# Black Resistance to Apartheid

## Future Prospects

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During the last five years much coverage has been given in the Western media to the black struggle for change in South Africa. Such coverage has often given the impression that blacks in that country are only beginning to take their oppression seriously and so to react to it accordingly. Whereas ten years ago there was similar coverage of unrest as a result of the Soweto school boycotts and their country-wide impact, the death in detention of black consciousness leader, Steve Biko, and the clampdown on twenty organizations, two newspapers and one periodical, the intervening years brought less and less coverage as the news became less spectacular and memories began to fade. The spectacular returned again in 1984 when we began once more to hear of mass murders by the police resulting from the Vaal rent boycotts, followed by the Langa incidents in the Cape six months later; when we heard of witch-hunts of suspected police informers who were invariably subjected to the notorious so-called necklace punishment; the state of emergency which was declared by the government in 1985 and then renewed and extended in 1986; and the resultant press clampdowns in 1986, which continue to this day.

During this period Bishop Desmond Tutu, the most vocal leader against apartheid since the late seventies, was honored to become South Africa's second Nobel Peace Prize winner; apartheid was declared a heresy by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches through the instigation of Dutch Reformed Church minister and leader, Allan Boesak; and a multitude of demonstrations against apartheid ocurred abroad in front of South African foreign missions, as well as at university campuses – symbolized by the erection of shanties. All these events have added to recent press coverage and but for the current news blackouts, there would be much more to learn about what in that part of the world are considered newsworthy events by Western press standards.

The fact that the Western press reports only sensational news from South Africa does not mean that black people there are for the most part doing nothing about their condition. Black resistance to white domination and subjugation is not a new development. Nor did it begin with the apartheid regime in 1948. In fact, resistance to white domination in South Africa began right from the start of colonialism when the Khoi people in the Western Cape abandoned trade with

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Dutch traders as soon as they realized that the latter intended to settle and demand land for their use. This was after a fleet of the Dutch East India Company, under the leadership of Jan Van Riebeeck, had landed in the Cape in 1652. After this there followed eight so-called Kaffir Wars during the period when the colonists, now under British administration in the Cape, moved inland and began to displace people from their lands, creating borders to determine where they should be restricted, and allocating to themselves fertile and wet lands. The last armed revolts before the apartheid era occurred in 1881 and 1906 when Mampuru in the Transvaal and Bambatha in Natal made their unsuccessful attempts to stage resistance against foreign domination and their impending, final dispossession.

Early in the 20th century, after South Africa had been declared a Union under exclusive white rule, the blacks vainly continued their protests to Britain – the colonial overlord – against their legal subordination to complete white rule in their own land. Black political organizations were established all over the country to plead their cause at local level. Political negotiation and persuasion replaced armed resistance. It followed and continued to be supplemented by political journalism, which appealed mainly to the consciences and fairness of white political leaders rather than to black resistance. In 1912 most of these local political groups were brought together to form the first national political organization, known as the South African Native National Congress. The name was later changed to the African National Congress. Later it was also adopted by blacks in Northern and Southern Rhodesia, now Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Even before the present ruling National Party took over government in 1948, the African National Congress (ANC) struggled with various government administrations in the country – from General Botha to General Smuts – for a change of their policy toward blacks. Under the Union government, which was established in 1910, blacks had no franchise except for a few teachers in the Cape who still qualified in terms of property or specified financial minimum in savings; they had to carry passes to prove their legality to remain or work in urban areas; stock taxes in rural areas enured that they would be forced to seek work on white farms and the mines to be able to afford the taxes, later having to choose between keeping these stocks and working fulltime on a contractual basis; those living in urban areas resided mostly out of sight of white areas and social and political separation was strictly enforced; blacks throughout the country had two white representatives in parliament who served as their spokespersons on political matters. These parliamentarians were later replaced by non-parliamentary Native Representative Councils, which were variously condemned by blacks for their toothlessness. Throughout this early period of its existence, the ANC's goal was to try to achieve relief from the hardships imposed by this system and to gain self-representation in government.

