

Civil Society Theory and the Politics of Transition in South Africa

Robert Fine

The emergence of what is called 'civil society theory' within opposition politics in South Africa, and its widespread use by most parties, has posed an important challenge to the prevailing political perspectives which have previously informed the anti-apartheid movement. Civil society theory has been imported from democratic movements of East Europe and reinforced by their success in hastening the collapse of Stalinism.

Simply stated, the rise of civil society theory expresses the widespread conviction that there is no longer any purchase in the idea of one-party government, the conflation of state and civil society, the denial of civil or political rights in the name of economic development. The term, however, is ambiguous, on one side pointing to the system of needs of a capitalist 'free market' and on the other to the empowering of a range of grass-roots organizations (trade unions, civic associations, rural committees, women's and youth organizations, student movements, etc) which are independent of the state. The emphasis has been on these new social movements retaining or obtaining autonomy from whatever political party is in power, being able to push the state from below for beneficial social changes and nurturing the seeds of democracy, civil rights and tolerance in their own sphere of activity.¹

In South Africa the theory usually assumes that the associations of civil society and the political leadership of the ANC — as the future government — will work together for the transformation of society, each providing the strengths the other lacks. In relation to those etatist theories (socialist and nationalist) which focus on the political kingdom alone as the centre of all power and source of all development, civil society theory does not ignore the state but advances what has been called a 'dual track' strategy. Albie Sachs put the perspective for the ANC: 'if good non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and open government is the main guarantee that the effects of apartheid will be overcome, then the organs of civil society are the principal guarantors that good government will exist'². The theory declares that the new society will be built by a combination of good government on one side and dynamic community, trade union, and other associations on the other.

This normative vision serves as a counterweight to the suppression of civil society that was the hallmark of apartheid — through the restrictions it imposed on the civil and political rights of the vast majority of its population — and to the highly centralised and statist visions of emancipation from apartheid which characterised the dominant SACP and African Nationalist currents of opposition. It gives political expression to the trade unions, and other new social movements which heroically bore the brunt of the internal struggles of the 1980s. It endeavours to

harmonise the interests of the two major wings of the opposition: the political leadership identified with the ANC-SACP, returned home after many years of exile, and the organizations which grew up within the country independently. Finally, in opposition to the grim prospect of a new class of officials, intellectuals and politicians running post-apartheid South Africa from above — perhaps with an iron fist no less authoritarian than that of apartheid — it seeks to find a space for a radical populism committed to participatory democracy, workers control and political self-education. That is, civil society theory proposes a marriage of power descending from the top and power ascending from the bottom.

Civil society bound: the old politics

The rise of civil society theory in South Africa represents an attempt to build a 'third road' in opposition to the two tendencies which have dominated opposition politics in the post-war era: liberalism and radicalism. The strategy of liberalism may be characterised in shorthand as that of 'reform from above' and the strategy of radicalism as that of 'revolution from without'.

Liberalism dominated opposition politics in South Africa up to the end of the 1950s, though there was scarcely a moment when it was not contested by radical forces. With the turn to armed struggle in 1960 and the ANC-SACP's adoption of 'revolutionary nationalism', liberalism was relegated to a subordinate position within the opposition movement as a whole. With the legalisation of the ANC-SACP in the 1990s and the latter's own turn toward negotiations, liberalism has again become the paramount form of liberation politics.

Theoretically, liberalism associates the ideal state with the free play of market forces, while the racially-defined and status-ridden nature of apartheid appears at odds with the rational market requirements of capital. However much capital comes to terms with apartheid, the antagonism between the free movement of capital and the racial superstructure is presented as a basic contradiction. The central proposition of liberalism is that the development of capital in South Africa has been accompanied by a growing need for reform as the irrationality of apartheid becomes more acute, and a growing capacity for reform as both capital and labour accumulate social power. Capital and labour are seen as having a common interest in the reform of apartheid, whatever other conflicts divide them.

The political strategy associated with liberalism is to cement an alliance around a consensual programme of reform from above and self-restraint from below. The candidates for such an alliance are usually conceived as the progressive wing of capital, organised labour and moderate politicians (liberal and nationalist) mediating between them³. In its relation to the social movements of civil society, its core strategy is to restrain them within parameters set by reform from above, avoiding or suppressing actions likely to alienate the consensual alliance it solicits.

