or shorter presentations for the work-in-progress sessions. Proposals on any subject connected with the history, contemporary development experience and future prospects of the southern African region are welcome. Abstracts should not exceed four pages.

THE DEADLINE FOR THE RECEIPT OF ABSTRACTS AND/OR APPLICATIONS TO ATTEND THE WORKSHOP IS  
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