Then, as now, South African white politics was largely concerned with the so-called black problem. Briefly, this problem can be summarized in three main questions: [1] how to dispossess blacks completely of their land without causing much reaction; [2] how to exploit black labour without giving much in return for it; [3] how to tax blacks – thus ensuring their labour –

without giving them a say in government or political representation. All this amounted to wishing that black people were mere zombies who provided all the needs of white people but remained dispensable in all other respects. Hence South Africa's legislation from the very beginning concentrated on increasing the power of whites and their government, and diminishing black civil and human rights by restricting the ability of blacks to exercise these rights in various ways.

In 1913 and 1936 blacks were restricted to 7½%, then to 13% of South Africa's entire territory. Today this mostly infertile chip of land is what has been declared a "homeland" of various black ethnic groups. Until today, through its restriction on black urban living, South Africa depends on so-called migrant labor, using mainly contract labor of people from the so-called homelands for its mines, farms, and industry. This is the cheapest form of labor in that it guarantees no security for the worker, no pension and family benefits, no guaranteed pay increases, etc. In the urban areas black workers are the lowest category of employees, no matter what their status or qualifications are. The top category is that of whites. Blacks are divided into Africans, "coloreds," and Indians, with the Africans holding the third rank after these two and rewarded accordingly. Their earnings are not in keeping with the cost of living anywhere in the country. This accounts for the ghetto conditions of most black townships, the diseases that are fraught in them, especially malnutrition, and – needless to say – crime in sprawling townships like Soweto.

As for representation in government, the government has continued to invent ways of avoiding it through the years. The white parliamentary representation of all three black groups was systematically eroded until none of them had any form of representation at all. Then the homeland system was devised for Africans, the Colored Representative Council for "coloreds" and the Indian Representative Council for Indians. In these structures they could take care of their own affairs and forget about asking for representation in the white government of the land. In 1984 the latter two groups were invited back to participate separately in a three chamber form of government representing whites, Indians and "coloreds." The Africans remained left out in the cold. They have their "homelands," it was said. As for city blacks, it was said that they could have local authorities to take care of their local needs. But they could hope for no representation in the national government, even in the form of a fourth chamber, as their primary political structures were meant to be those in the "homelands" or bantustans, as they were originally called.

(By now it should be clear that we have already made an unannounced transition from conditions in the Union government to the situation as it is today.) South Africa changed from the status of a Union to that of a Republic in 1961 under the premiership of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd. Although Verwoerd did not introduce the concept of apartheid, he can be said to have been its prime architect. While racial segregation was advocated and practiced throughout the years of the Union government, as it was prior to it, the idea of apartheid as a consciously legalized form of comprehensive, racial discrimination came with the advent of the ruling National Party to power in 1948. Apartheid was used as a presidential campaign slogan and promise

by Dr Malan, who became the first apartheid prime minister. Malan, however, did not believe in total territorial segregation because of the economic dependency of whites on blacks. Strijdom after him ensured that apartheid was strictly enforced in social and political life and facilities. Job reservation became a law; black universities were established to limit the number of blacks going to the few white universities in the country (Bantu education had been introduced in 1953); "mixed" residential areas of Africans and "coloreds" were segregated and the latter given a slightly preferential treatment; later, even African residential areas were sorted out according to ethnic background as the government implemented its divide and rule strategy. It became Verwoerd's lot to implement the "homeland" system through displacements of people and their resettlement and he did so ruthlessly, without regard to human suffering and sentiments. John Vorster, after him, became even more ruthless. The only difference between these past Prime Ministers and the present State President, P W Botha, is that they carried out their policies without being or seeming to be apologetic about them. While the current President is continuing to fulfil the apartheid tradition with the same determination externally, he is nevertheless certainly not as steadfast about it as his predecessors. Desite all protestations to the contrary, he has adopted a rather apologetic approach and seems less certain about the righteousness of the cause. Yet he is caught in the dilemma of having to please his electorate, on the one hand, and recognizing the need for drastic change, on the other. So much for the historical background.