Radicalism first arose in the 1960s as a response to the perceived failures of liberalism and provided the dominant form of oppositional theory until the end of

the 1980s. Manifested especially in its armed struggle, it presented itself as a break from the limitations of non-violence, legalism and reformism. Within its own language the transition from liberalism to radicalism was presented as a progression from protest to challenge, reform to revolution⁴. Radicalism however, had one thing in common with the doctrine it superseded: it also subsumed the associations of civil society to its own centralised project, in its case that of revolutionary overthrow of the state. It neglected or opposed attempts to reform apartheid from below or to develop the popular organizations of civil society except insofar as they fed into the armed struggle. It was not just a revolutionary strategy but a revolutionism which counterposed itself to civil society. Confounding the general question of reform with the top-down model of reform pursued in the previous period, radicals ended up rejecting all partial reforms, all particular campaigns, all negotiations with the state, all participation in official bodies. At its worst it celebrated violence as the sole instrument of liberation⁵.

The three basic propositions put forward by radicals are that black society is deprived of all means of social self-defence, that no reform is possible or real, and that it is only possible to overthrow the system as a whole through violent revolution from below. It explains apartheid as a specific form of capitalist state based on the super-exploitation of black labour and incorporation of white labour. There have been different emphases on what was crucial to the formation of apartheid — labour control, the decline of the reserves, the threat posed by the black urban proletariat, the local conditions of exploitation in South Africa, etc. — but in all cases the functional requirements of capital are seen as the major determinant of the state.

The common element of radicals and liberals lies in their top-down, etatist approach to theory and politics. For all the limitations of liberalism in the 1950s, the strategy with which it was identified was not without success. It was at the head of a popular movement of trade unions, community groups, women's organizations and other associations of civil society which rocked the state at the end of the decade. By contrast, the radical strategy led to the virtual collapse of civil society and failed to make any significant inroad into the state. These contrasting results indicate deep-seated weaknesses in radical theory and practice. Indeed it was formalised as a theory by exiled intellectuals in the mid-1970s, when the new unions inside South Africa revealed in practice that black society was not deprived of all means of social self-defence, that real reform was possible and that the overthrow of the system as a whole through violent revolution was not the only way. In this regard, radical intellectuals lagged behind the actuality of the labour movement⁶.

Civil society unbound: the new unions

On the margins of South African political life, there has been a long history of criticism of etatist politics in both liberal and radical forms, but such criticism was weakened by the defeat of the labour movement in the course of the

Second World War and the subsequent marginalisation of socialist ideas. In the 1970s, however, this critique began at last to acquire centrality with the emergence of the new unions. In the absence from South Africa of the exiled liberation movement, the new unions had a political significance which outstretched their organizational form as unions.

The new unions initiated a process which I have called the 'proletarian reformation' in South Africa⁷. There were three main elements: the self-organization of labour in industrial unions, the struggle for partial reforms in the workplace, and the demand for legal space in which to organise. The doctrine of 'reform from below' took the form of collective struggles over wages, conditions, managerial recognition of unions and the abolition of racism in the workplace. The self-organization of workers and the struggle for reform in the workplace were inseparable twins which lay at the heart of the unions' challenge to the prevailing orthodoxies of radicalism.

The doctrine of 'non-racialism' challenged the prevailing culture of nationalism, offering to workers an experience of combining as workers regardless of 'race' or 'nation', affirming independence from the idea of apartheid and from the nationalism which defined the liberation movement. Commitment to non-racialism was coupled with an internationalism based on links with foreign trade unions and solidarity with foreign workers. The doctrine of 'workers control' broke with the formalistic notion of representation which characterised the old forms of liberation organization, emphasising instead forms of participatory democracy, accountability of delegates to members, open debate, the formation and education of cadres of union activists, visible structures of responsibility between members and leaders, and most of all the principle that workers should participate not only in action but in decision-making processes over how to act. It also stretched over into its more usual meaning of workers controlling their own productive enterprises.