After the National Party take-over, the ANC continued to react to increasing legislation by the government and its resultant restrictions on blacks. Even before this, it had become so preoccupied with this immediate concern that it gradually came to concentrate more on black representation in the existing government than explicitly on a future of non-racial majority rule in a reconstituted government. Hence the ANC at this stage of its struggle is characterized as having been a reformist organization. In 1944 new blood was introduced into the organization through the formation of a youth league. Under the leadership of dynamic personalities like Muziwakhe Lembede the Youth League began to question this reformist stance of the ANC. It advocated the restoration of the land to the people, one African nationality under an African majority rule, and the drafting of a program of action to give direction to the struggle. The program of action, drawn up in 1949, shunned empty negotiations with the government and adopted a policy of non-co-operation with the government. There were to be self-assertive activities such as strikes, boycotts, and other forms of protest, including the refusal to pay taxes.

The ANC, with the cooperation of the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), implemented this program of action in 1952, in what was known as the defiance campaign. This campaign involved the defiance of a multiplicity of apartheid laws such as: separate facilities in railways, post offices, and other public facilities; the defiance of curfew laws and prohibitions to enter black areas without a permit. The campaign took place in the context of a stayaway from work, thus affecting the country's economy. Though initially about 90% successful, the campaign ended in riots which were believed to

be largely the work of agents provocateurs.

After this campaign the ANC continued to put pressure on the government in various ways, mostly stayaways. In 1955 it assembled a gathering known as the Congress of the People and adopted a Freedom Charter for a free South Africa. This Charter was the result of a co-operative effort among four main organizations: the ANC itself, the SAIC, the South African Colored People's Organization (SACPO), and the Congress of Democrats. They were known jointly as the Congress Alliance, which was later joined also by the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). In 1956 charges of high treason were brought by the government against 156 leaders and supporters of the ANC. The charges focussed mainly on the Freedom Charter, which was seen as a revolutionary, communist document. After about five lengthy years of trial, however, all the defendants were acquitted on the basis of insufficient evidence of their revolutionary motives and treason.

In the meantime another organization was established in 1959, called the Pan Africanist Congress. It was critical of the ANC's continued mild approach. It accused the ANC of having diluted the 1949 program of action by implementing it in the way it did. It objected to communist influence in the ANC through the dual membership of some black Marxists and the membership in the Congress Alliance of the Congress of Democrats (COD). It rejected the Freedom Charter as a sell-out document which represented an abdication of the black cause to white interests and a yielding to communist blackmail, which claimed that the struggle was not a racial or national one but a class struggle. The PAC, under the equally brilliant leadership of Mangaliso Sobukwe, claimed to be the rightful successor of the ANC under its original mandate, as well as a rightful heir of the Congress Youth League. These traditions were allegedly dishonored by the ANC through its actions and alliances. Even before the PAC breakaway, there had been a division in the Youth League since the adoption of the Freedom Charter. Those League members who supported the Charter had come to be referred to as Charterists. Those who objected to it were called Africanists. This is the wing that established the PAC later.

The PAC had a short life-span of less than two years. Its position remained firmly that of the Youth League and it rejected white leadership and any claims of some whites to be truly desirous of change. It believed that only those who were real victims of the status quo could wish for its complete annihilation. All whites, on the other hand, benefited from the system and would always introduce checks and counter-checks in any attempt to do away with the system completely, it was alleged. They were all regarded as "shareholders in the South African Opressors' Company, Pty., Ltd." The PAC asserted that its opposition to white co-operation was not motivated by racialism, as it was often charged, but by facts of white dishonesty. Nor was this rejection part of the ultimate goal of the organization. It was only a temporary strategy. When the struggle had been won, the only determinant to being a free citizen of a non-racial South Africa would be the paying of full allegiance to Africa and to the principles of majority rule. Anyone who subscribed to these conditions, black or white, would be regarded as an African, "and a man's colour

[would] be as irrelevant as the shape of his ears."

On March 21, 1960 the PAC engaged in a national campaign against passes and called for a work stay-away. Its president and other leaders of the organization burned their passes and submitted themselves for arrest, urging people to do the same. The campaign, which was peaceful throughout the country, turned violent when police opened fire on crowds at various places, killing and injuring masses of people. The name which has become symbolic of this national campaign and the police brutality it provoked is Sharpeville. The township of Sharpeville in the Vaal area suffered the most casualties of this brutality, with 69 people killed and 178 injured in the end. Sharpeville is thus symbollically a forerunner of Soweto in 1976, the Vaal in 1984, and Langa in the Cape in 1985.

The turmoil which followed the Sharpeville events finally led to a state of emergency and ultimately the banning of the PAC and the ANC in April 1960, thus being forced underground. Thus, having campaigned non-violently for change since 1912, black national resistance only resorted to violence after 1960 when these two organizations could no longer operate legally. The PAC adopted a terroristic approach in its underground operation, killing marked whites and suspected black informers. The ANC, on the other hand, engaged in sabotage and avoided the deliberate killing of people. In 1963 both underground wings of the organizations were hunted out and finally unearthed and convicted. Nelson Mandela, representing the ANC's *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, remains the symbol of this crushed effort to work for non-violent change.

His last words on receiving a life sentence in 1964 were:

> . . . . there comes a time, as it came in my life, when a man is denied the right to live a normal life, when he can only live the life of an outlaw because the government has so decreed to use the law to impose a state of outlawry upon him. I was driven to this situation, and I do not regret having taken the decisions that I did take . . .

During the lull that followed the crackdown on the ANC and the PAC the government took strides in implementing its "homeland" policy. Few people dared speak out openly against the government because of the proliferation of informers and the special branch spy police. In the "homelands" themselves those chiefs who continued to resist the policy were deposed and replaced by those more receptive to it. People continued to be moved from their traditional lands or areas in the cities and resettled in their supposed homelands. The term used for this in the case of urban blacks was to be "endorsed out," meaning having your pass stamped to indicate that you were an unwanted resident. Almost all "homeland" townships consisted initially of single tents or corrugated iron shacks, later converted into two, three, or four-roomed houses, depending more on the renter's income than on the number of people in a house-hold. People had to wait for up to five years or more before beng allotted a house to rent. All open resistance had seemingly died down and the government was having a free hand, at last. In some cases people moved "voluntarily" to the "homelands" after encountering frustration in trying to find houses in their urban areas, where waiting lists for houses are always overflowing. The system was seemingly beginning to be self-fulfilling, at last.

When in the late 1960s a new stu-

dent organization, calling itself the South African Students Organization (SASO), started campaigning for membership with condemnations of the government and its multiple injustices, some of us wondered whether they were from Mars. Did they know what was happening in the country? They did, indeed, and they analyzed the situation very convincingly in their monthly newsletter which was a very early development of the organization. Many of us did not know even as members of this organization who the main analyst, Frank Talk, was until a book of Steve Biko's essays appeared soon after his death in 1977.

SASO became the movement of the seventies, giving birth to the Black People's Convention and inspiring the establishment of multiple other organizations, which adopted black consciousness as their philosophy. Black consciousness was defined as an attitude of mind – a way of life. It resembled in many respects the PAC's general policy but differed mainly in the primary focus of its strategy on conscientization. This meant withdrawing briefly from socio-political action directed to the state while working toward remotivating the people and helping them to redefine their goal and inculcating self-reliance. The main slogan was, "Black man, you are on your own." Hence blacks had to close their ranks and rediscover their strength before they could join forces with whites either in the struggle itself or the running of the country after liberation. The Black Consciousness Movement's approach was thus people centered. While the government was challenged verbally, all aggressive political action was suspended until a later, unspecified period. In the meantime, there was a proliferation of black self-help programs, including literacy campaigns, mobile clinics, student workshops, physical programs such as school constructions in rural areas, publications, and enquiries into dozens of community development programs.