The unions sought to overcome the divorce of economics and politics, by relating demands for a workplace 'rule of law' to normal issues of pay and conditions; and emphasising the importance of trade union independence in the wider struggle for a non-racial democracy. They were schools of democratic socialism, not only through their formal education programmes but in their mode of being.

The significance of the new unions thus lay not only in the reconstruction of black trade unionism but in their attempt to reconstruct the political culture of the liberation movement. The unspoken premise was that there could be no revolution without reformation: without prior reformation, liberation from apartheid could not lead to the constitution of freedom. This perspective was shared by some who saw reformation as the limit of their ambitions and others who saw it as a stepping stone for revolutionising society as a whole.

The limits of the new approach stemmed from the trade union form in which the new unions conceived of politics. Thus the idea of workers control introduced fresh political air into anti-apartheid politics but concealed the existence of an or-

ganised leadership in the unions with its own more or less worked out programme of action. The 'trade union left' was an identifiable political grouping with its own ideas and dominated the unions roughly up to the formation of Cosatu in 1985, when it was increasingly challenged by the SACP-ANC alliance⁸. The trade union left upheld an image of unions as a pure form of working class organisation, while other forms of association — political parties, community groups, social movements — appeared as inherently cross-class, populist, middle class dominated, etc. It perceived this distinction as an essential feature of unions, not as a contingent result of their political development. The privileged status thus afforded to trade unions as a working class organization obscured the political role of the radical intelligentsia within them; conversely the devaluation of other associations of civil society obscured the political battle for their leadership.

The idea of 'workers control' was a vehicle through which the trade union left reduced substantive questions of socialist politics to procedural questions of democracy or respect for trade union independence alone. It was associated with the notion that the unions were the representative voice of the working class as a whole. This possessed the potentiality for inversion of radical democracy to the silencing of opposition when criticism was excluded on the ground that it had not gone through the right channels or appropriate structures. A principle which started life as a means of democratic accountability could — and sometimes did — become a mechanism which could be turned against the trade union left itself.⁹

The associated idea of 'trade union independence' also offered a breath of fresh political air in South Africa. The unions showed that real independence from the state could not be secured formally through affirmations of non-cooperation, boycott, isolation, etc but through the growth of working class organization. The strength of this doctrine of independence was revealed, for example, in the response of the new unions to state-initiated labour reforms, where they successfully broke from the frame of radicalism by adapting constructively to new conditions of legality without succumbing to a corporatist legalism.¹⁰

The trade union left failed, however, to extend the methods it employed in its own sphere into the political; a key reason being that it had its own version of two-stage theory: first build the unions, only later address political issues concerning the state. In the context of these real limitations, the trade union left was subjected to two criticisms in the mid-1980s, which had superficial similarities but were in fact opposed. The socialist critique of economism was directed at the restriction of socialist ideas to the trade union sphere and called for their extension into politics. In the mid-1980s a critique of this kind emerged from within and without the trade union movement, claiming that unions were the embryo of a wider workers' movement and calling for a Workers Charter or even a Workers Party¹¹. Protagonists of this critique, however, were politically weak and there was considerable ambiguity over what was distinctive about working class politics, conceptions stretching from revolutionary vanguardism of a Leninist variety to a Gorzian perspective of 'structural reform'.¹²

The nationalist critique of economism took off from the opposite premise. It was against the extension of independent working class organization into politics, which was defined as the terrain of the national liberation movement, and against trade union independence in the economic sphere from the national liberation movement. It put forward the idea of 'political unionism' which in this context meant union recognition of the political leadership of the SACP-ANC. This critique of 'economism' was sometimes dressed in the cloth of Marx or Lenin but in actuality reserved the political to the national liberation movement and the economic to a trade union movement led by the national liberation movement.

The practical outcome of this argument was a new marriage between the nationalist politicians and the old trade union left in the latter half of the 1980s, based on the idea that in the political battle for democracy the working class had no specific interests of its own. A formal ANC-SACP-Cosatu alliance was effected: members of the trade union left were recruited into the Communist Party or drawn into its 'orbit'; those who continued to oppose the SACP-ANC were isolated; the Freedom Charter was adopted by Cosatu and most of its affiliates in an atmosphere of pressure; the idea of a Workers Charter as the emblem of an independent left was assimilated into the Freedom Charter; the idea of a Workers Party was abandoned or transferred to the Communist Party. The disintegration of the trade union left as a distinctive and independent political entity and the incorporation of its core elements into the national liberation movement was at first presented as a new marriage of nationalism and socialism and has now been reformulated as the twin-track strategy of civil society theory¹³.

✕ In its prime the trade union left shifted the focus of opposition from counterproductive and often rhetorical direct challenges to the apartheid state to nurturing autonomous social institutions which seemingly posed no immediate threat to the state. This 'antipolitics' (as it was sometimes called in east Europe) was from the start political, not just because apartheid politicised autonomous black organization but because it was conceived by the trade union left as the first stage of a larger transformation of society¹⁴. The achievements of 'social movement unionism' were outstanding; not least, it brought hundreds of thousands of black workers into public life. When the big questions of political power were thrust upon the trade union movement in the 1980s, however, the strategy faltered. The choice before the unions was presented as either 'political' or 'non-political' unionism: between joining the ANC-SACP in its bid for power or focussing on unions independently of politics. This was really no choice at all. The unions were drawn into the political frame of national liberation movement.

The antinomies of civil society

If there was a decade of 'civil society' in South Africa, it was the 1980s. In every corner of social life popular organization evolved: not just trade unions but all manner of youth, student, women's, community, cultural and ethnic as-

sociation. There was a veritable feast of civic activity with initiatives arising in every corner. The unity of this multifarious movement was for the most part expressed in the form of the ANC, whose goal in this regard was to contain the disparate elements of civil society within the ambit of the national liberation movement through mediating institutions (like the United Democratic Front and the Mass Democratic Movement) as well as through symbols of unity like the Freedom Charter and the release of Nelson Mandela. To those elements of 'civil society' which remained outside its ambit, the ANC could be in turn repressive and inviting; for those within, support for the general struggle of the ANC was to transcend local or sectional concerns.

Seething beneath the surface of civil society, however, strong disintegrative forces were at work. Social and political frustrations were expressed in the distorted forms of communal and gangster violence: elders versus comrades, Zulu versus Xhosa, warlord versus warlord. Many of the associations of civil society were not remotely 'civil'; thus 'popular justice' mainly degenerated into ghastly brutality that was neither popular nor just; and political argument sometimes degenerated into endless blood-feuds. Even within the most 'civil' of societies, that of the trade unions, the pursuit of factional aims was marred by all manner of intimidation.

The violence between competing interests that was the mark of civil society was not resolved by ANC leadership. The political leadership of the liberation movement espoused a militant form of radicalism which stressed the hollowness of all state reforms, the impermissibility of participation in official bodies and the centrality of mass insurrection. Its slogans at home were extremely radical: non-collaboration with the state, render South Africa ungovernable, no education before liberation, people's power, insurrection, etc. The rhetoric of 'dual power', however, served to aggravate the violence of civil society, as one grouping proclaimed its authority in the face of another, ANC-SACP approval was given to those who flew its flag, 'enemies of the people' were targeted, and 'unity' was turned into a demand for political conformity.

The central problem was that the unity of the 'people' tended to be conceived in terms of an abstract and monolithic 'general will', discounting the actual and divergent empirical wills of its constituent members. The 'people' tended to be conceived as singular interest or will which was embodied in a single movement. Rival claimants often shared the same conception of the 'people', as did those like the Communist Party which claimed to represent the 'working class' as a singular whole. In this rule of abstractions, there was a tendency for 'unity' to be imposed from above in a fashion that was destined to increase fragmentation on the ground. The unitary idea of the 'people' — whether in the field of justice, education or community — was turned to the service of factional political ends, so that any claimant to the title of representative of the people became an object of suspicion and possible overthrow.¹⁵

The state could exploit and aggravate these divisions because civil society was unable to create its own cohesion under the banner of the ANC-SACP. For many

who suffered from the violence of the times, these events resulted in a Hobbesian desire for peace and security at any cost. The state encouraged political violence between the conflicting interests of civil society and justified itself as the only force capable of containing this violence through police measures. The unleashing of civil society became the ground, paradoxically, for re-legitimising the state.