During this time of construction, overt political action in the BCM was mostly accidental rather than planned action. Student protests such as those instigated by the expulsion of Onkgopotse Tiro from the University of the North in 1972 do not fall strictly under political action. The 1974 Viva Frelimo Rallies organized to celebrate Frelimo's victory in Mozambique were not meant to be a direct challenge to the government, except insofar as the government tried to stop them and sent the police to disperse the gathering and make arrests. The 1976 Soweto uprisings were more a manifestation of the black consciousness influence in school pupils than the direct execution of policy by any of the existing black consciousness organizations. Thus when the twenty odd black consciousness organizations were declared illegal by the government in 1977 following countrywide unrest which began in Soweto the year before, the BCM had not yet evolved or at least implemented an aggressive, government-oriented program of action. It may thus be concluded that the BCM was declared illegal prematurely. Perhaps even then it already gave the government a sense of what was to come, were it to be allowed to continue operating.

Unlike the period following the banning of the ANC and the PAC, the interval between the declaration of the BCM as an illegal organization and the establishment of another national organization was brief – only over a year. Before the establishment of the Azanian People's Organization as the

political successor of the Black People's Convention in 1978, a number of civic associations were formed in several black townships mainly to intervene in the student question and the crackdowns that followed the police massacres and people's anger after the Soweto uprising. While abiding by the black consciousness philosophy to a large extent, AZAPO decided to embark on the second stage of the black consciousness approach and engage in direct political action and challenge of the government. Until 1984, however, such challenge was rather indirect, focused on instigating sports and cultural boycotts of South Africa by overseas performers, campaigning against foreign investment, contributing toward the formation of trade unions and their activity, and other people-oriented kinds of activities and campaigns.

In 1983 AZAPO was chiefly instrumental in the establishment of the National Forum, which was an alliance of black consciousness and non-black consciousness organizations. Though not entirely a black organizational alliance, the National Forum's membership consists of organizations which are predominantly black. Hence it displays a black consciousness tendency. Like the UDF, established three months after it, the NF was formed mainly in reaction to the government's constitutional reforms which involved the participation of "coloreds" and Indians in government through a tricameral form of parliament, thus abolishing the Westminster system of government in South Africa. Africans were not included in this scheme. Instead, three Bills were introduced in parliament to take care of them. They were called the Black Local Authorities Bill, which was calculated mainly to re-christen the Urban Bantu Councils which would now be known as municipalities or city councils; the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill – a euphemism for influx control, which sees to the restriction of black inflow and movement in urban areas; and the Black Community Development Bill. The immediate goal of these alliances was to gain support in opposing proposed "colored" and Indian elections as the government's first step in the implementation of participatory reforms. Urban Africans were also to be discouraged from participating in council elections under the new Local Authorities Bill.

Both alliances and AZAPO were successful in their campaigns, which took place in 1984. All African, "colored," and Indian polls were less than representative of the majority of the people. But the government still continued with its reform plans. After the results of the elections, though, the two alliances continued to operate against other government policies. The NF continued to work in close cooperation with AZAPO, while the UDF developed an organizational structure through which it continues to mobilize the people, often in conjunction with labor unions and/or student organizations. Both AZAPO and the UDF have been warned by the government at various stages of their operation that they were overstepping their limits. In 1986 the UDF was declared an affected organization, making it illegal for it to receive funds from overseas. It was accused of playing to a foreign audience and trying to impress its overseas supporters. Since 1985 several supporters of the UDF and its affiliate organizations have undergone treason trials, involving

about fifty people in all. More than a dozen of these have been acquitted as the trial progresses.

Many AZAPO and UDF leaders and supporters have been playing hide and seek with the authorities since the declaration of the current state of emergency in 1985, which has resulted in thousands of detentions. It was reported that by the end of 1986 more than 22 000 people were in detention without trial and the number continues to grow as only a few are released occasionally while more are brought in. At least three deaths in detention have also been reported since 1985. While there have been serious curbs on the media since late 1986, from what we have been able to gather thus far the situation remains critical and tense and apartheid continues to claim its victims in detentions, convictions, and deaths.