There is no doubt that the state was shaken by the uprising of the 1980s and the international sanctions which accompanied it and that this was the background to the change of political climate which occurred at the end of the decade. It is a myth, however, to interpret the reform of apartheid as a clearcut victory for democratic forces, for the apartheid state survived and quelled the uprising of the mid-1980s and the reform programme was initiated by Botha at the beginning of the 1980s. At this time almost all members of the liberation movement derided reform in radical style as a fiction or tactical device, ruling out the possibility that it expressed a real crisis of apartheid capitalism and imperative for restructuring.

In the event, the reform programme — which acted as a trigger to the urban revolt of the 1980s and revealed the political vulnerability of apartheid — was revived when the De Klerk government picked up the mantle of reform at the end of the decade on the basis of a far-reaching corporatist strategy. Instead of looking to a black bourgeoisie independent of the ANC-SACP, the state now looked its enemy in the face. Reform was delivered from the top down: in the form of the legalisation of liberation organizations, the release of political prisoners, the return of political exiles, the offer of negotiations for a new constitution, the deracialisation of the National Party, the repeal of most apartheid laws. This was corporatism with a vengeance.

The liberation movement naturally shifted strategy in accordance with these new conditions, but the thrust of its new direction was a return to liberalism. The ANC-SACP abandoned armed struggle and insurrection; it began to operate openly inside the country; most of its leaders and activists returned from exile; it entered negotiations with the government; the international sanctions campaign was eased; there was a 'discourse shift' from that of isolating and destroying apartheid to reconstruction. Some militants resisted this turn, reluctant to surrender the heroic spirit of the 1980s, but the main body of the leadership declared its eagerness to join the search for consensus¹⁶. It was not just that a change of strategy occurred in line with a change of circumstances, but rather that the change of circumstances dominated the change of strategy. In this shift from radicalism everything was turned on its head: insurrection into 'elite-pacting', armed struggle into legalism, non-collaboration into social partnership. Having for decades characterised the Nationalist government as absolute evil, the main body of the ANC-SACP swung into the politics of corporatism.

The new turn was legitimated through a revamped theory of nationalism. The ANC-SACP moved to a form of an all-embracing pan-South African nationalism¹⁷, overcoming differences imposed by apartheid, uniting the people around a common national identity, turning away from primordial racial

categories, looking instead to a new South Africa of the future. If apartheid divides, the new nationalism unites; if apartheid looks to the past, South African nationalism looks ahead to a nation yet to be formed. Reconciliation was the key.

The defects of nationalism, however, are not easily overcome. The emancipation of South African society from its racist political shell may be accompanied by the growth of South African patriotism, but it is not a 'natural' outcome. South African nationalism raises its own spectres. What relations will the new nation seek with surrounding, weaker nations, and where will it draw its borders with Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland? Who would decide? How will South Africa respond to democratic opposition movements in neighbouring states with which 'national interest' requires friendly relations? How will it distinguish between local and foreign workers? Most important of all, how will the new nation respond to the social demands of its own poor when these are seen to conflict with the 'national interest'? None of these questions are easily answered, but the promotion of nationalism suggests the prioritising of 'national interest' over other concerns¹⁸.

With regard to the unions, Pan-South African nationalism functions to assimilate the non-racialism of the unions, originally associated with labour internationalism, into the corporatist framework and to draw the unions toward a commitment to the new South African national interest. For their part most of the trade union left reject the response of far-left political groupings, to the extent that the latter refuse negotiations and remain wedded to the old radical political vocabulary¹⁹. On the other hand, it has also been warning against 'elite-pacting', the turning of popular forces into 'spectators' of the negotiating process and the subordination of social issues²⁰. In short, it seeks a middle road.

Civil society theory functions here as an alternative to the radicalism of the far-left and the liberalism of 'elite-pacters'. The main problem is that the theorisation of civil society comes at a time when the initiative for political reform is with the government, negotiations are being centralised among the leading parties, many of the community and youth organizations established in the 1980s have lost their base, the trade union left has lost its distinct identity, most unions are hitched to the wagon of ANC-SACP politics, and internecine violence is rife in the towns and rural areas. Thus the positing of civil society as a normative theory of what 'ought to be' comes in the wake of its actual historical decline (though the unions continue to grow in numbers and organization). Civil society theory is a call for the associations of civil society to affirm their independence and raise their specific interests in the context of negotiations taking place between the main political parties over their heads. The problem is to turn this 'ought' into more than an idea, if it is not to become a mask for the etatisation of politics.

Civil society and party politics

There are many aspects to the building of civil society — economic, legal, constitutional, political — but I want to focus on one in my conclusion: the party

political question. It concerns the form of mediation between civil society and the state. With the worldwide decline of the 'one-party state' model in Eastern Europe and many parts of Africa, most sections of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa are now committed in principle to party political pluralism. But there are major problems of transition.

The suppression of the party-system by apartheid, for the vast majority of the population, has been long and deep in South Africa, perhaps adding another significance to the concept of 'apartheid' as 'a-party'. The impact of this repression on the opposition movement has been contradictory. On the one hand, the struggle for a multi-party parliamentary democracy has been a major thread of liberation culture. On the other, it has been internalised in the political consciousness of the liberation movement itself: if the myth of racial identity is used by the apartheid state to justify its suppression of the party system, the substitution of national movements for political parties does not transcend this suppression.

The critique of party politics became a central theme of the South African opposition after the war. In debates between the ANC and its rivals, each side accused the other of being a political party in disguise, sowing class divisions rather than national unity, dictating political ideas from above rather than expressing national consciousness from below. The party-form was identified with divisiveness, exclusion and rigidity; the congress or movement-form with unity, fluidity and inclusion. Consequently real distinctions between leaders and the people were obscured by the apparent identity of the national movement with the 'nation'. The idea of the 'people' was turned into a formalism whose singular consciousness was homogenised by the movement which spoke in its name; the plurality of particular opinions was negated by the homogenous notion of 'public opinion'; the policy choices of one party or movement were dressed up as the 'general will' of the people or nation as a whole; and definite political perspectives were presented in the language of rational necessity. Political argument was restricted to competing claims to represent the oppressed masses, the ground was prepared for painting political opponents as 'enemies of the people', and political differences were displaced onto the irrational terrain of 'friend and foe'²¹. The Communist Party's own formal self-conception of being the sole, legitimate representative of the working class accentuated these tendencies.

Important democratic practices were submerged inside the liberation movement with its rejection of party politics. The idea of a party is that it represents no more than a part of the whole rather than the will of the people as a whole; its programme and practices are open to rational criticism by other parties rather than being elevated as the *vox populi* or *vox rationis*; its policies can be revised or scrapped according to its decision-making structures rather than being set in stone as eternal principles; individuals join or support a party as citizens and not by virtue of ascribed national or racial status.

In 'normal' bourgeois society the fundamental problem of representation is that political parties are sucked into the state, undergoing a process of statification

which substitutes party political pluralism for popular participation in public life. This process, however, is never unconflictual or completed so long as the party system remains intact; however arrogant and hierarchical the party bosses become, to remain a party is to leave open some space for dissent from below. Thus the history of socialist political parties has been one of constant battle for their destatification and their accountability to their members.

To be sure, the media-driven statification of political parties — their trivialisation which removes them from the real needs and concerns of individuals — has led generations of critics to reject the party system as a whole in favour of some 'higher' form of political organization. This critique has been given all number of political expressions, left and right, and is the impulse which has led many marxists into the cul-de-sac of 'anti-parliamentarism'. In a review of my book with Dennis Davis, *Beyond Apartheid*, the SACP theoretician Jeremy Cronin posed this objection to our emphasis on political parties:

The regime hopes to present the South African situation as a relatively 'normalised' bourgeois democracy with a variety of political parties. Competing for the centre in this conception would be an ANC that hoists a flag called 'social democracy' and the NP and friends would hoist another flag called 'christian democracy'. Out on the fringes would be a series of miniscule 'ideological' parties to the left and right. But the democratisation of our society requires a broad national democratic front and not a charade of a west European democracy.²²

I do not wish to defend 'the charade of west European democracy' against critics of its limited democratic content, but it is absurd to identify party political pluralism in South Africa with conservatism. On the contrary, is it not more likely that the right will do its utmost to restrict any such development and impose a more authoritarian solution? In dismay at the prospect of a 'normalised' christian versus social democrat divide, Cronin loses sight of the real threat. He endorses a 'national democratic front' but if this means a government of 'national unity' in which the ANC-SACP shared power with the Nationalist Party, such an outcome would be much worse than the 'western' party system which Cronin still spurns.