During the last few years many people have expressed the confidence, as a result of both the internal and external pressure that has been brought to bear on the government, that the end is in sight. This remains a big question to those of us who, as fate would have it, are pessimists. Is it, really? Certainly any such speculation on the imminence of the fall of the apartheid regime can only be a matter of hope rather than absolute conviction. Did we not feel the same after Soweto? And yet the government summoned its ultimate weapon for dealing with persistently "troublesome" organizations. The BCM was declared illegal in its representative organizations. Were not similar sentiments expressed twenty-seven years ago following the Sharpeville incidents? Yet the ANC and the PAC were banned. We do have short memories indeed. This is not to imply that the present government can never be overcome. Rather, the main question is whether current strategies of resistance have changed in any significant way from those of past organizations in order to anticipate any drastic government action. Listen to what Mandela has to say: "South African history has conditioned Africans to the fact that if their demands are made strongly enough to have some chance of success, they will be met by force on the part of the government." I submit that the South African government does not summon its ultimate weapon against an organization unless it feels really threatened, as Mandela implies. The strength of a national organization in South Africa is measured by the government's endurance against it.

That the government has not yet summoned this weapon against current political organizations should be an indication that it is not yet threatened, or rather quite threatened, by them. It is probably still confident that it can deal with them in other ruthless ways, as it is presently doing. Furthermore, current political divisions among whites are against the significance of the Afrikaner Laager concept, which is the utimate fortress against any threat to white survival – national or political. Under this concept all party-political differences are shelved when there is an "external" threat and all whites join the fortress of the Laager to fight together as one. Yet today, there are three Afrikaner parliamentary political parties, ranging from conservative to utra-conservative; one non-parliamentary, swastika-wielding opposition; in addition to two largely English-speaking parliamentary oppositions. These divisios, particularly among Afrikanerdom, are not indicative of a government concerned about what is often referred to as the total onslaught against it.

For blacks it is quite a relief that political resistance is still allowed to continue in the country, in spite of its casualties. In this way at least everyone, both inside and outside the country, can witness that blacks do not condone the system. The government has often given that impression after imposing silence on black opposition and its publicity, as shown by the current curbs on the news and the media. However, when the government becomes really threatend, it will definitely declare the organization or organizations responsible for this threat illegal and will call on white unity by appealing to the Laager. Joining the Laager at such times is used as a sign of white patriotism and a fulfilment of the age-old proverb that blood, indeed, is thicker than water. To those outside, the idea of the Laager is generally used as a blackmail instrument, when the government responds to any external pressure by threatening to withdraw into the Laager.

Hitherto the banning of a political organization in South Africa has meant that it will either disappear underground or begin operating from exile. In either case it means that the government has managed to get rid of it – to remove it from its sight and make it less effective. If being declared an illegal organization is a real indication that the government is threatened, as I am trying to argue, should the organization being thus declared cease to operate openly upon receiving the order? Is ceasing to operate in this case not submitting at full impact and thus removing the pressure that the government can no longer bear, offering it relief? Perhaps the real end to apartheid will come not while organizations are still able to operate legally above ground, in spite of their persecution and the indignation it arouses; and no matter how they are able to harass the government. The end will probably come when they shall decide to defy their illegal status and continue to operate as usual in spite of it. No doubt, the total wrath of the almighty apartheid regime will be unleashed. But how will it differ from yesterday and today? Legality in South Africa has always been only nominal in the operation of black organizations.

In conclusion, may I point out that this paper has deliberately concentrated on political resistance. Any detailed consideration of black resistance to apartheid will in future have to include the role played by the Church, by the trade union movement, and more explicitly by the students and their organizations particularly since the beginning of the present decade. These sectors of South African society are increasingly playing a significant role in waging opposition to white supremacy and apartheid laws in that country. Also to be considered, confirmed or refuted, are the disputed claims of the Chief Minister of the Kwa-Zulu homeland, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, and his Inkatha Movement. My personal opinion of this last organization, based on my experience as a black South African, though not examined through deliberate paper research, is that it does not constitute a part of the black resistance movement in South Africa.