Between civil society and the state there has to be some general form of mediation, for if each particular interest of civil society lobbies the state on behalf of its own private concerns — no matter how justified — then judgement of their claims and determination of priorities between them are left in the hands of one body alone, the state executive. The state executive is in principle the representation of the state interest in civil society; the party system is in principle the representation of the private interests of civil society in the state. If the state executive is not to be the sole mediation between state and civil society, then the party system of representation is essential.

The primary illusion of civil society theory lies in its idealisation of civil society itself as an independent realm of benevolence. However, bourgeois civil society is the realm of violence, self-interest, inequality and exploitation; none of the as-

sociations of civil society, not even the most democratic unions, are immune to these forces nor to their 'colonisation' by the state. Political parties for all their attendant dangers are the crucial means by which the particular interests of civil society are taken beyond themselves and lifted to the general interests of the state. For if this 'universalisation of the particular' is not effected from below, it will necessarily be imposed from above.

The problem of the transition from national liberation movements to party political pluralism is urgent. In substance the long-delayed development of a democratic socialist party (or parties) in South Africa remains as crucial as ever; in form the emancipation of party politics, breathing the fresh air of public life and open debate, remains an essential part of the wider emancipation of politics from race-thinking. The weakness of civil society theory is that it offers an unstable compromise, the limitations of which have been brought to public view in eastern Europe. To my mind, therefore, the question of mediation between state and civil society is crucial if liberation from apartheid is also to establish a constitution of liberty in South Africa²³.

References

Abbreviations used in these notes

NLR	New Left Review
ROAPE	Review of African Political Economy
SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
WIP	Work in Progress

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2. Albie Sachs (1991), 'Affirmative action in South Africa', The Alistair Berkley Memorial Lecture. See also ANC NEC (1989), *Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa*, IDASA.
3. See Merl Lipton (1985), *Capitalism and Apartheid*, Gower, and J Butler et al (eds)(1988), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa*, David Philip.
4. Harold Wolpe (1984), 'Strategic Issues in the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa', *Review*, 8, 2.
5. Joe Slovo (1977), 'No Middle Road', in B Davidson et al, *Southern Africa: The New Politics of Revolution*, Penguin.
6. The state has been characterised by many radicals as a 'colonialism of a special type', or as a form of 'racial capitalism', 'fascism' or 'Bonapartism'. The concept of 'totalitarianism' was rarely used, perhaps because it would have drawn attention to parallels between apartheid and the regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR, or because apartheid never entirely eradicated civil society.
7. I first came across the term 'proletarian reformation' in Leon Trotsky (1974), *Writings 1934-35*, Pathfinder.
8. For discussions of the trade union left see Johann Maree (ed), *Independent Trade Unions in South Africa*, Raven; S Friedman (1987), *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions*, Raven; Jeremy Baskin (1991), *Striking Back: A History of COSATU*, Verso.
9. See Jan Theron (1990), 'Workers control and democracy: the case of FAWU' and FAWU's response, *SALB*, 15, 3, Sept.
10. Contributions to this debate include: Phil Bonner (1983), 'Independent trade unionism in SA after Wiehahn', *SALB*, 8, 4; Bob Fine et al (1981), 'Trade unions and the state', *Capital and Class*, 15,

- and SALB 7, 1, 81; Fink Haysom (1981), 'In search of concessions: reply to Fine et al', SALB, (1981) 7, 3; Bob Fine (1982), 'Trade unions and the state once more', SALB, 8, 1.
11. See Joe Foster (1982), 'The Workers' Struggle: Where does FOSATU Stand?', ROAPE, 24.
 12. For left versions of radicalism see Alex Callinicos (1988), *South Africa Between Reform and Revolution*, London; Adam Habib (1991), 'The SACP's Restructuring of Communist Theory: A Shift to the Right', *Transformation*, 14; David Kitson (1991), 'Is the SACP really Communist?', WIP, 73 March/April; Alex Callinicos (1990), 'Can South Africa be Reformed?', *International Socialism*, 46. For the structural reform perspective see John Saul (1991), 'South Africa: Between "Barbarism" and "Structural Reform"', NLR, 186, and for the idea of a mass rather than vanguard party of labour see Workers Liberty (1985), *Breaking the Chains*, London. See also Pete Hudson (1986), 'The Freedom Charter and the Theory of the National Democratic Revolution', *Transformation*, 1; P Hudson (1988), 'Images of the Future and Strategies in the Present: The Freedom Charter and the South African Left', in P Frankel et al (eds), *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa*, Croom Helm; and Daryl Glaser, 'Democracy, Socialism and the Future', WIP.
 13. John Saul (1986) pointed to 'the advance in the wedding of popular democracy and socialist preoccupations' represented by the Cosatu-ANC-SACP alliance. 'South Africa: The question of strategy', NLR, 160, Nov-Dec. See also Alec Erwin (1985), 'The question of unity in the struggle', SALB, 11, 1, Sept. and J Cronin (1986), 'National Democratic Struggle and the Question of Transformation', *Transformation*, 2, for early formulations.
 14. For the use of the term 'antipolitics' in the Polish opposition, see David Ost (1990), *Solidarity and the Politics of Antipolitics*, Temple.
 15. See especially Daryl Glaser (1991), 'Discourses of Democracy in the South African Left' in R Cohen and H Goulbourne, *Democracy and Socialism in Africa*, pp 93-121.
 16. These are discussed in WIP (1990), 69, September, and reviewed in Yunus Carrim (1990), 'From banned liberation movement to legal political party: challenges before the ANC', unpub.
 17. Pan-South African nationalism was discussed in the late 1950s by Kenneth Hendrikse in *The Citizen*, but suffered paradoxically from anti-semitism. It was theorised much more richly by Neville Alexander (1979), *One Azania, One Nation*, Zed, but never fully emancipated from black consciousness. In a watered down form, it appeared in Joe Slovo (1989), 'The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution', *International Viewpoints*, Jan. The idea of a 'government of national unity' is being plugged hard by the centre: see H Gilliomie and L Schlemmer (1989), *From Apartheid to Nation-Building*, OUP.
 18. Most left discussions around issues of national growth and social redistribution seek to reconcile these goals. See Alec Erwin (1990), 'South Africa's Post-Apartheid Economy: Planning for Prosperity', SALB, 14, 66; Alec Erwin (1990), 'Comment' on the Harare Recommendations on Post-Apartheid Economic Policy', *Transformation*, 12; Stephen Gelb (1990), 'Democratising Economic Growth', *ibid*; and ANC/Cosatu (1991), 'The economy beyond apartheid', *New Nation*, June; Lawrence Harris (1990), 'Building the Mixed Economy', paper presented to the ANC's Department of Economics and Planning workshop, Harare, April-May.
 19. See fn 18 and also 'A Year in the Life of the Left', WIP (1991), 72, Jan-Feb.
 20. Reports from the December 1991 Conference of the SACP suggest a Stalinist fight-back. For the profession of a new-found anti-Stalinism, see Joe Slovo (1990), 'Has Socialism Failed?', *African Communist*, 121; for the limits of current anti-Stalinism in the SACP see Pallo Jordan (1990), 'The crisis of conscience in the SACP', *Transformation*, 11. For an overview see Heribert Adam (1991), 'Transition to democracy: South Africa and Eastern Europe', *Telos* (1990) 85, Fall.
 21. See Carl Schmitt (1976), *The Concept of the Political*, Rutgers. This was Schmitt's irrational characterisation of 'the political' in the 1930s prior to his joining the Nazi Party.
 22. WIP (1991), 76, p 49.
 23. The phrase 'constitutio libertatis' is from Hannah Arendt (1988), *On Revolution*, Penguin, ch 4

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